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Australia’s casual approach to University teaching

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Australia’s casual approach to University teaching

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41st Annual National Conference: Achieving Successful Results in Higher Education through Collective Bargaining
Dr Bonny Cassidy, Letter to the editor, The Age, 29 July 2013,

‘Since completing my doctorate five years ago I have worked as a casual teaching academic in [two states] combining casual contracts from several institutions as I have been unable to find a permanent position anywhere. In that time I have received a maximum of two hours of pedagogical ‘training’. Most university teaching skills are learnt on the job or through fleeting incidental conversations with colleagues. Although doing the frontline work of the university, we [casual academics] move around campuses almost invisibly without offices or invitations to collegial meetings....’
Background

- 37 public universities
- Government a minority source of revenue
- Education as export

- Casual work
- The casual academic
- CB settings
Australia’s insecure academic workforce

- Majority of university teaching staff are hourly paid (casual)
- Perform most of the undergraduate teaching
- Casual teaching has no career path – more trap than bridge
- Transfer of risk to employee
Who are Australia’s casual academics?

- Majority are women – 57 per cent
- Average age is 36 (50 for tenured academics)
- Diverse motivations but most want a more secure position
Who are casual academics?

Myth of flexibility

“casualisation suits a lot of people who take a portfolio approach to their career; they mix and match academic work with work in industry, consulting…”

(Universities Australia, Chief Executive)
May et al.: Australia’s casual approach to University teaching

A framework for explaining academic casualisation

- The enterprise university
- External forces, public policy, regulatory changes
- The university setting
- Labour supply

Outcomes for casual academic staff
- Insecurity
- Invisibility
- Poor quality jobs

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Explaining casualisation

• Academic discipline has an impact

• A new typology
  • Aspiring academics
  • Externally focused
  • Casual by choice
  • Retiring

• Key features are insecurity, lack of career and invisibility
Future challenges

- Pressures to save costs remain – outsourcing and online
- Regulation through collective bargaining difficult
- Representation is challenging – casuals scared to be active
- Highly educated but uncertain future
How far can casual staff bend for flexibility?
‘I don’t call myself an academic, this increased casualisation encourages us to not think of ourselves as academics yet I have been working full time (casual) as an academic since I submitted my PhD so I am an academic, but I think that casual work makes people feel bad about themselves...’ (casual academic, Nov 2011)