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the blasst report

Benchmarking leadership and advancement of standards for sessional teaching

Final Report 2014

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List of acronyms used

ALTC	Australian Learning and Teaching Council Ltd
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
AUTC	Australian Universities Teaching Committee
BLASST	Benchmarking Leadership and Advancement of Standards for Sessional Teaching
DL	Distributed Leadership
HERDSA	Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia
JUTLP	Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice
OLT	Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching
PAR	Participatory Action Research
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency



Executive summary

Sessional Staff /sessional stáef/ noun.

Any teachers in higher education employed on a casual, short-term contract, or sessional basis. This may include lecturers, tutors, unit, program and subject convenors, demonstrators and markers.

The Benchmarking Leadership and Advancement of Standards for Sessional Teaching (BLASST) project has refined and validated national standards to support and enhance quality learning and teaching by sessional staff. These standards were informed by the outcomes and recommendations of seminal national projects, including: Training, Support and Management of Sessional Teaching Staff (AUTC, 2003); the ALTC-commissioned RED Report (2008); Subject Coordinators: Leading Professional Development for Sessional Staff (CLASS) (LE9-1212); and had their genesis in a series of four Macquarie University internal projects over eight years that conceptualised and drafted the standards framework. At the same time there was sector-wide focus on standards, supported and promoted through AUQA and TEQSA. The ongoing importance of sessional staff as teachers in higher education in Australia, and internationally, required a mechanism to identify effective practices and share them more widely. There was a need for multi-level, multi-disciplinary and cross-institutional standards.

The BLASST Sessional Staff Standards Framework presents criteria and standards for evaluating current practice in quality learning and teaching, management and administrative policy, procedures and systems affecting sessional staff. The framework is designed to stimulate reflection and action, and enable institutions, faculties, departments and individuals to evaluate and lead good practice with regard to sessional staff. It provides an evidenced-based foundation for reflective decision-making and can be used to inform practices and priorities, primarily through benchmarking.

A team of four partner universities piloted these standards for quality learning and teaching with sessional staff through multi-level, multi-disciplinary benchmarking workshops. With the development of an online interactive tool to support benchmarking activities, a validated BLASST framework was launched at a national summit event.

The project's five key objectives have been achieved, with outcomes for each:

- *development of national standards* to support and enhance quality learning and teaching by sessional staff – the BLASST framework, to be endorsed by TEQSA;
- an *on-line interactive tool* to facilitate the self-assessment benchmarking process, with the capability of generating a customised report and action plan – the BLASST B-BIT;
- an *implementation guide* on how to use the framework and self-assessment tool – the BLASST guide;



- a *leadership summit* for national dissemination of the framework – the BLASST national leadership summit, and
- a *refereed publication* of the summit papers, published as a special issue of the *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 10, (3) in October, 2013.

Each of these outcomes is available at <http://blasst.edu.au/index.html>

The BLASST project aimed to systematise good practice for learning and teaching with sessional staff. To achieve this, the BLASST project team recommends that:

- All universities use the BLASST framework to engage in a regular quality-assurance and quality-enhancement process that draws on the multiple perspectives of stakeholders and aligns with their institutional quality framework.
- Following benchmarking with the BLASST framework, universities use their reports and action plans to develop, reflect on and lead good practice and iterative improvement in the quality of learning and teaching with, and by, sessional staff.



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Chapter 1 Why was the BLASST project needed?

Setting the context

Research about the role of sessional staff for learning and teaching in higher education is needed to provide data and insights that can be used to inform the leadership of good practice across the sector. This final report weaves the narratives of the journal article abstracts that contribute to the special issue, 'Setting the Standard – Quality Learning and Teaching with Sessional Staff', of the *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*. This journal is peer-reviewed, online and open-access, and therefore an accessible means for dissemination. The papers that make up the special issue are a scholarly outcome of the BLASST national leadership summit. Each of the papers 'use and advance existing knowledge' and incorporate 'a literature review'.

The international context

A range of initiatives and programs to support quality learning and teaching with sessional staff have been trialled internationally. As the leading UK expert on sessional staff, one of the project's reference-group members, Colin Bryson, was an invited keynote speaker for the BLASST national leadership summit. His paper provides an overview of the broader international context, with a focus on an evaluative review of programs from the United Kingdom. A key question that frames his paper is: has there been any real progress in support for sessional staff?

Bryson, C. (2013). Supporting sessional teaching staff in the UK – to what extent is there real progress? *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 10(3).

Abstract

A major proportion of teaching in UK universities is undertaken by a diverse and large group of sessional staff, in common with many higher education systems around the world. This article reviews efforts over the last decade to support and develop such staff and to improve their situation. Improvement in this area is very slow. The article concludes by considering what progress is likely in the future and the factors and conditions which facilitate or hinder progress.

The national context

A common cry across the papers and presentations of the BLASST national leadership summit was for data on sessional staff in our sector. Without current and accurate data, not knowing who our sessional staff are makes it challenging to plan for their support. The project was proud to have Robyn May share ground-breaking findings using a large national



data set obtained through over 2,500 surveys of sessional staff. These findings present new insights and knowledge.

May, R., Strachan, G. & Peetz, D. (2013). Workforce development and renewal in Australian universities and the management of casual academic staff. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 10(3).

Abstract

Most undergraduate teaching in Australia's universities is now performed by hourly paid staff, and these casual academics form the majority of the academic teaching workforce in our universities. This recent development has significant implications for the careers and working lives of those staff, for other academic staff, and for students, implications which are yet to be closely examined. Investigation of the working conditions of casual academic teaching staff is important, as the ageing of the continuing academic workforce suggests the universities will need to consider workforce development and renewal, and the casual academic workforce may represent an important source of labour. This paper examines the support casual academic staff receive from their universities to undertake their work, and how this level of support has an impact on their job and career satisfaction. It uses data from the Work and Careers in Australian Universities Survey, conducted in 2011 across 19 universities. Casual academic teaching staff answered questions which provided information on a range of demographic details, conditions of work, their motivations for casual work, and their access to a range of job and career supports. The research found that there is variation among universities in their provision of physical supports such as provision of a desk and computer, supports for collegial inclusion such as meeting attendance, and access to professional training. The range of assistance provided to these staff had an impact on their job and career satisfaction.

The need for standards

The BLASST project refined and validated national standards to support and enhance quality learning and teaching by sessional staff. These standards were informed by the foundational work of earlier seminal national and internal projects, including, but not limited to, the Australian Universities Teaching Committee (AUTC) project on training, support and management of sessional teaching staff (2003); the ALTC-commissioned RED Report (2008); Subject Coordinators: Leading professional development for sessional staff, known as the CLASS project (LE9-1212); and had their genesis in a series of four Macquarie University internal projects over an eight-year period that conceptualised and drafted the standards framework.

At the same time there was a sector-wide focus on standards, supported and promoted through AUQA and now TEQSA. The ongoing importance of sessional staff as teachers in higher education in Australia, and internationally, required a mechanism to identify effective practices and share them more widely. There was a need for multi-level, multi-disciplinary and cross-institutional standards. The rationale to support this need for



standards is presented in the paper by the project leader, Marina Harvey. The paper includes a literature review that situates this need in a framework of leadership for quality.

Harvey, M. (2013). Setting the standards for sessional staff: Quality learning and teaching. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 10(3).

Abstract

Across the Australian Higher Education sector a focus on quality is driving a new paradigm for learning and teaching: quality standards. One challenge is to engage all academics with this progress towards systematic quality enhancement and assurance. Sessional staff, who provide most of the face-to-face teaching in Australian universities, remain at the periphery of learning and teaching. Any development of standards must therefore proactively address the role of sessional staff in attaining and achieving quality learning and teaching. Building on seminal research on sessional staff, this paper argues the need for standards as a potential strategy for quality learning and teaching with sessional staff. The rationale for, and process of, developing national standards is outlined and the learning and teaching standards are introduced.

The need for quality standards for learning and teaching with sessional staff shaped the project outcomes.

The project outcomes

The primary outcome of the BLASST framework project is a sessional staff standards framework that establishes national standards to support and enhance quality learning and teaching by sessional staff. The project was designed to achieve the following deliverables:

1. *development of national standards* to support and enhance quality learning and teaching by sessional staff
2. an *on-line interactive* to facilitate the self-assessment process, with the capability of generating a customised report and action plan
3. an *implementation guide* on how to use the sessional staff standards framework and self-assessment tool
4. a *leadership summit* for national dissemination of the sessional staff standards framework
5. a *refereed publication* (national summit papers).



Chapter 2 Planning for success: building in research and evaluation

The approach and methodology

The grant application was definite in the project's approach and methodology. 'Building in research and evaluation' (Wadsworth, 2010) into the grant application and throughout the project's life course would enhance project success. This leadership project was committed to a distributed approach to leadership, aligned with the Participatory action research (PAR) method used. Informal evaluation was inherent and ongoing in the PAR method. Both formative and summative formal evaluations were built into the project plan.

Distributed leadership

A distributed leadership approach (Jones, Lefoe, Harvey & Ryland, 2012; Jones, Harvey, Lefoe & Ryland, forthcoming 2014) provided the project framework. This has been described as an

...approach in which collaborative working is undertaken between individuals who trust and respect each other's contribution. It occurs as a result of an open culture within and across an institution. It is an approach in which reflective practice is an integral part enabling actions to be critiqued, challenged and developed through cycles of planning, action, reflection and assessment and replanning. It happens most effectively when people at all levels engage in action, accepting leadership in their particular areas of expertise. It requires resources that support and enable collaborative environments together with a flexible approach to space, time and finance which occur as a result of diverse contextual settings in an institution. Through shared and active engagement, distributed leadership can result in the development of leadership capacity to sustain improvements in teaching and learning.

<http://www.distributedleadership.com.au/>

Hence, this successful approach provides systematic, multi-faceted and coherent criteria (Marshall, 2006) for what was recently considered the 'elusive' concept (Anderson & Johnson, 2006) of leadership in higher education. Each participant has the opportunity to further develop their leadership capability in learning and teaching, collectively building the leadership capacity of their respective organisations as they engage with the sessional staff standards framework. This approach to leadership does not follow, but acknowledges, a traditional hierarchical model while supporting the collegiality inherent in PAR. The BLASST project, working on multi-dimensional levels, could therefore realise greater project outcomes; for example, creating a nexus between administration and learning and teaching (for sessional staff through the benchmarking workshops) and thereby achieving more-



efficacious processes in enhancing quality learning and teaching for sessional staff.

The adoption of a distributed leadership approach allowed the enactment of the principles of the ALTC (the OLT's predecessor organisation). The project supported *inclusiveness*, as the multi-level participants led the benchmarking workshops and the national summit; for *collaboration* between the project team, reference group and all participant leaders; and for *long-term change* and *high impact* by the leaders of sessional staff standards as they engaged with the BLASST framework, providing opportunities for recognising and sharing *excellence* in practice.

Participatory action research (PAR)

A methodology was needed that would: align with a distributed approach to leadership; be compatible with the culture of the academy; and support the building in of research and evaluation. PAR (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1988) satisfied these criteria. Using PAR as a method for learning and teaching projects can be characterised by a series of 16 indicators (developed by Harvey, 2008). Each is listed below (in boldfaced italics) and elaborated using reflective data from five project-team members who completed the prompt 'Reflecting on the BLASST project, my experience has been of...'

Team members agreed that they had engaged in ***regular participation as part of the project team***. Comments included that 'Participation is the key', 'meetings ...have encouraged participation and thinking about BLASST...' and 'there has been a high level of engagement'. ***Regular participation within my department and my university and through outreach*** was illustrated with 'have spoken about this at a number of levels' and 'everyone knows about this project in my department'. There were fewer examples of participation through outreach, with the HERDSA conferences being the common example.

While one team member agreed that there had been ***an adequate time frame***, this was explained as only being because 'of the preliminary work by Marina and Macquarie University and planning involving the potential [project] team prior to the start'. Most team members disagreed, saying, for example, 'this has been frustrating. It's a 2 year project that needs more time to really come into its own' and 'more time for gathering good practice examples' was needed.

The project team agreed to ***a sense of ownership*** of the project. Characteristic of a PAR learning and teaching project, there were ***fluid boundaries*** (conflation of the researcher/participant role), and ***flexibility*** and ***regular communication*** were 'a strong feature of the project'. Whilst allowing for flexibility, ***some project structure*** was provided. ***Developmentally appropriate strategies***, in response to project needs, 'evolved very nicely', with 'lots of just-in-time work'.

Team members ***developed confidence*** (in their leadership roles), ***developed credibility*** (and impact), especially through the BLASST national leadership summit, and worked ***collaboratively*** – comments included 'great collaboration' and 'this has been an intensely collaborative project'. Throughout, they ***drew on theory*** to provide and expand their



evidence base.

A PAR method requires participants to acknowledge emotions of not knowing, of being comfortable with the unknown as the PAR process leads them. One team member expressed this as... 'If emotions aren't acknowledged then a learning opportunity is missed.'

Both ***individual and communal***, or collaborative, ***reflection*** are indicators of a PAR method. Meetings provided 'a good avenue' as did the 'interview...after the workshop...a key time for reflection'. In terms of reflective practice, team members perceived that they 'could have done more along the way'.

Planning the evaluation

A key criterion in developing the project's evaluation framework was the need for it to align with and enhance both the distributed approach to leadership and the PAR method. The framework was shaped by that of the ALTC Grants Scheme – Evaluating Projects resource developed by Chesterton and Cummings (2007), based on the work of Owen (2006) and also informed by Reeves and Hedberg (2003).

The iterative cycles of action research, with their inherent evaluation through reflection, facilitated the collaborative development of an evaluation framework by the project team, supported by the project manager. Evaluation foci were negotiated and aligned with the five intended project outcomes, the key evaluation questions and selected project-appropriate and relevant criteria (from Chesterton & Cummings, 2007, p. 13). The focus on the sessional staff standards framework made it appropriate to use the MERI approach (monitoring, evaluation, research and improvement) (Wadsworth, 2011a). Internal evaluation (by participants and project-team members) of project processes and outcomes was assured by the interactive action research cycles. An approach of interactive or participatory evaluation (Owen, 2006) supported the project's design, conceptual framework and methodology.

Evaluation was to be both informal (through collaborative, but supported, reflection by project partners) and formal (through evaluative survey instruments at each stage 1 workshop, and the stage 2 summit). A range of styles and approaches would provide a diversity of perspectives and data.

An external evaluator (with expertise in both sessional staff in Australian higher education and evaluation of learning and teaching projects) held most of the responsibility for summative evaluation (for stages 1 and 2), working *through* and *with* the project team (Wadsworth, 2011a, p.31). To support the summative function of the evaluation, an approach of integrated monitoring with impact (Owen, 2006) was selected as the most efficacious.

The final evaluation report is provided as an attachment, and a list of evaluated outcomes appears in chapter 5.



Planning dissemination

Dissemination is the planned process of understanding and engaging with potential adopters, and facilitating commitment to change throughout the life of the project. (Gannaway, Hinton, Moore & Berry, 2010). Project dissemination begins with the planning phase or grant application. Three key dissemination strands – assess climate, engage and transfer (Gannaway, Hinton, Moore & Berry, 2010) – shaped the progress for this project's dissemination. These strands were compatible with the ALTC dissemination framework (2008).

Assessing climate (or evaluating systems, as in Wadsworth, 2011a) was to be enacted in stage 1 as the project partners undertook a workshop benchmarking exercise to pilot the draft sessional staff standards framework. The climates of participating universities had to be actively investigated through an action research cycle. This fed forward into the ongoing framework development to enhance its transferability to all higher education institutions across Australia. Potential adopters – users of the framework – were identified by each higher education institution through the nomination process for organisational representatives and participants for the BLASST national leadership summit (stage 2).

Intended users of the framework would engage with the sessional staff standards through a range of strategies. Stage 1 saw the project partner universities engage through benchmarking workshops using the prototype online interactive framework. Partner universities led the dissemination by strategically targeting potential adopters for participation in the workshops. The development and provision of an online interactive tool would enhance the engagement of participants as they were supported, even scaffolded, by this technology through the process of benchmarking standards. The automated reporting function of the interactive framework tool would let participants become aware of 'relevant outcomes' and be involved in making effective use of workshop outcomes through an action plan. Workshop participants would also play an important evaluative feedback function for the development of the framework. Stage 2 saw wider engagement with the holding of a national sessional staff standards summit, whereby (potentially) each institution in Australia would have participants engaged in: workshopping the standards; fora on the sessional staff standards and on leading these standards; and presenting, and thereby disseminating, their learnings through scholarly papers to be published as a peer-reviewed publication. The summit (with this title strategically chosen, as it would be a gathering of leaders) would provide the formal networking opportunity, through a workshop session, for organisations to identify potential benchmarking partners.

A main aim of this project was that the sessional staff standards framework be transferable to all Australian higher education institutions. To support transferability, the summit papers would be published as a peer-reviewed proceedings publication. Summit participants would leave the summit having developed their leadership capacity to take the framework to their institutions and lead the use of the standards at multiple levels of their own organisation (e.g. departments, faculties or their organisations as a whole) and with external benchmarking partners. The project outcomes would be 'findable' (Gannaway, Hinton, Moore & Berry, 2010) via the website and online interactive tool. This accessibility would



enhance project sustainability and national transferability. In addition, it was planned that future links with TEQSA would be explored to promote the sustainability of the framework.

A summary of disseminated project outcomes is presented in chapter 5.

BLASST linkages with other projects

The BLASST standards had their genesis in the foundational work of earlier seminal national and internal projects, including, but not limited, to: the AUTC project on Training, Support and Management of Sessional Teaching Staff (2003); the ALTC-commissioned RED Report (2008); and Subject Coordinators: Leading professional development for sessional staff, known as the CLASS project (LE9-1212). The BLASST logo was designed to represent these influential projects, for example: the red of the 'RED report', the four leaves representing the four Macquarie University projects, and the colours reflecting the traffic light colour code of the summary report that is generated by the B-BIT.

Founded on a distributed leadership approach, the BLASST reference group included Professor Sandra Jones, leader of the 'Evidence-based benchmarking framework for a distributed leadership approach to capacity building in learning and teaching' project (LE11-2000). This ensured ongoing review of the enactment of this leadership approach throughout the project's stages. The BLASST standards framework and user guide also acted as inspiration for the benchmark development and user guide of the LE11-2000 project.

BLASST linkages with the OLT's program objectives

The outcomes of the BLASST project directly address four of the OLT's five program objectives for Leadership for excellence in learning and teaching grants (2013, p.4). The BLASST project outcomes:

1. promote and support strategic change in higher education institutions for the enhancement of learning and teaching, and the benefit of the student experience
through organisational engagement with the BLASST resources and through benchmarking workshops using the BLASST framework.
2. raise the profile and encourage recognition of the fundamental importance of teaching in higher education institutions and in the general community
with a focus on enhancing the quality of learning and teaching with sessional staff, who provide the majority of teaching in our universities.
3. develop effective mechanisms for the identification, development, dissemination and embedding of good individual and institutional practice in learning and teaching in Australian higher education
by establishing the BLASST framework and BLASST B-BIT as evidence-based mechanisms to support this identification, development, dissemination and embedding of good individual and institutional practice in learning and teaching in Australian higher education. The BLASST website, with its good-practice case studies and resources, provides additional mechanisms.



4. identify learning and teaching issues that impact on the Australian higher education system and facilitate national approaches to address these and other emerging issues

by addressing the issues and impact of sessional teaching staff through providing the BLASST standards framework, endorsed by TEQSA, as a national approach to address these issues.

BLASST linkages with the OLT's strategic priority areas

The BLASST project addressed three of the OLT's three strategic priority areas for Leadership for excellence in learning and teaching grants (2013, p.5).

1. Consolidating leadership by building on the outcomes of projects funded in earlier years under the Leadership for Excellence in Learning and Teaching Program;

particularly by:

focusing on acting on the recommendations emerging from the ALTC-commissioned RED Report (Percy, et al., 2008) (a summary of links is provided in Harvey, 2013), and

ensuring continuity of leadership with the membership of the reference group, including colleagues who had led or been involved in previous sessional staff or leadership projects.

2. Disciplinary and cross-disciplinary leadership to enhance learning and teaching through leadership capacity-building in discipline structures, communities of practice and cross-disciplinary networks,

enabling project-team members, sessional staff, heads of departments and deans of faculties to lead disciplinary and cross-disciplinary teams in benchmarking sessional staff standards.

3. Institutional leadership to enhance learning and teaching through leadership capacity-building at the institutional level,

supporting the engagement of university executive in the BLASST benchmarking process, through a 'thinking aloud' exercise, and through their attendance and participation at the BLASST national summit.

BLASST disciplinary and interdisciplinary linkages

The BLASST project was founded as a multi-level and interdisciplinary project, and was supported in this method by the adoption of a distributed leadership approach. The development of disciplinary and interdisciplinary linkages was built into the project. Project Stage 1 saw the pilot benchmarking workshops at each partner university; this involved a broad and diverse range of interdisciplinary participants. One chose a disciplinary focus for the exercise, and new disciplinary linkages were the result (refer to Luzia, et al., 2013 for details).



The BLASST national leadership summit, as stage 2, was a key platform for the building of both disciplinary and interdisciplinary linkages. The list of disciplines involved in the BLASST project (through participants and contributors to project outcomes), includes:

- Accounting
- Architecture
- Asian Studies
- Building
- Business
- Chemistry
- Chiropractic
- Communication
- Computer Science
- Cultural Studies
- Dentistry
- Design
- Economics
- Education
- Engineering
- Geography
- Health
- Higher Education
- Human Resources
- Industrial Relations
- Information Technology
- Law
- Management
- Media
- Medicine
- Nursing and Midwifery
- Pharmacy
- Philosophy
- Psychology



Chapter 3 Piloting the BLASST framework (stage 1)

Project partner university pilots

Stage 1 of the BLASST project saw the partner universities engage in piloting the BLASST sessional staff standards framework at their universities. The project team led this process at their respective universities and were supported by the project manager. Additional support was provided in the form of workshop templates and funding. The pilot relied on a prototype of the B-BIT. This process and evaluative learnings are discussed in detail in the paper led by the project manager, Karina Luzia.

Luzia, K., Harvey, M., Parker, N., McCormack, C., Brown, N. & McKenzie, J. (2013). Benchmarking with the BLASST Sessional Staff Standards Framework. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 10(3).

Abstract

Benchmarking as a type of knowledge-sharing around good practice within and between institutions is increasingly common in the higher education sector. More recently, benchmarking as a process that can contribute to quality enhancement has been deployed across numerous institutions with a view to systematising frameworks to assure and enhance the quality of higher education. However, to date, sessional staff who are the majority of teachers in higher education, have been mostly excluded from or invisible in this process, both within individual institutions and across the sector. To ameliorate the effects of this exclusion and to acknowledge the contribution made to quality teaching by sessional staff, the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) funded BLASST project is establishing a national sessional staff standards framework which sets in place standards to evaluate and support the quality of performance and outcomes in learning and teaching, and in management and administrative policy, procedure, and practices affecting sessional teachers in higher education. In this paper, we present four case studies of benchmarking across four Australian universities that piloted the sessional staff standards framework in order to enhance and support quality learning and teaching by sessional staff. We discuss some of the strengths and limitations of this approach to supporting sessional staff and show how the benchmarking process facilitates active engagement for and particularly by sessional staff in enhancing quality teaching and learning.





Figure 1 Participants at the UTS pilot workshop



Figure 2 A break-out room for lunch supports collegial discussion

Evaluative data from the workshops included pre- and post-workshop surveys; interviews with each project-team member at the conclusion of each workshop; reflective data documented by the project manager and project leader; and the evaluative lens of the project's external evaluator. This extensive pool of evaluative data was used by the project team for reflection, then to inform the planning and development of stage 2 of the project. Key learnings from this pilot process included the need to move beyond proprietary software for the online tool to a customised online and interactive web-based tool, and the need to provide an independent facilitator for the workshop. Key affirmations included the value of the workshop structure, which commenced with a 'thinking aloud' exercise, multi-level participant collaboration and inclusion of sessional staff as paid participants, and concluding with a whole-of-institution plenary session and validation that the benchmarking process can be undertaken within one day.



Applying the framework

One of the partner universities, the University of Tasmania, had been working towards improving their support of sessional staff. Joining the BLASST project provided the opportunity to pilot a benchmarking workshop. The project team member, Natalie Brown, realised an opportunity to explore another application of the BLASST framework: to use sessional-staff surveys to align organisational data collection to the principles, criteria and standards of the framework.

Brown, N.R., Kelder, J.A., Freeman, B. & Carr, A.R. (2013). A message from the chalk face – What casual teaching staff tell us they want to know, access and experience. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 10(3). (C1)

Abstract

The University of Tasmania established a project in 2009 to investigate the particular needs of casual teaching staff, identify strategies to improve access to information, and facilitate a consistent approach to employment, induction, development and recognition. The project was managed by the university learning and teaching centre, and co-ordinated by a Reference Group. A preliminary survey in 2010 explored casual teaching staff information and resource needs and a mapping exercise was undertaken to establish institutional practices. The findings of the preliminary 2010 survey and mapping exercise prompted the development of an institution-wide Casual Teaching Staff Policy. The preliminary 2010 survey was subsequently updated and a second survey administered in 2012 to obtain additional baseline data against which to evaluate the casual teaching staff project and implementation of the Casual Teaching Staff Policy. This paper presents the results of the 2012 survey designed with this dual focus in mind. The 2012 survey items were explicitly aligned to the Sessional Staff Standards Framework arising from the Benchmarking Leadership and Advancement of Standards for Sessional Teaching (BLASST) project. The 2012 survey results were mapped to the Sessional Staff Standards Framework guiding principles (Quality Learning and Teaching, Sessional Staff Support and Sustainability), standards (Good Practice, Minimum Standard, Unsustainable), and criteria spanning different institutional levels (Institutional Level, Faculty Level, Department Level, Individual Level). Together the quantitative and qualitative survey data results provide a rich depiction of the world of casual teaching staff at the University of Tasmania. On the one hand the results evidence examples of well-supported, fully engaged casual teaching staff; on the other hand, a distressing picture emerges for many such staff. The findings are presented with discussion regarding the requisite ensuing steps in this ongoing initiative to improve the employment, induction, development and recognition experiences of University of Tasmania casual teaching staff.



Chapter 4 Launching BLASST (stage 2)

The BLASST national leadership summit was the key event for Stage 2 of the project. The summit was designed to achieve multiple dissemination, scholarly reflection and network linkage. Dissemination activities included: launch of the B-BIT; sharing and acknowledgement of national good practice; and dissemination of ground-breaking international and national research. Opportunities for scholarly reflection included: a question-and-answer panel; sessional-staff representatives documenting their reflections on the summit; and a professional artist synthesising his reflections on key issues through visual representations. Gathering multi-level representatives from higher education institutions at this summit provided the firm base for new network linkages.

Dissemination at the summit

Launching the B-BIT

The online interactive of the BLASST framework had developed from the prototype of stage 1 into the B-BIT. This was launched at the summit, and a BLASST online series of workshops gave participants the opportunity to experience engagement with the tool. These workshops provided a source of additional feedback on the functionality and usability of the tool, which was used to inform the final version of the B-BIT

(<http://www.blasst.edu.au/bbit-explained.html>). A 'BLASST quick guide' had been developed to support participants engaging with the tool. Feedback on the user guide was incorporated when the resource was developed into 'The BLASST Guide' (http://www.blasst.edu.au/docs/A413_008_BLASST_Benchmark_Guide.pdf)

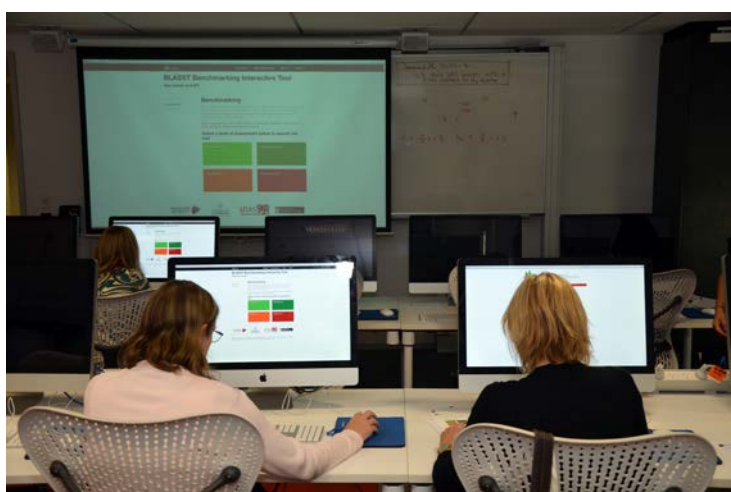


Figure 3 BLASST summit participants engage with the B-BIT in the computer laboratory



National good practice

The summit provided an opportunity to share, acknowledge and even celebrate good practice around learning and teaching with sessional staff. All universities were invited to nominate a good practice for the BLASST Good Practice Awards (the nomination form is provided as Appendix B). Nominees described the practice: what it is; who enacts it; and how it supports sessional staff. They could also include critical factors that contributed to the success of the practice; positive outcomes; resourcing needed; challenges and areas for improvement; and evidence of impact and/or success.

Ten finalists were invited to share their good practice through PechaKuchas. A *PechaKucha* is a (very) short PowerPoint presentation. For the BLASST good practice PechaKuchas, presenters were asked to prepare a presentation of 10 slides x 30 seconds each slide; that is, a five-minute presentation. These proved to be an effective and engaging form of dissemination (<http://www.blasst.edu.au/awards.html>).

Figure 4 PechaKucha presentations stimulate much discussion with the group



Figure 5 Associate Professor Jillian Hamilton presents her good practice PechaKucha



Good practice was acknowledged and celebrated through the BLASST good practice awards. Table 1 provides a summary of these awards.

Table 1. BLASST National Good Practice Award finalists and winners

Winners	Commendation
The University of Adelaide Dimitra Lekkas Highly commended	For diverse and extended support to sessional staff including additional and recurrent workshops and reimbursement of expenses
Flinders University Ann Luzeckyj and Heather Smiegel Highly commended	For supporting higher-degree research students as teachers
RMIT University Andrea Chester Commended	For emphasising building teaching teams with sessional staff
University of South Australia David Birbeck Commended	For sustainability in sessional staff support (this program has been running for more 10 years)
The University of Adelaide Ursula McGowan Highly commended	For designated roles to support sessional staff in the form of faculty coordinators, and for providing flexible options to sessional staff for professional development in the form of online training
Edith Cowen University Michelle Adamos Commended	For monetary recognition of sessional staff contributions
RMIT University Adriana Del Mastro & Dora Poulakis Highly commended	For targeted support of tutors
University of Canberra Jackie Walkington Commended	For employing staff mentors for sessional staff
Sunshine Coast University Gail Crimmins <i>Winner</i> (Unit level)	For a strong and embedded philosophy around supporting sessional staff, which includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Focus on integration into the unit • Tutor mentoring • On-line tutor forums • Tutor guides, meetings plus professional development sessions • 12 hours of paid 'other activity'
Queensland University of Technology Jillian Hamilton <i>Winner</i> (Institutional level)	For dedicated role as Associate Director Academic: sessional staff <i>AND</i> For not one, but TWO programs dedicated to sessional-staff learning and teaching, support and sustainability, both specifically directed towards career-advancement development and progression for sessional staff: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. SAP (Sessional Academic Program) 2. SAS (Sessional Academic Success) program

Disseminating research

New research findings on sessional staff and learning and teaching were disseminated through the international keynote speaker, Colin Bryson and the national keynote speaker, Robyn May (refer to chapter 1) and another six papers (refer to table 2).

Table 2. Papers presented at the BLASST National Leadership Summit

Building leadership in learning and teaching quality standards with sessional staff: a distributed leadership approach <i>Sandra Jones – RMIT University</i>
Enhancing sessional staff satisfaction and effect: A professional model <i>Jackie Walkington – University of Canberra</i>
Professional development for sessional staff: the good, the bad and the consequences <i>Kristina Everett & Shannon Kennedy-Clark – Australian Catholic University</i>
A CLASS Act: The teaching team approach to subject coordination <i>Geraldine Lefoe & Dominique Parrish - University of Wollongong</i>
Academic aspirations amongst sessional tutors in a New Zealand university <i>Amanda Gilbert & Kathryn Sutherland - Victoria University, Wellington</i>
A message from the chalkface – what casual teaching staff tell us they want to know, access and experience <i>Jo-Anne Kelder, Natalie Brown & Brigid Freeman – University of Tasmania, University of Melbourne</i>

Three of these papers, and the winning PechaKucha, were developed into journal articles for the forthcoming special edition of the *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*.

Hamilton, J., Fox, M. & McEwan, M. (2013). Sessional Academic Success: A distributed framework for academic support and development. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 10(3).

Abstract

With approximately half of Australian university teaching now performed by sessional academics, there has been growing recognition of the contribution they make to student learning. At the same time, sector-wide research and institutional audits continue to raise concerns about academic development, quality assurance, recognition and belonging. In response, universities have increasingly begun to offer academic development programs for sessional academics. However, such programs tend to be centrally delivered, generic in nature, and contained within the moment of delivery, while the Faculty contexts and cultures that sessional academics work within are diverse, and the need for support unfolds in ad-hoc and often unpredictable ways.

In this paper we present the Sessional Academic Success (SAS) program—a new framework that complements and extends the central academic development program for sessional academic staff at Queensland University of Technology. This program recognizes that experienced sessional academics have much to contribute to the advancement of learning



and teaching, and harnesses their expertise to provide school-based academic development opportunities, peer-to-peer support, and locally contextualized community building. We describe the program's implementation and explain how Sessional Academic Success Advisors (SASAs) are employed, trained and supported to provide advice and mentorship and, through a co-design methodology, to develop local development opportunities and communities of teaching practice within their schools. Besides anticipated benefits to new sessional academics in terms of timely and contextual support and improved sense of belonging, we explain how SAS provides a pathway for building leadership capacity and academic advancement for experienced sessional academics. We take a collaborative, dialogic and reflective practice approach to this paper, interlacing insights from the Associate Director, Academic: Sessional Development who designed the program, and two Sessional Academic Success Advisors who have piloted it within their schools.

Lefoe, G.E., Parrish, D.R., Keevers, L.M., Ryan, Y., McKenzie, J. & Malfroy, J. (2013). A CLASS Act: The teaching team approach to subject coordination. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 10(3).

Abstract

Advancing the development of good practice around the teaching team has been the focus of a recently completed, nationally funded, grant entitled Coordinators Leading Advancement of Sessional Staff (CLASS). It focused on developing leadership capacity of subject coordinators to provide supportive contexts for sessional staff to enhance their knowledge of teaching practice and contribute to subject improvement through a team approach. An action learning approach and notions of distributed leadership underpinned the activities of the teaching teams in the program. The project was able to work at multiple levels both within and across institutions to change practice. A professional development framework for leadership capacity is proposed with an effective dissemination strategy for such projects. This paper provides an overview of a practical approach, led by the subject coordinator, to engaging sessional staff through the facilitation of a supportive network within the teaching team. It addresses some of the gaps identified in the recent literature which includes lack of role clarity for all members of the team and provides some examples of initiatives that teams engaged with to address some of the challenges identified. Resources to support this approach were developed and are shared through the project website. Recommendations for future direction include improved policy and practice at the institutional level, better recognition and reward for subject coordinators and resourcing to support the participation and professional development needs of sessional staff.

Sutherland, K. & Gilbert, A. (2013). Academic aspirations amongst sessional tutors in a New Zealand University. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 10(3).

Abstract

In New Zealand, as in many other western societies, the higher education system has



become an increasingly less secure place in which to work, and over 40 per cent of those teaching in New Zealand higher education are sessional staff of some kind. Our university in New Zealand has long relied on part-time paid tutors, many of whom are students themselves, to deliver part of the teaching in large courses. These tutors work with groups of students facilitating their learning in workshops, seminars, laboratories and a variety of other teaching environments. We have tracked the experiences of tutors over a significant period of time, and surveys of tutors' experiences since 2007 reveal that the majority of respondents hold tight to the hope of a future academic career. They regard tutoring as good preparation for an academic career, and many report being even more committed to pursuing an academic career since beginning tutoring. How can we best support tutors to navigate their way into an academic career that might look somewhat different from the one they set out to pursue? This paper shares data and insights from our longitudinal research with tutors, and encourages those supporting sessional staff to think about how to enable tutors to take a scholarly approach to their teaching, regardless of the career path they eventually take.

Scholarly reflection

Reflective opportunities were embedded not only through the action research cycles of the project, but throughout the summit activities and sessions. A question-and-answer panel focusing on 'Sustaining good practice for sessional staff' provided the space for summit participants to collaboratively reflect on input from the panel. The panel was made up of Suzi Hewlett (General Manager, OLT), Suzi Vaughan (DVC, Learning and Teaching, QUT) and a sessional staff representative, Laurence Wainwright (UTS) (Figure 6).



Figure 6 The summit's Q&A panel

Other sessional staff representatives who participated in the summit maintained a reflective journal of the day. These reflections were shared with the project team as a source of rich data from the perspective of one of the key stakeholders for this project, sessional staff. Another powerful reflective strategy was that of securing an artist to act in the role of a participant observer, and then synthesise his reflections on the key issues as they arose throughout the summit. The resulting visual representations (as cartoons) were shared with



participants at the conclusion of the summit and have been incorporated into project publications; they are also available as a suite of resources on the project website. They are supported with a guide on how they can be used for workshops, seminars or meetings (<http://www.blasst.edu.au/resources.html>).

Network linkages at the summit

Although invitations to the summit had been addressed to the DVCs, Learning and Teaching, at each Australian university, the invitation to participate was open. The invitations were effective in disseminating information about the summit, as a total of 40 institutions, and over 100 participants, attended on the day (table 3). Institutional representatives covered a broad range of levels, from sessional staff and subject convenors to Provosts and DVCs.

Gathering together, motivated by an interest in enhancing the quality of learning and teaching with sessional staff, acted as a conduit for developing new linkages. The choice of venue was important, as a large foyer saw animated discussion during tea breaks and the outdoor courtyard, the site of the barbeque lunch, also facilitated new linkages.

The BLASST project subsidised the cost of the summit registration for participants, together with accommodation. The universities were responsible for travel costs, although a regional subsidy was also available for this.

The project received a series of unsolicited emails praising the summit and the opportunity to build new networks. The reflective evaluation data reveals that the majority of participants agreed that the summit enabled them to 'Develop my network with a focus on identifying potential benchmarking partners'.



Table 3. Delegate institutions at the BLASST national leadership summit

Australian Catholic University	The University of Adelaide
Australian National University	University of Canberra
CQ University	University of New England
Charles Darwin University	The University of Newcastle
Curtin University	University of Notre Dame
Deakin University	University of Queensland
Edith Cowan University	University of South Australia
Flinders University	University of Southern Queensland
Griffith University	The University of Sydney
James Cook University	University of Tasmania
La Trobe University	University of Technology, Sydney (UTS)
Macquarie University	University of the Sunshine Coast
Monash University	The University of Western Australia
Murdoch University	University of Western Sydney
Newcastle University (UK)	University of Wollongong
Queensland University of Technology	Victoria University
RMIT University	Victoria University of Wellington
Southern Cross University	Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT)
Swinburne University of Technology	Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency
THINK: Education Group	



Figure 7 Summit participants network at lunch and discuss sessional staff issues

Chapter 5 BLASST off! Achieving success

Analysing success

Evaluation outcomes, impact and transferability, factors critical to success and sustainable resources

The BLASST project team are proud of the success of the BLASST project. The external evaluation report validates this sense of success, as do the impact measures reported in this chapter. The factors critical to the success of this project are also summarised and discussed.

This chapter concludes with a listing of the project deliverables and a wide range of resources that are disseminated through the project website and peer-reviewed journal articles.

Evaluation outcomes

Formal and informal evaluation of the BLASST project judge that all five key objectives established for BLASST were achieved:

1. *Development of national standards* to support and enhance quality learning and teaching by sessional staff (the BLASST framework, to be endorsed by TEQSA)
2. *An on-line interactive* to facilitate the self-assessment benchmarking process, with the capability of generating a customised report and action plan (the B-BIT)
3. *An implementation guide* on how to use the sessional staff standards framework and self-assessment tool (the BLASST guide)
4. *A leadership summit* for national dissemination of the sessional staff standards framework (the BLASST national summit)
5. *A refereed publication* (of the national summit papers) as a special issue of the *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, Volume 10, Issue 3.

The following extract from the external evaluator's summative report (Parrish, 2013, pp.8-14) provides details and evidence for each of the five evaluation outcomes or deliverables.

Deliverable 1

Establishment of a *sessional staff standards framework* that determines national standards to support and enhance quality learning and teaching by sessional staff: **Achieved**

The *sessional staff standards framework* sets in place criteria and standards by which the



quality of performance and outcomes in learning and teaching, and in management and administrative policy, procedure and practices around sessional staff, can be measured. Feedback on the framework, gathered across both stages of the BLASST project, affirmed its potential for supporting and enhancing quality learning and teaching by sessional staff, as evidenced in comments including:

I think this tool will be invaluable in assuring quality for both sessional staff, faculty and the institution level. (Stage 1 workshop participant feedback)

A very useful framework. (Stage 2 summit participant feedback)

Very useful document which will assist in framing future practice. (Stage 2 summit participant feedback)

BLASST framework affirmed as a powerful tool for steering conversations and initiating change. (Stage 2 summit participant feedback)

The stage 1 feedback from workshop participants indicated that 83 per cent of respondents believed that the framework had the potential for enhancing quality learning and teaching by sessional staff and 96 per cent of the respondents recognised that the framework had the potential to support sessional staff. Stage 2 summit feedback noted the importance of the framework for identifying, informing, guiding, evaluating and benchmarking good teaching practice by sessional staff and effecting positive change across the sector. Feedback across the duration of the BLASST project affirmed the strategic significance of the framework for enhancing and supporting quality learning and teaching by sessional staff.

Deliverable 2

An online interactive to facilitate the self-assessment process with the capability of generating a customised report and action plan: **Achieved**

The online interactive tool was developed as a self-assessment evaluative instrument that individuals could use to self-assess or evaluate against the framework standards at each of the four levels. In each section of the tool, respondents are asked to pick the most applicable statement from the set of standards, then provide a reason and evidence for their selection. At the end of the process, the tool automatically generates a summary benchmarking report against the sessional staff standards, which are colour-coded to illustrate whether *good practice* or *minimum standard* has been achieved, and if current levels of practice are *Unsustainable*. The report can then be saved as a PDF file or printed out for the respondent's use. No data or personal information entered by respondents is retained in the system.

Stage 1 workshop participant feedback affirmed the useability and value of the online interactive tool. While 68 per cent of respondents stated that the online interactive was easy to use for the first time, and 84 per cent rated the overall online activity as enjoyable, respondents identified some issues around the user-friendliness of the online interactive tool, particularly in relation to its initial Excel spreadsheet format, as noted in the comment:

[The framework] was conceptually simple and [the] only issues were Excel related. (Stage 1 workshop participant feedback)



Specific concerns about the online interactive, raised in this early stage of the project, included 36 per cent of workshop participants indicating that they were not able to correct mistakes with ease; and 12 per cent perceiving that they could not perform the benchmarking task at a reasonable rate. Workshop participants were encouraged to provide formative comments and suggestions on how the online interactive tool could be improved. Most of the feedback gathered in this initial consultation phase illuminated issues and improvement measures associated with the Excel format of the online interactive tool.

The summary report that was automatically generated by the online interactive tool was highly regarded, with over 92 per cent of workshop respondents noting its usefulness. Phase 2 of the project saw the tool developed from its original Excel format into an online interactive tool and named the B-BIT. A draft version of the B-BIT was launched at the BLASST national summit. The acceptance of the B-BIT by higher education stakeholders was illuminated by the fact that 75 per cent of BLASST summit survey respondents expressing interest in using the B-BIT in their institutional context. Further, the relevance and value of the B-BIT for enhancing sessional staff practices and responding to challenges faced by sessional staff was acknowledged, as illustrated in comments such as:

A strong advantage of the summit I felt was the focus around launching the BLASST benchmarking tool itself, which allowed for a sense of direction to follow on from the issues being discussed. Despite the confronting nature of many papers presented that discussed the somewhat sad state of affairs for sessional staff, being able to point to the BLASST benchmarking tool as a realistic avenue to improve conditions for existing and future sessional staff, and making reference to how the tool was already being used, fostered a more optimistic and purposeful tone. (Stage 2 summit participant feedback)
Great. Good to do exercise. Can't wait for this to be available for use and evidence for changing practice. (Stage 2 summit participant feedback)

Detailed suggestions, many very specific in nature, were provided by summit participants who attended the BLASST session focused on showcasing the B-BIT. Examples of this feedback, which was integral in refining and finalising the B-BIT, included:

BLASST online tool – warning message if a field is not filled in. Needs to be bigger and perhaps in a box – or highlight the error itself. (Stage 2 summit participant feedback)

Increase the visibility of – “flow” (various steps in the process) in breadcrumb trail at top (larger font?) Or in a coloured box – you are here. (Stage 2 summit participant feedback)

Have the spell check in the form. (Stage 2 summit participant feedback)

The B-BIT was trialled at the HERDSA 2013 conference, and was shown to cope with multiple and simultaneous logins, and to be usable on a range of devices. Additionally, there was broad acceptance of the B-BIT and its value by higher education stakeholders.

The electronic nature of the B-BIT increases the likelihood that it will be a sustainable resource. This is primarily due to the dynamic nature of the B-BIT and the associated potential for revising and updating its content and presentation as needed.



Deliverable 3

An implementation guide on how to use the *sessional staff standards framework* and self-assessment tool: **Achieved**

The implementation guide (user guide) will be produced as both an electronic and a hard-copy document. The online version of the user guide will be available for download as a complete document and in sections: Benchmarking workshop, tool and framework. The user guide will include information on the project and the Framework, and on suggested ways of working with the framework and the online interactive tool. Project-team members reviewed and informed the finalisation of the user guide, which was showcased and trialled at the HERDSA 2013 Conference. This consultation did not identify any issues, and the user guide was well received by a representation of higher education stakeholders.

The final version of the user guide will be published for dissemination in August 2013. The dynamic nature of the electronic version of the user guide has the potential to promote its own sustainability, as does the fact that the online version of the user guide can be revised and updated in light of ongoing framework and tool developments.

Deliverable 4

A leadership summit for national dissemination of the *Sessional Staff Standards Framework*: **Achieved**

The formal, informal and unsolicited evaluation data and feedback from the national BLASST Summit was, on the whole, extremely positive and complementary. The primary aim of disseminating the *sessional staff standards framework* was achieved, with 79 per cent of respondents who completed the formal summit evaluation stating that they had a better understanding of the framework as a result of their participation in the summit.

A number of significant participant benefits emerged out of the summit evaluations and feedback, including a general sense of optimism, buoyed by the appreciation that similar sessional-staff issues are being encountered across the sector at institutional, department and individual levels, and that a significant number of institutions are committed to addressing these issues. Ninety per cent of respondents noted that the summit let participants reflect on the challenges and possibilities faced by sessional staff. The keynote presentations, PechaKuchas and paper sessions and the ensuing discussions were recognised as highly informative and a significantly positive outcome of the summit. These activities were valued for the opportunity they afforded to appreciate how other institutions are addressing the management of sessional staff and the range of initiatives and strategies to support and develop them being employed across the sector. Eighty-three per cent of respondents acknowledged that they had a better understanding of the latest sessional-staff research as a consequence of their attendance at the presentations. Eighty-four per cent noted that they learnt about good practice in relation to sessional staff through the summit sessions. The tone of the evaluations and feedback was extremely positive, and there was a noticeable optimism about the prospect of supporting and enhancing quality



learning and teaching by sessional staff. This was highly evident in comments such as:

The programs discussed in these sessions sounded incredibly promising, but even more encouraging were the positive outcomes that had already been assessed, and were reported, from many of these programs. I found this to be particularly inspiring, as the programs were, on the whole, both simple and evidently effective. Furthermore, the feedback from sessional staff that presenters said had already been received demonstrated what an impact these programs have already had on both teaching skills and confidence of the staff, which no doubt leads to an improved experience for students as well. (Stage 2 summit participant feedback)

I personally found it incredibly inspiring that so many academics have taken a passionate interest in assisting and developing sessional staff, and was excited by the optimistic tone to the summit. Although there is quite a way to go in addressing and changing many of these issues, there were so many promising ideas presented at the summit, as well as a number of programs that have been already developed and implemented, that I strongly believe there will be significant, positive changes in the future. (Stage 2 summit participant feedback)

There was a variety of opportunities facilitated for summit delegates to network and engage in peer discussions. Seventy-eight per cent of respondents stated that they had an opportunity during the summit to identify strategies for collaboration and/or networking. Summit attendees indicated their appreciation of the diverse mix of delegates and the range of perspectives they represented from all levels of higher education. Additionally, professional and academic staff delegates, many of whom had never been invited to attend a conference, let alone actively participate in such an event, were extremely grateful for the opportunity. There was noteworthy representation and participation by sessional staff; however, it was recognised that if sessional staff are to be involved in such events, their attendance must be appropriately supported.

Finally, the professional and proficient organisation and implementation of the BLASST Summit by the project team, and in particular the project leader, Dr Marina Harvey, and project manager, Dr Karina Luzia, was acknowledged across all sources of evaluation and feedback. Examples of the congratulatory comments included:

Beautifully organised summit, the framework, the preparatory emails, the program, keeping to time during the day, the PechaKuchas and the two keynotes – all very useful/helpful. (Stage 2 summit participant feedback)

Thank you for a really inspirational experience. (Stage 2 summit participant feedback)

Thanks for a very interesting and enjoyable day. Thanks for organising it. (Stage 2 summit participant feedback)

The summit on Friday, it was so well run and organised; everything went so smoothly thanks to you and the team (Stage 2 summit participant feedback).

I thank you and your team for hosting such a professional and well organised summit. Everything about what you and your team did was excellent. (Stage 2 summit participant feedback).



Deliverable 5

A refereed publication (national summit papers): **Achieved**

An outcome of the BLASST summit is a special issue of the *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice* titled 'Setting the Standard – Quality Learning and Teaching with Sessional Staff'. This issue will present scholarly contributions from leaders across the higher education sector that are setting the standard for developing good practice with regard to sessional staff learning and teaching. This special issue will be published in October 2013.

Impact of the project and value to the sector

One key measure of the national and sector impact of the BLASST project is the plan by TEQSA to endorse the BLASST framework as 'an example of an effective method for ensuring quality standards for institutions that employ sessional staff'¹. TEQSA will be producing an information sheet 'on how sessional staff are considered within TEQSA's Regulatory Risk Framework', and will include a link to the BLASST site and interactive tool.

The following quote from the external evaluator's report also provides insight into how the BLASST framework is amenable to implementation in a variety of institutions or locations.

At the HERDSA 2013 conference, where the Framework was showcased, interest was expressed by a number of institutional representatives, in adopting the Framework for assuring and promoting quality teaching and learning by sessional staff. This included the Hong Kong Baptist University (also hosting HERDSA in 2014) and Australian Film Television and Radio School. Additionally, there was a suggestion proposed during the BLASST HERDSA Showcase of the value in adapting the Framework for use with all teaching staff, not just sessional staff. The serendipitous developments that transpired particularly in the second stage of the BLASST project reinforce the relevance and viability of the Framework (Parrish, 2013, p.9).

Throughout the project's lifespan, unsolicited emails also provided examples of evidence of impact on the sector; for example:

...you provided an excellent role model for us with your symposium, and we adapted your strategy in a national call for case studies in our project (on postgraduate supervision). It worked really well as an early dissemination and collection process, and the feedback we received about the opportunity to participate and connections made was fantastic. So thank you for the example you

¹ Personal communication from Samantha Young, Assistant Director, Regulation and Review, TEQSA, to Marina Harvey 24 April 2013.



set!²

and

After thoroughly enjoying the PechaKucha sessions, I was hoping to develop something similar for sessional staff to nominate for as part of a PD day I deliver. Can I ask if I am able to use some your nomination form as a base line for me creating one for this PD day.³

and

As the web coordinator for the Faculty of Arts and Business at the University of the Sunshine Coast I have been asked to follow up on the media release for the BLASST award (National Leadership Summit held at Macquarie University, Sydney) to Dr Greg Nash, Gail Crimmins and Marama Liebergreen in relation to this year's Good Practice Award (course level) COR109. With a view to linking the media release to our faculty's web landing page, along with our program and courses page I am hoping I might be able to upload your logo to correspond with the copy. Is this possible?⁴

A 2013 OLT *Citation for outstanding contributions to student learning* winner, Associate Professor Jillian Hamilton, credits her engagement in the BLASST project with opening ...'up opportunities that may otherwise not have occurred'. Her involvement with the BLASST national leadership summit's PechaKuchas 'led to the urge to put into HERDSA' a presentation and this 'led to the journal article' (the JUTLP special edition). Her national citation is "For sustained development of innovative approaches to academic development and comprehensive support frameworks for sessional tutors to ensure the best possible learning environment for students."⁵

² Correspondence from Associate Professor Jillian Hamilton, Associate Director, Academic: Sessional Development, Learning and Teaching Unit, Queensland University of Technology (13/08/2013).

³ Correspondence from Michelle Adamos, Organisational Development Consultant, Edith Cowan University (07/03/2013).

⁴ Correspondence from Kim Abbey, Administration Officer (Communications), Faculty of Arts and Business, University of the Sunshine Coast (21/05/2013).

⁵ Correspondence from Associate Professor Jillian Hamilton, Associate Director, Academic: Sessional Development, Learning and Teaching Unit, Queensland University of Technology (19/08/2013).



Factors critical to success

A range of factors has been identified by the project leader and project team as critical to the success of the project. These factors have been categorised into project preparation, process-planning and method categories.

Project preparation factors

The detailed *grant application* acted as a foundational and structural reference document throughout the project. It was the source and reference for time-planning and milestones, budget items, and goal-setting towards achieving outcomes and deliverables.

- Establishing *realistic deliverables* and associated timeframes for the project.
- *Founding the project upon, and embedding it within*, a strong body of established and completed *national research* into sessional staff; for example, the RED Report, the CLASS project and internal university projects.
- ‘Building in research and evaluation’ (Wadsworth, 2010) throughout the project.
- *Project-team membership*.
 - Individuals who were invited to the project, were not only interested in quality learning and teaching with sessional staff, but passionate about bringing about positive change.
 - All the members of the team had been in sessional staff learning and teaching roles; this ensured that they contributed an experiential appreciation of the issues. The team members had not forgotten the nature of precarious employment, nor what is needed to enable quality learning and teaching with sessional staff.
- *Each team member contributed*:
 - individual strengths to the project (aligned with the distributed leadership approach adopted for the project);
 - a *continuity of expertise* on sessional staff from prior ALTC and OLT projects and work; and
 - a strong and deep knowledge about learning and teaching in higher education, and about the research and issues around sessional staff.

Process planning, stage 1

- The *inclusivity of each benchmarking workshop* in phase 1 of the project. The workshops, at each partner universities, engaged participants that were multi-level and multi-disciplinary. This also aligned with the distributed leadership and PAR approach of this project, and allowed for, and responded to, the contextual diversities of each university, including the diversity of participants at each workshop site.
- Provision of *program templates* as a resource for the phase 1 workshops. These templates provided a basic structure, but allowed for flexibility, and for acknowledging and working with different contexts.



- *Continuity of project team members* for the life of the project was a factor that encouraged success. This enabled a shared, common understanding of the project from conception to completion – and beyond, as we intend to continue!

Process planning, stage 2

- *Very early summit planning* from the project's start; for example, the date, purpose, audience and scope were established 18 months in advance. International presenters, who were members of the reference group, were invited and funded to participate. This involved the project team and the reference group and ensured that universities had the date in their calendars.
- The wording and sending of the invitations to the national summit resulted in all but four Australian universities participating in the summit.
- Securing a professional artist (cartoonist) as a participant observer, to synthesise the key issues arising throughout the summit and interpret them visually. This provided an additional lens for learning from the summit, and gave rise to a suite of resources.
- Employing an effective project officer, with an understanding of the content of the project, whose contributions included ensuring regular communication and a commitment to the project's success grounded from an experiential role of being a sessional staff member.

Method

- Adopting *PAR* as a method ensured reflective practice was embedded and practiced at every project action, step and phase. Reflective questions were continuously asked of the project team members, the reference group and every participant at each workshop and at the summit. Reflective evaluations were all considered and acted upon to inform the direction of the project.
- Enabling a *distributed approach to leadership* for learning and teaching allowed all participants to contribute their strengths, and – equally importantly – to develop their leadership capacity. The project could therefore benefit from the leadership of the team members and reference group, but also from all workshop participants. The summit provided a leadership platform for good practice award winners (some of whom had never participated in any national forum prior to this), for sessional staff and for university executives.
- *Face-to-face meetings* of the reference group and the project team. *Meetings that were also workshops* ensured and achieved project progress towards outcomes. This was the format for most team meetings, but was only possible for one reference group meeting (due to international membership).

Factors that impeded success

The project leader and the project team struggled to identify impediments to project success. Upon collaborative reflection we were able to identify:

International reference group

- The *difficulty of achieving international reference group meetings* through



teleconferencing, as technology regularly failed (teleconference drop-outs, failure by the provider to record meetings, etc.), may have detracted from the more regular involvement of all reference group members.

- Calendar entries for meetings were overridden by executive requests, etc. Inviting expert members comes at the cost or risk of institutional demands.
- International time zones limited when meetings could be held.

General

- Project timeframes need to acknowledge and allow for participants' entitlement to annual leave.
- Some challenges in working with web developers and online-technology experts did not impede success, but did impede progress. These colleagues took time to appreciate the scope of the job, resulting in some delays, and required intensive communication meetings. Moreover, competing projects and priorities meant that our project work was at times lower in their priorities; however, they always achieved good outcomes.

Dissemination through sustainable resources

The BLASST project produced a range of materials that are made available to the higher education sector, both nationally and internationally. Many of these are examples of post-project and sustainable dissemination. The two key dissemination conduits are the BLASST website and the special issue of the *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*.

1. The BLASST website <BLASST.edu.au>

The BLASST website acts as an entry point for benchmarking activities and as a repository for supportive resources. These resources include:

The BLASST standards framework (PDF – 216k)

http://www.blasst.edu.au/docs/A413_008_BLASST_Benchmark_Guide.pdf

The BLASST guide (PDF – 1.2mb)

http://www.blasst.edu.au/docs/A413_008_BLASST_Benchmark_Guide.pdf

The BLASST – benchmarking interactive tool (B-BIT)

<http://www.blasst.edu.au/bbit-explained.html>

The BLASST national summit presentations

<http://www.blasst.edu.au/summit2013.html>

BLASST good practice awards and case studies

<http://www.blasst.edu.au/awards.html>

Workshop program template

<http://blasst.edu.au/resources.html>



Cartoon resources and resource guide

<http://blasst.edu.au/cartoons.html>

Annotated bibliography on quality learning and teaching and sessional staff

<http://blasst.edu.au/resources.html>

2. Special issue of the *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*

The *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice* is an online and open-access journal. A special issue, 'Setting the Standard – Quality Learning and Teaching with Sessional Staff' (Volume 10, issue 3) had been secured for dissemination of the scholarly outcomes of the project.

The following journal articles will be available at:

<<http://ro.uow.edu.au/jutlp/>>



Brown, N.R., Kelder, J.-A., Freeman, B. & Carr, A.R. (2013). A Message From The Chalk Face – What Casual Teaching Staff Tell Us They Want To Know, Access and Experience. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 10(3).

Bryson, C. (2013). Supporting sessional teaching staff in the UK – to what extent is there real progress? *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 10(3).

Hamilton, J., Fox, M. & McEwan, M. (2013). Sessional Academic Success: A Distributed Framework for Academic Support and Development. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 10(3).

Harvey, M. (2013). Setting The Standards For Sessional Staff: Quality Learning And Teaching. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 10(3).

Lefoe, G.E., Parrish, D.R. & Keevers, L. (2013). A CLASS Act: The teaching team approach to subject coordination. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 10(3).

Luzia, K., Harvey, M., Parker, N., Brown, N., McCormack, C. & McKenzie, J. (2013). Benchmarking with the BLASST Sessional Staff Standards Framework. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 10(3).

May, R., Strachan, G. & Peetz, D. (2013). Workforce development and renewal in Australian universities and the management of casual academic staff. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 10(3).

Sutherland, K. & Gilbert, A. (2013). Academic aspirations amongst sessional tutors in a New Zealand University. *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice*, 10(3).



3. Artefacts

BLASST bookmarks were used as an effective dissemination resource throughout the project. The summit also disseminated the BLASST website URL on its bags. Each summit participant also received a tape measure printed with the question “How does your institution measure up?”



Figure 8 BLASST bookmarks



Supported by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching

MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY

UTAS

UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY SYDNEY

blasst Benchmarking leadership and advancement of standards for sessional teaching

Quality learning and teaching • Support for sessional staff • Sustainability



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Appendix A. Good practice nomination form

Sess-ion-al Staff /sessional stæf/ noun. Academic staff member who is not on a permanent or continuing contract. This includes any teacher on a casual or short-term contract as a lecturer, tutor or demonstrator.

INVITATION

You are invited to nominate a Good Practice for the BLASST Good Practice Awards.

BLASST is a project funded by the Office for Learning & Teaching to establish a national **Sessional Staff Standards Framework** to support and enhance quality teaching by sessional staff in higher education.

The BLASST Good Practice Awards seek to identify leaders in sessional staff issues in higher education by recognising good practice around supporting sessional staff. Nominations are invited in three categories that align with the three key principles of the Sessional Staff Standards Framework: *Quality Learning and Teaching*; *Support for Sessional Staff*; and *Sustainability*.

BLASST Good Practice Award winners will be recognised at the BLASST **National Leadership Summit** to be held on **22nd February 2013** at **Macquarie University, Sydney** with representatives from across the Australian higher education sector. The winning examples of good practice will also be showcased on the BLASST website **blasst.edu.au**.

Categories for nomination are the Key Principles of the Sessional Staff Standard Framework

1) Quality Learning and Teaching

Any practices that show commitment to consistently high quality learning and teaching for all, regardless of the employment status of the staff member teaching them

Examples of learning and teaching approaches adopted across the University that demonstrate that learning and teaching values, principles and priorities are applied to Sessional Staff; and that Sessional Staff are included in University communities of practice

2) Support for Sessional Staff

Any practices that show commitment to achieving quality management standards in recruitment, employment, administration, academic and professional support, in order to ensure consistent and appropriate support for Sessional Staff

Any practices that recognise the requirements of Sessional Staff to undertake their learning and teaching roles effectively and professionally

3) Sustainability

- Any practices that show recognition for long-term sustainability of quality learning and teaching through retaining Sessional Staff; reducing turnover of Sessional Staff; and encouraging Sessional Staff in the pursuit and development of academic teaching careers*
- Any practices that show the provision of appropriate resources to support processes around Sessional Staff, and/or the minimisation of the administrative load on ALL staff (including academic, administrative, and Human Resources staff)*



BLASST GOOD PRACTICE NOMINATION FORM

Contact details – full name, address and email	
Organisation	
Identify at what organisational level your practice is applied (circle as appropriate)	Individual / Department / Faculty / School / Subject or Unit Convenor / Office / Whole-of-Institution / Other: _____
Your BLASST good practice example as an abstract (300 words max) <i>Please include a description of your good practice: what it is; who enacts it; and how it supports sessional staff. Suggestions for what may also be included:</i> - critical factors that contributed to the success of this practice - positive outcomes - resourcing needed - challenges and areas for improvement - evidence of impact and/or success	
BLASST Key Principle addressed by your good practice (indicate as appropriate)	1) Quality Learning and Teaching 2) Support for Sessional Staff 3) Sustainability

I agree to the uploading of my example of good practice for sessional staff to the BLASST project website.

Nominations are due on **Friday, 2nd November, 2012** and are to be emailed, as an attachment, to karina.luzia@mq.edu.au.

Nine finalists will be chosen to present at the BLASST National Summit on Friday 22nd February, 2013, at Macquarie University, Sydney. Presentations will be in the form of a short, five-minute *PechaKucha*. All finalists will be sponsored for participation at the Summit; that is, summit registration and one night's accommodation will be provided. Travel will be at the expense of the finalist's institution.

Finalists will be notified by 12th November, 2012



Appendix B. BLASST Good Practice Awards PechaKucha. What, Why, When, Where and How

What is a PechaKucha?

A *PechaKucha* is a (very) short PowerPoint presentation.

The original PechaKucha format is 20 slides x 20 seconds each slide.

For the *BLASST Good Practice PechaKucha*, we are asking presenters to put together a presentation of:

****10 slides x 30 seconds each slide (which means five minutes per presentation)**

Why?

The PechaKucha method of presentation design and delivery is based on simplicity and brevity. It asks presenters to produce a brief and focused presentation. It allows more people to present and offers extended opportunities for audience engagement and discussion after the presentation/s.

When?

Each BLASST Good Practice PechaKucha will be showcased during one of three afternoon presentation sessions at the National Leadership Summit on Friday 22 February 2013 (see below).

Where?

The BLASST National Leadership Summit will be held at Macquarie University, Sydney Australia.

How?

Visit this website <http://www.pecha-kucha.org/> for an introduction and overview of the *PechaKucha* as a presentation style.

Open the accompanying PowerPoint template. It consists of 10 blank slides with suggestions for what sort of information to include on each slide. One 'spare slide' is also included.

Open the view in *slideshow*. At the bottom of each slide is an automatic timer that indicates the remaining time for each slide.

Using your Good Practice nomination 'abstract' as a guide, design a presentation that showcases your Good Practice as a *PechaKucha*.

No rules, just suggestions:

- As little text as possible on each slide,
- Good quality images,
- Empty space can be your friend,
- You don't have to use the template or the timer (but they might help!).

Questions? Email Karina Luzia on karina.luzia@mq.edu.au

Further references:

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External Evaluation Final Report

BLASST PROJECT

BACKGROUND TO THE PROJECT

Sessional staff have been defined as teachers including any higher education instructors not in tenured or permanent positions, and employed on an hourly or honorary basis (Percy et al, 2008, p. 4). Between 40 and 50 per cent of teaching in Australian universities is provided by sessional staff (Percy et al, 2008) and at individual departmental levels this can rise to levels of 80 per cent and higher (Harvey, Fraser & Bowes, 2005). Sessional staff are the interface for learning and teaching in Australian higher education, yet research indicates that they are at the periphery (Kimber, 2003) of learning and teaching plans.

The BLASST project focused on the delivery of a *Sessional Staff Standards Framework* (Framework) that established national standards to support and enhance quality learning and teaching by sessional staff. This Framework was developed using a participatory action research methodology. The project's distributed leadership approach developed multi-level leadership capacity as participants engaged with the Framework to lead benchmarking activities at organisational, faculty, departmental and/or individual levels.

This two year project commenced in 2012 and was due for completion in August, 2013. It is led by Macquarie University, with team members (outlined in Table 1) from the University of Canberra (UC), University of Tasmania (UTAS) and University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). The first year of the project involved participants from each of the three project partner institutions. The second year of the project focused on the broad dissemination of the Framework through a National Leadership Summit held on Friday 22 February 2013.

Table 4. BLASST project team

PROJECT TEAM	AFFILIATION
Dr Marina Harvey <i>Project Leader</i>	Lecturer, Learning and Teaching Centre, Macquarie University:
Associate Professor Coralie McCormack <i>Project Team Member</i>	Teaching and Learning Centre, University of Canberra
Dr Natalie Brown <i>Project Team Member</i>	Co-Head, Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching, University of Tasmania



Dr Nicola Parker <i>Project Team Member</i>	Lecturer, Institute for Interactive Media and Learning, University of Technology, Sydney
Associate Professor Jo McKenzie <i>Mentor to Dr Nicola Parker</i>	Director, Institute for Interactive Media and Learning, University of Technology, Sydney
Dr Karina Luzia <i>Project Manager</i>	Learning and Teaching Centre, Macquarie University:

The project deliverables were established as:

1. Development of national standards to support and enhance quality learning and teaching by sessional staff.
2. An online interactive to facilitate the self-assessment process with the capability of generating a customised report and action plan.
3. An implementation guide on how to use the *Sessional Staff Standards Framework* and self-assessment tool.
4. A leadership summit for national dissemination of the *Sessional Staff Standards Framework*.
5. A refereed publication (national summit papers).

PROJECT CONTEXT

A value of the *Sessional Staff Standards Framework* (Framework) is that it supports sector wide awareness of sessional staff issues. The Framework engages participants to lead by focusing on national standards with the potential to achieve “wholesale improvements”. The Australian higher education sector has been consistent in identifying a need for addressing and assuring learning and teaching standards for sessional staff. This need has been specifically identified by the OLT (successor to ALTC), following a review of leadership programs where “...few tackled big systemic issues...Some currently topical opportunities are being missed, for example, sessional staff issues” (ALTC, 2010).

The current scenario of “the general lack of performance management of sessional teachers presents a high risk factor for universities” (Percy, 2008, p. 14). The Framework can act as both a tool and a strategy for risk identification and minimisation. Moreover, the planned interactive platform has the ability to automatically generate targeted action plans when organisational units are identified as achieving below minimal standards.

With criteria categorised at different levels of engagement, the Framework has the strength of allowing participants to lead, and benchmark, at the individual, departmental, faculty or organisational levels. Cross institutional benchmarking, using the Framework, enables leadership development at the sector level, while also acting as an educative tool to inform the sector about good practice and supporting quality learning and teaching.



EVALUATION APPROACH

The primary outcome of the BLASST project was the establishment of a *Sessional Staff Standards Framework* (Framework) that determines national standards to support and enhance quality learning and teaching by sessional staff. An evaluation approach that closely aligned with the project’s design, outcome, deliverables and methodology was adopted with three considerations guiding the evaluation process:

1. Have the primary outcome and project deliverables been achieved?
2. Has the project resulted in any serendipitous outcomes?
3. Is the Framework and online interactive sustainable?

The main purpose of the external evaluation was to provide a summative assessment of the success of the BLASST project. To support this summative function of the external evaluation, an integrated **clarification** (Owen, 2006) and **MERI** approach [monitoring, evaluation, research and improvement] (Wadsworth, 2011) was identified as the most efficacious. The MERI focused on identifying the effective and useful aspects of the Framework and the online interactive and how they could be improved. Three key elements of the BLASST project focused the external evaluation process and provided a structure for disseminating the evaluation findings:

1. Sessional Staff Standards Framework
2. Online Interactive
3. BLASST Summit

Evaluation data was both informal (through collaborative, but supported reflection by project partners) and formal (through evaluative survey instruments at each Stage 1 workshop, and Stage 2 summit). Table 2 outlines the evaluation data that was gathered and analysed to address the key considerations in relation to the elements of the BLASST project being evaluated.

TABLE 2: blasst EVALUATION DATA THAT WAS GATHERED AND ANALYSED

SESSIONAL STAFF STANDARDS FRAMEWORK	ONLINE INTERACTIVE	BLASST SUMMIT
Feedback and reflections from project team and reference committee members		
Workshop and Summit participant feedback		Summit participant feedback
Unobtrusive data (e.g. Records of meetings, Email correspondence, informal observations)		

FINDINGS

The BLASST project sought to refine, test and evaluate the *Sessional Staff Standards Framework* (Framework) and a prototype benchmarking interactive tool. The Framework articulates a set of standards at four levels: Institutional level, Faculty level, Department level and Individual sessional staff member level. At each level, there are a set of statements that correspond to three Key Principles: Quality Learning and Teaching, Support for Sessional Staff, and Sustainability. An online interactive tool (Tool) was developed as a self-assessment evaluative instrument that individuals could use to self-assess or evaluate against the standards at each of the four levels. The Framework and Tool were presented at the BLASST National Summit, held at Macquarie University on 22nd February 2013 with feedback collected from participants to further inform the development and finalization of both resources.

This report uses the qualitative and quantitative data, collected both formally and informally across the implementation of the BLASST project to map evaluative findings against the five planned BLASST project deliverables:

1. Development of national standards to support and enhance quality learning and teaching by sessional staff.
2. An online interactive to facilitate the self-assessment process with the capability of generating a customised report and action plan.
3. An implementation guide on how to use the *Sessional Staff Standards Framework* and self-assessment tool.
4. A leadership summit for national dissemination of the *Sessional Staff Standards Framework*.
5. A refereed publication (national summit papers).

SESSIONAL STAFF STANDARDS FRAMEWORK

Deliverable 1: Establishment of a *Sessional Staff Standards Framework* that determines national standards to support and enhance quality learning and teaching by sessional staff

Achieved

The *Sessional Staff Standards Framework* (Framework) sets in place criteria and standards by which the quality of performance and outcomes in learning and teaching, and in management and administrative policy, procedure and practices around sessional staff can be measured. Feedback on the Framework, gathered across both stages of the BLASST project, affirmed its potential for supporting and enhancing quality learning and teaching by sessional staff, as evidenced in comments including:



I THINK THIS TOOL WILL BE INVALUABLE IN ASSURING QUALITY FOR BOTH SESSIONAL STAFF, FACULTY AND THE INSTITUTION LEVEL. (STAGE 1 WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK)

A VERY USEFUL FRAMEWORK. (STAGE 2 SUMMIT PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK)

VERY USEFUL DOCUMENT WHICH WILL ASSIST IN FRAMING FUTURE PRACTICE. (STAGE 2 SUMMIT PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK)

BLASST FRAMEWORK AFFIRMED AS A POWERFUL TOOL FOR STEERING CONVERSATIONS AND INITIATING CHANGE. (STAGE 2 SUMMIT PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK)

The Stage 1 feedback from workshop participants indicated that 83 per cent of respondents (See Appendix 4) believed that the Framework had the potential for enhancing quality learning and teaching by sessional staff and 96 per cent of the respondents recognized that the Framework had the potential to support sessional staff. Stage 2 Summit feedback noted the importance of the Framework for identifying, informing, guiding, evaluating and benchmarking good teaching practice by sessional staff and affecting positive change across the sector. Feedback across the duration of the BLASST project affirmed the strategic significance of the Framework for enhancing and supporting quality learning and teaching by sessional staff.

At the HERDSA 2013 conference, where the Framework was showcased, interest was expressed by a number of institutional representatives, in adopting the Framework for assuring and promoting quality teaching and learning by sessional staff. This included the Hong Kong Baptist University (also hosting HERDSA in 2014) and Australian Film Television and Radio School. Additionally, there was a suggestion proposed during the BLASST HERDSA Showcase of the value in adapting the Framework for use with all teaching staff, not just sessional staff. The serendipitous developments that transpired particularly in the second stage of the BLASST project reinforce the relevance and viability of the Framework. The sustainability of the Framework has been significantly strengthened by the fact that the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) Chief Commissioner Carol Nicoll has sought permission to endorse the Framework as “an example of an effective method for ensuring quality standards for institutions that employ sessional staff”⁶. TEQSA will be producing an information sheet “on how sessional staff are considered within TEQSA’s Regulatory Risk Framework”, and will include a link to the BLASST site and interactive tool.

⁶ Quoted from email from Samantha Young, Assistant Director, Regulation and Review, TEQSA, to Dr Marina Harvey (BLASST Project Leader) 24 April 2013.



ONLINE INTERACTIVE

Deliverable 2: An online interactive to facilitate the self-assessment process with the capability of generating a customised report and action plan.

Achieved

The online interactive tool was developed as a self-assessment evaluative instrument that individuals could use to self-assess or evaluate against the Framework standards at each of the four levels. In each section of the tool, respondents are asked to pick the most applicable statement from the set of standards and then provide a reason and evidence for their selection. At the end of the process, the tool automatically generates a summary benchmarking report against the sessional staff standards that are colour-coded to illustrate whether *Good Practice* or *Minimum Standard* have been achieved or if current levels of practice are *Unsustainable*. The report can then be saved as a PDF file or printed out for the respondent's use. No data or personal information entered by respondents is retained in the system.

Stage 1 workshop participant feedback affirmed the useability and value of the online interactive tool. While 68 per cent of respondents (See Appendix 4) stated that the online interactive was easy to use for the first time and 84 per cent rated the overall online activity as enjoyable there were some issues identified around the user-friendliness of the online interactive particularly in relation to its initial Excel spreadsheet format as noted in the comment:

[THE FRAMEWORK] WAS CONCEPTUALLY SIMPLE AND [THE] ONLY ISSUES WERE EXCEL RELATED. (STAGE 1 WORKSHOP PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK)

Specific concerns about the online interactive, raised in this early stage of the project, included 36 per cent of workshop participants indicating that they were not able to correct mistakes with ease; and 12 per cent perceiving that they could not perform the benchmarking task at a reasonable rate. Workshop participants were encouraged to provide formative comments and suggestions on how the online interactive could be improved. Most of the feedback gathered in this initial consultation phase illuminated issues and improvement measures associated with the Excel format of the online interactive.

The summary report that was automatically generated by the online interactive was highly regarded with over 92 per cent of workshop respondents noting its usefulness. Phase 2 of the project saw the tool developed into an online interactive and named the B-BIT (BLASST Benchmarking Interactive Tool). A prototype of the B-BIT was launched at the BLASST National Summit. The acceptance of the B-BIT by higher education stakeholders was illuminated in 75 per cent of BLASST Summit survey respondents (See Appendix 4) purporting interest in using the B-BIT in their institutional context. Further, the relevance and value of the B-BIT for enhancing sessional staff practices and responding to challenges faced by sessional staff was acknowledged as illustrated in comments such as:

A STRONG ADVANTAGE OF THE SUMMIT I FELT WAS THE FOCUS AROUND LAUNCHING THE BLASST BENCHMARKING TOOL ITSELF, WHICH ALLOWED FOR A SENSE OF DIRECTION



TO FOLLOW ON FROM THE ISSUES BEING DISCUSSED. DESPITE THE CONFRONTING NATURE OF MANY PAPERS PRESENTED THAT DISCUSSED THE SOMEWHAT SAD STATE OF AFFAIRS FOR SESSIONAL STAFF, BEING ABLE TO POINT TO THE BLAAST BENCHMARKING TOOL AS A REALISTIC AVENUE TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS FOR EXISTING AND FUTURE SESSIONAL STAFF, AND MAKING REFERENCE TO HOW THE TOOL WAS ALREADY BEING USED, FOSTERED A MORE OPTIMISTIC AND PURPOSEFUL TONE. (STAGE 2 SUMMIT PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK)

GREAT. GOOD TO DO EXERCISE. CAN'T WAIT FOR THIS TO BE AVAILABLE FOR USE AND EVIDENCE FOR CHANGING PRACTICE. (STAGE 2 SUMMIT PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK)

Detailed suggestions, many very specific in nature, were provided by summit participants who attended the BLASST session focused on showcasing the B-BIT. Examples of this feedback, which was integral in refining and finalizing the B-BIT included:

BLASST ONLINE TOOL – WARNING MESSAGE IF A FIELD IS NOT FILLED IN. NEEDS TO BE BIGGER AND PERHAPS IN A BOX – OR HIGHLIGHT THE ERROR ITSELF. (STAGE 2 SUMMIT PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK)

INCREASE THE VISIBILITY OF – “FLOW” (VARIOUS STEPS IN THE PROCESS) IN BREADCRUMB TRAIL AT TOP (LARGER FONT?) OR IN A COLOURED BOX – YOU ARE HERE. (STAGE 2 SUMMIT PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK)

HAVE THE SPELL CHECK IN THE FORM. (STAGE 2 SUMMIT PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK)

The B-BIT was trialled at the HERDSA 2013 conference, and was shown to cope with multiple, and simultaneous logins and was able to be used on a range of devices. Additionally, there was broad acceptance of the B-BIT and its value by higher education stakeholders.

The electronic characteristic of the B-BIT increases the likelihood that it will be a sustainable resource. This is primarily due to the dynamic nature of the B-BIT and the associated potential for revising and updating the content and presentation of the B-BIT as necessary or warranted.

Deliverable 3: An implementation guide on how to use the *Sessional Staff Standards Framework* and self-assessment tool.

Achieved

The implementation guide (User Guide) will be produced both as an electronic and hard copy. The online version of the User Guide will be available for download as a complete document and in sections - Benchmarking Workshop; Tool and Framework. The User Guide will include information on the Project, on the Framework and on suggested ways of working with the Framework and the online interactive tool. Project team members reviewed and informed the finalization of the User Guide, which was showcased and trialled at the HERDSA 2013 Conference. This consultation did not identify any issues and the User Guide was well accepted by a representation of higher education stakeholders. The final version of the User Guide will be published for dissemination in August 2013. The dynamic nature of the User Guide, in its electronic format, is an affordance that has the potential to promote the sustainability of this resource. The online version of the User Guide will be able to be revised and updated in light of ongoing Framework and Tool developments that transpire further advocating the sustainability of the User Guide.



BLASST SUMMIT

Deliverable 4: A leadership summit for national dissemination of the *Sessional Staff Standards Framework*.

Achieved

The formal, informal, and unsolicited evaluation data and feedback from the national BLASST Summit was on the whole, extremely positive and complimentary (See Table 3 for an account of the Summit agenda). The primary aim of disseminating the *Sessional Staff Standards Framework* was achieved with 79 per cent of respondents completing the formal Summit evaluation (See Appendix 4) stating that they had a better understanding of the Framework as a result of their participation in the Summit.

There were a number of significant participant benefits that emerged out of the Summit evaluations and feedback. This included a general sense of optimism buoyed by the appreciation that similar sessional staff issues are being encountered across the sector at institutional, department and individual levels and that a commitment to addressing these issues is being undertaken by a significant number of institutions. Ninety per cent of Summit evaluation respondents (See Appendix 4) noted that the Summit availed the opportunity and provided impetus for reflecting upon the challenges and possibilities faced by sessional staff. The keynote presentations, PechaKucha and paper sessions and the ensuing discussions that transpired from these, were recognized as highly informative and a significantly positive outcome of the Summit. These activities were extremely valued for the opportunity they afforded delegates to appreciate how other institutions are addressing the management of sessional staff and the range of initiatives and strategies being employed across the sector to support and develop sessional staff. 83 per cent of Summit evaluation respondents acknowledged that they had a better understanding of the latest sessional staff research as a consequence of their attendance at the Summit presentations. 84 per cent of Summit evaluation respondents noted that they learnt about good practice in relation to sessional staff through the Summit sessions. The tone of the evaluations and feedback was extremely positive and there was a noticeable optimism and confidence recurring about the prospect of supporting and enhancing quality learning and teaching by sessional staff. This was highly evident in comments such as:

THE PROGRAMS DISCUSSED IN THESE SESSIONS SOUNDED INCREDIBLY PROMISING, BUT EVEN MORE ENCOURAGING WERE THE POSITIVE OUTCOMES THAT HAD ALREADY BEEN ASSESSED, AND WERE REPORTED, FROM MANY OF THESE PROGRAMS. I FOUND THIS TO BE PARTICULARLY INSPIRING, AS THE PROGRAMS WERE, ON THE WHOLE, BOTH SIMPLE AND EVIDENTLY EFFECTIVE. FURTHERMORE, THE FEEDBACK FROM SESSIONAL STAFF THAT PRESENTERS SAID HAD ALREADY BEEN RECEIVED DEMONSTRATED WHAT AN IMPACT THESE PROGRAMS HAVE ALREADY HAD ON BOTH TEACHING SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE OF THE STAFF, WHICH NO DOUBT LEADS TO AN IMPROVED EXPERIENCE FOR STUDENTS AS WELL. (STAGE 2 SUMMIT PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK)

I PERSONALLY FOUND IT INCREDIBLY INSPIRING THAT SO MANY ACADEMICS HAVE TAKEN A PASSIONATE INTEREST IN ASSISTING AND DEVELOPING SESSIONAL STAFF, AND WAS EXCITED BY THE OPTIMISTIC TONE TO THE SUMMIT. ALTHOUGH THERE IS QUITE A WAY TO GO IN ADDRESSING AND CHANGING MANY OF THESE ISSUES, THERE WERE SO MANY PROMISING IDEAS PRESENTED AT THE SUMMIT, AS WELL AS A NUMBER OF



PROGRAMS THAT HAVE BEEN ALREADY DEVELOPED AND IMPLEMENTED, THAT I STRONGLY BELIEVE THERE WILL BE SIGNIFICANT, POSITIVE CHANGES IN THE FUTURE. (STAGE 2 SUMMIT PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK)

TABLE 3: BLASST SUMMIT PROGRAM

TIME	PROGRAM OF EVENTS		
9.00 AM	Registration & coffee		
9.15 AM	Summit opening and acknowledgment of Country (Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Provost, Professor Judyth Sachs, Macquarie University) Introducing the <i>Sessional Staff Standards Framework</i> (Dr Marina Harvey)		
10.00 AM	International Keynote: “Supporting sessional staff: to what extent is there real progress?” (Colin Bryson, Newcastle University, UK)		
10.50 AM	MORNING TEA		
11.20 AM	National Keynote: “‘No money and an uncertain future...’ How are Australian universities preparing the next generation of academic staff?” (Robyn May, Griffith University)		
12.00 PM	Question AND DISCUSSION TIME		
12.30 PM	LUNCH		
	Stream A	Stream B	Stream C
1.15 PM	BLASST online	PechaKucha Good practice case studies	Papers
1.50 PM	Papers	BLASST online	PechaKucha Good practice case studies
2.25 PM	PechaKucha Good practice case studies	Papers	BLASST online
3.00 PM	AFTERNOON TEA		
3.20 pm	Q & A Panel: Sustaining good practice for sessional staff [Panel members include Suzi Hewlett (General Manager, OLT), Suzi Vaughan (DVC, Learning and Teaching, QUT), Steve Cassidy (Department of Computing, MQ) and Lawrence Wainwright (Casual Academic, UTS)].		
4.20 pm	BLASST Good Practice Award winners announced		

There were a variety of opportunities facilitated for Summit delegates to network and engage in peer discussions. Seventy-eight per cent of Summit evaluation respondents stated that they had opportunity during the Summit to identify strategies for collaboration and/or networking. Summit attendees indicated their appreciation of the diverse mix of delegates attending the Summit and the range of perspectives they represented from all levels of the university. Additionally, professional and academic staff delegates, many of whom had never been invited to attend a conference let alone actively participate in such an event,



were extremely grateful for the opportunity. There was noteworthy representation and participation by sessional staff at the Summit however, it was recognized that if sessional staff are to be involved in such events their attendance must be appropriately supported. Finally, the professional and proficient organisation and implementation of the BLASST Summit, by the project team and in particular the Project Leader Dr Marina Harvey and Project Manager Dr Karina Luzia, was decidedly acknowledged across all sources of evaluation and feedback. Examples of the congratulatory comments provided by Summit delegates included:

BEAUTIFULLY ORGANISED SUMMIT, THE FRAMEWORK, THE PREPARATORY EMAILS, THE PROGRAM, KEEPING TO TIME DURING THE DAY, THE PECHA KUCHAS AND THE TWO KEYNOTES – ALL VERY USEFUL/HELPFUL. (STAGE 2 SUMMIT PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK)
THANK YOU FOR A REALLY INSPIRATIONAL EXPERIENCE. (STAGE 2 SUMMIT PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK)
THANKS FOR A VERY INTERESTING AND ENJOYABLE DAY. THANKS FOR ORGANISING IT. (STAGE 2 SUMMIT PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK)
THE SUMMIT ON FRIDAY, IT WAS SO WELL RUN AND ORGANISED EVERYTHING WENT SO SMOOTHLY THANKS TO YOU AND THE TEAM (STAGE 2 SUMMIT PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK).
I THANK YOU AND YOUR TEAM FOR HOSTING SUCH A PROFESSIONAL AND WELL ORGANISED SUMMIT. EVERYTHING ABOUT WHAT YOU AND YOUR TEAM DID WAS EXCELLENT. (STAGE 2 SUMMIT PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK).

Deliverable 5: A refereed publication (national summit papers).

Achieved

An outcome of the BLASST National Leadership Summit which took place in Sydney on 22 February 2013 was a special issue of the *Journal of University Teaching and Learning Practice* titled: **Setting the Standard - Quality Learning and Teaching with Sessional Staff**. This issue will present scholarly contributions from leaders across the higher education sector that are setting the standard for developing good practice with regard to sessional staff learning and teaching. This special issue will be published in October 2013.



CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The desired overarching outcome of the BLASST project was positively realized and the five intended deliverables were successfully achieved. The effectiveness and professionalism of the project team and in particular the Project Leader Dr Marina Harvey and Project Manager Dr Karina Luzia was integral in the success of the BLASST project.

The BLASST Framework and B-BIT have been soundly ratified as highly beneficial, sustainable and a solid foundation on which future support and enhancement of quality learning and teaching by sessional staff can be advanced. The relevance and value of the BLASST resources to policy makers, leaders and those engaged in learning and teaching across the higher education sector is noteworthy. The development of staff training initiatives and promotional activities that could be implemented at an institutional level to endorse and disseminate the outcomes and outputs of the BLASST project would be worthwhile and progress the quality of learning and teaching by sessional staff across the sector.

The BLASST project team have thoughtfully considered ways in which the outcomes of the BLASST project can be disseminated, promoted and expanded. The production of a 'HERDSA Guide'⁷ is one strategy that is being progressed. The focus of the guide is still to be determined and this initiative will be implemented post the completion date of the BLASST project. Some suggestions for the development of the guide have included:

- The Green Guide as a scholarly work on sessional staff;
- The Green Guide for managing sessional staff at different levels, unpacking the Framework;
- Including additional resources from the national BLASST summit such as the PechaKuchas ; and
- The Green Guide could include examples of good practice from an individual perspective

Feedback, particularly from BLASST Summit delegates suggested that further research focusing on strategies and infrastructure to integrate the Framework into institutional systems and processes would be well received. It is also evident that recognition and promotion of good practices around the management and leadership of sessional staff to promote quality learning and teaching is essential for sustainable and profound change to occur.

There was a suggestion during the BLASST Summit panel session that sessional staff need to be responsible for their own careers, and take the impetus to develop their own skills in any way they can. However, universities and departments/faculties need to foster an environment where sessional staff are empowered and secure in pursuing these goals and permanent and sessional staff work together to foster and promote their quality learning and teaching.

⁷ HERDSA Guides provide useful ideas and information on many aspects of teaching and learning. Written by experts in specific fields, they are short, inexpensive and easy to read. For more information see http://www.herdsa.org.au/?page_id=139



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