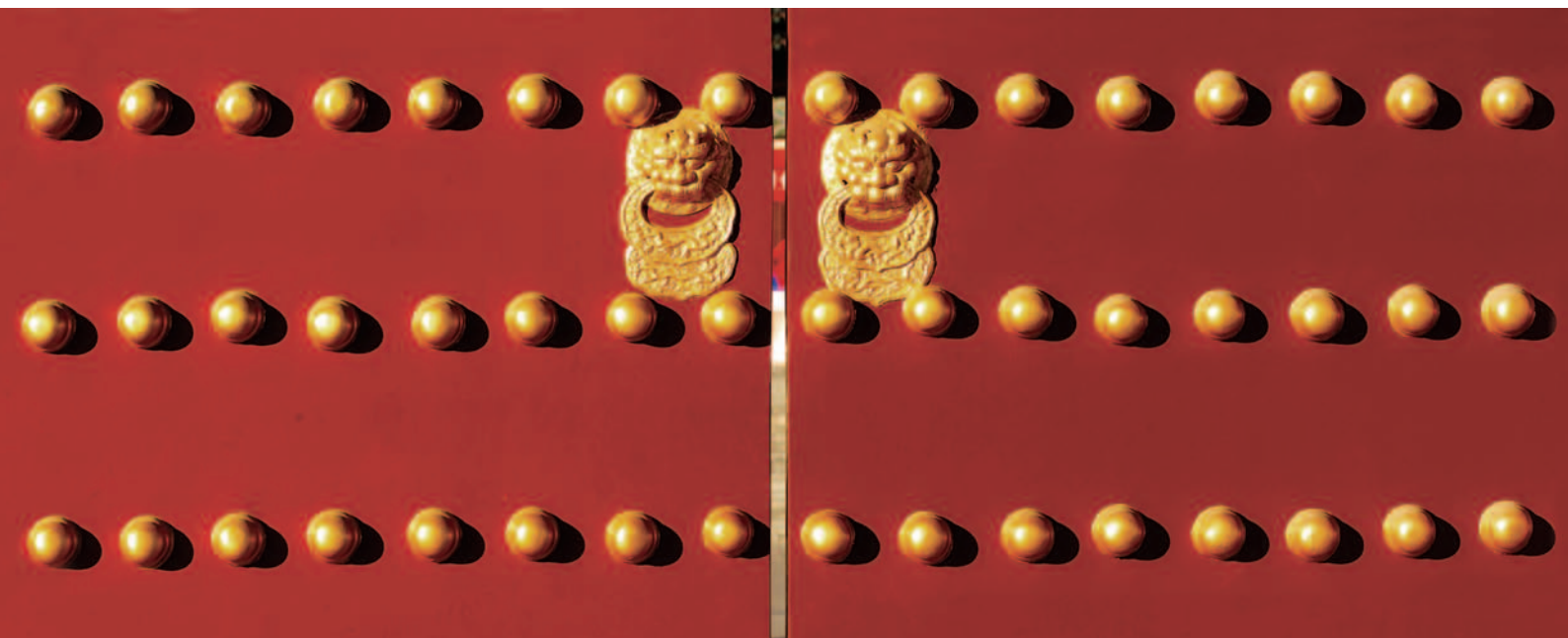


RESEARCH BRIEFING

Changing Academic Profession

November 2010



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The Real Academic Revolution

Why we need to reconceptualise Australia's future academic workforce, and eight possible strategies for how to go about this

Executive summary

Academic work and its associated profession make substantial contributions to the socio-economic development of Australia. But rarely is the work or the profession itself front-page news. This needs to change, partly because of the growing significance of academic work, and partly because of diverse pressures facing universities and its professional workforce. The growing significance of the academic profession is juxtaposed, almost in perfect counterpoint, by its shrinking capacity.

In Australia today, fewer academic staff are available to do a growing amount of work. And the capacity of the workforce is shrinking relative to almost linear growth in the size of the system. These demographic challenges are serious. But demography is not the only challenge to supply. Nearly half of all people obtaining PhDs prefer to work outside the tertiary sector. Even if supply can be managed through smart recruitment

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and deft retention and development practices, there are signs that simply recruiting people into existing academic roles will not be sufficient. This is because both the work and the workforce have changed, and hence so have the roles.

The challenges are many, but one of the first to overcome is for the system to find and implement a positive narrative for the future. A significant foundation task for any workforce development initiative is to understand the major changes taking place with the workforce, learners and education itself, and to translate these into new conceptualisations of roles and expectations, and to implement them. Renewing the academic workforce will involve more than a simple refresh. It will require a fundamental reconfiguration built on an informed reconceptualisation – the aim and intended contribution of this briefing. If academic life is to be an attractive future career choice for clever and dedicated people, then it is necessary to be able to show them a realistic description of what becoming an academic means, coupled with a career structure that meets the reality and expectations of an increasingly diversifying workforce.

This research briefing analyses academic work and the academic workforce in the context of current dynamics and likely futures. It discusses the significance of academic work, reviews workforce characteristics, and analyses tensions and pressures. Prevailing conceptualisations, it is argued, do not reflect the current situation in which the profession finds itself, and would provide a very shaky foundation on which to build the future workforce. There is an overarching need for a fresh conceptualisation of academic work that is authentic and feasible – a complex and significant task.

In resonance with the scholarly process itself, we begin this task by laying a firm conceptual foundation – in this case a typology of academic work. This typology provides an instrument for exploring different permutations of foci. We contend that academic work is not necessarily an ‘integrated whole’, but in fact takes a diverse range of forms.

These conceptual ideas are reinforced and expanded by a case study of sessional academics – a study of the future right before our eyes. In addition to many intrinsically illuminating insights, this testifies to the ‘unbundling’ of academic work that has taken place, and the challenges faced by the academic profession.

We operationalise these challenges in eight auspicious strategies for building Australia’s future academic workforce:

1. Reconfiguring academic work;
2. Constructing academic career profiles;
3. Designing attractive customised experiences;
4. Designing measured experiences;
5. Engaging sessional academics;
6. Refreshing the research degree;
7. Expanding staff numbers with system growth; and
8. Engaging leaders in capacity development.

We conclude by calling on institutions and the profession, jointly and collectively, to assume responsibility for leading the change required to implement these strategies. For this we sketch the foundations of a roadmap setting an agenda for reshaping the academic workforce and profession. While this briefing is analytical in style, it is intended to be fiercely practical in intent.

As this agenda suggests, building the future academic workforce is an issue of relevance to many stakeholders. At the same time, only concerted effort by disciplinary and institutional groups is likely to seed the change that the current briefing shows is required. While many institutions appear to have given limited attention to workforce planning, now is clearly the time to begin. Waiting for a crisis, or for certainty, will be too late and will seriously damage the system.

Acknowledgements

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This briefing was authored by Associate Professors Hamish Coates (Australian Council for Educational Research and LH Martin Institute) and Leo Goedegebuure (LH Martin Institute). As always, the views expressed in this research briefing are our own. Getting to this stage of the academic profession project has been both stimulating and insightful for us. We come to this topic from quite different angles and with different histories. This has reinforced our beliefs in the inherent values of academic debate, which we engaged in fully. Suffice to say that the resultant is a truly collaborative effort.

Hamish Coates
Leo Goedegebuure
Melbourne, November 2010

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Introduction

The importance of being academic

Higher education in Australia has grown considerably over the last thirty years. In 1982 there were only 12,990 higher degree by research students and 23,705 academics (DETYA, 1993). In 1985 there were 138,666 university students, and in 1989 only around 10 per cent of the Australian population had a higher education qualification. Only a few decades later there are over a million students in the system of which around a third come from overseas, the nation is looking to a bachelor degree attainment level of 40 per cent, and the nature of education and of education's role in the broader economy has changed considerably.

In 2010, Australia is a global player in higher education and this system is one of the nation's leading exports. Higher education prepares the future professional workforce. It fuels innovation, builds international linkages, enhances individual and social prosperity, and culturally enriches cities and the regions.

Academic work and its associated profession make substantial contributions to the socio-economic development of the country and its public debate and discussions. While eternally difficult to quantify, academic work clearly plays a direct and indirect role in the further development of Australia through the variety of knowledge creation and dissemination activities discussed in this briefing. Academics train Australia's professional capability, conduct scholarly and applied research, build international linkages, collaborate with business, run large knowledge enterprises (universities), generate substantial export revenue, mentor individuals, train the research and the academic workforce, boost social equity, contribute to the creative life of the nation, develop communities, and contribute to broader economic development. And this list could easily be expanded.

These contributions play an increasingly significant role in a nation focused more and more on the generation, commercialisation and export of knowledge-based products and services, notwithstanding the importance

of the mining industry. Australian universities have been remarkably productive in certain areas, excellent examples being the provision of education to growing numbers of domestic and international students. Despite decreases in public expenditure (KPMG, 2009) around a half of Australia's universities are ranked in the top few per cent of all institutions globally (CWCU, 2010). Australia's academics play on the world stage and punch well above their weight in terms of research (DIISR, 2010; Meek, Goedegebuure & Van der Lee, 2010). Such success calls for ongoing improvement, and for recognition of the importance of being academic.

Challenging contexts

But rarely is the work or the profession itself front-page news. This needs to change, partly because of the growing significance of academic work, and partly because of diverse pressures facing universities and its professional workforce. As Coaldrake portended in 2001 the academic workforce that drives higher education is in trouble. In 2010 it is reasonable to contend that the conceptualisation and organisation of academic work and the academic career structure no longer meet the educational and operational demands of the current environment and create many barriers to success (Enders & De Weert, 2009). Traditional approaches to academic work are being battered by new approaches to funding, new epistemologies and ontologies, increasing competitiveness and internationalisation, policies seeking to measure research performance, institution-specific funding compacts, reshaped tertiary architectures, stronger forms of quality control, and broader technological advances and changes in the nature of professional work.

But the growing significance of the academic profession is juxtaposed, almost in perfect counterpoint, by its shrinking capacity. Bach would be proud of the logical symmetry that has been inadvertently achieved. As we reported in 2009 (Coates, Dobson, Edwards, Friedman, Goedegebuure & Meek, 2009), this is a global issue, and one being addressed by countries around the world (see, for instance: Universities UK, 2007; AFT, 2009; MOHE, 2010).

In Australia today, fewer academic staff are available to do a growing amount of work (Hugo & Morriss, 2010). Large, growing and senior sections of the workforce will retire over the next five years, fuelling a looming succession crisis. Figure 1 shows the age of the Australian population of managers and professionals and those reporting the profession of university lecturers and tutors. The challenge posed by these demographics is compelling. In a recent and comprehensive analysis Hugo and Morris (2010: 4) estimate that in the next five years the Australian university sector will need to “replace almost half of its staff”. While the highly specialised and diverse nature of the roles along with current data limitations makes projecting supply and demand in this area highly complex (Edwards, Bexley & Richardson, forthcoming), these broad trends cannot be dismissed.

However, the supply of appropriately qualified and trained academics will be challenged by more than the requirement to replenish current numbers. The capacity of the workforce is shrinking relative to almost linear growth in the size of the system. Even accepting the kinds of reconfiguration suggested in the latter parts of this briefing, moves towards more universal levels of

tertiary education provision will simply require more teachers if we are to at least maintain current quality. Figure 2 spotlights this tension, showing that staff numbers are growing at a lower rate than are student numbers. In the 1990s this led to increases in student/staff ratios from around 13:1 to 20:1. While the student/staff ratio statistic appears to have stabilised relatively over the last decade, any shift towards ‘universal’ levels of provision will propel further increase in this ratio.

These demographic challenges are serious. The ‘making’ of an academic is not a simple matter, with at least a decade required to prepare an individual for even an entry-level role – assuming all goes well. Importing academics from abroad is not straightforward either and may well become harder with growing competition for highly skilled talent from other systems struggling with similar demographic pressures.

But demography is not the only challenge that we are currently facing. Nearly half of all people obtaining PhDs prefer to work outside the tertiary sector (Edwards, Bexley & Richardson, forthcoming). Of those that choose higher education, many seek to

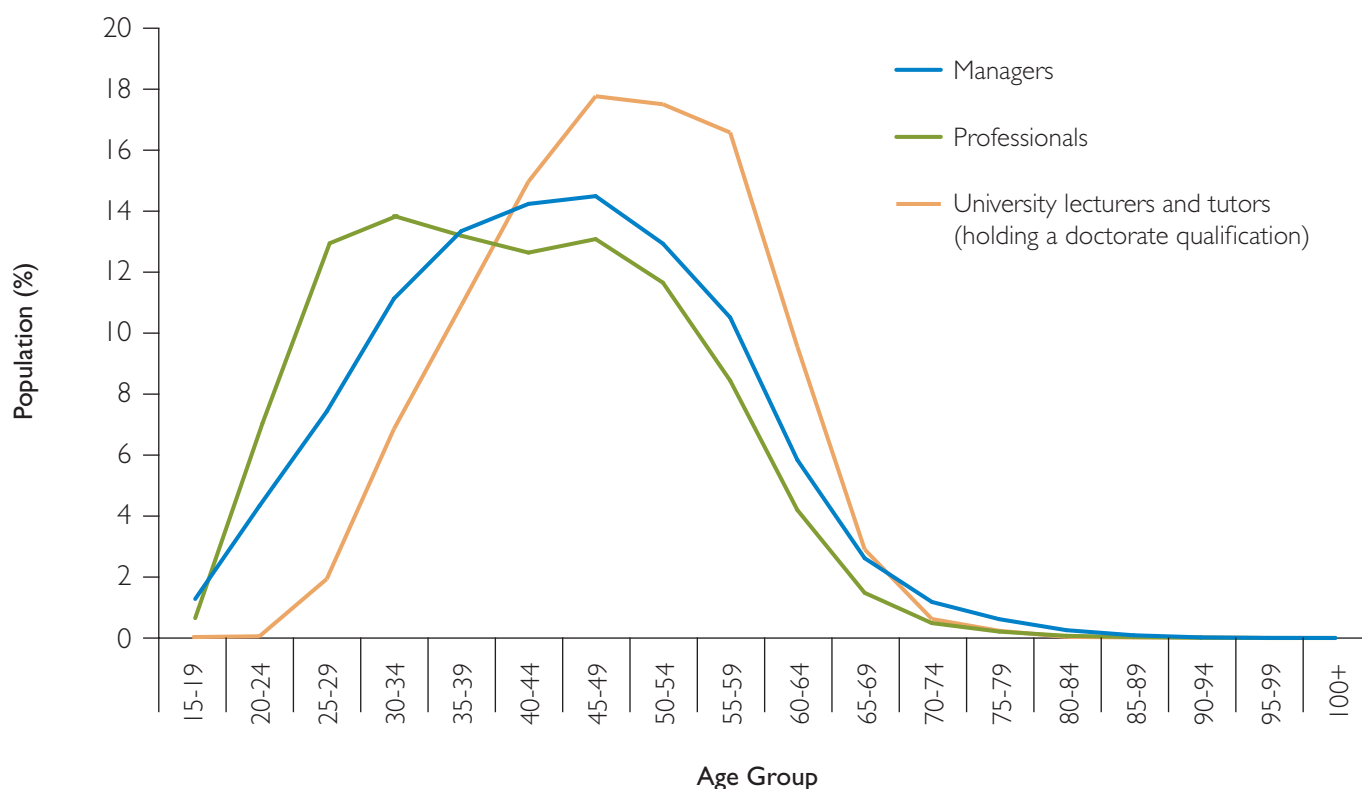


Figure 1 Age distribution of managers, professionals and university lecturers and tutors, 2006

Source: ABS Census of Population and Housing (2006)

move abroad. A 2009 analysis of Australia’s academic workforce (Coates et al., 2009) – the precursor to the current analysis – revealed troubling evidence about the attractiveness of the academic profession in Australia.

Even if supply can be managed through smart recruitment and deft retention and development practices, there are signs that simply recruiting people into existing academic roles will not be sufficient. This is because both the work and the workforce have changed, and hence so have the roles. What appears to be the prevailing view, which may have reflected university life in the elite systems of the 1950-70s, appears increasingly untenable. As we contend in this briefing, there have been qualitative and quantitative changes in the demand for academic work. And complexities in this area are not going away, particularly with increasing diversification, shifts to demand-driven funding and competition from other sectors. This is a matter that the system – institutions, governments, peak bodies, academics and other stakeholders – cannot afford to ignore.

Reconfiguring the academic profession

The challenges are many, but one of the first to overcome is for the system to find and implement a positive narrative for the future. A significant foundation task for any workforce development initiative is to understand the major changes taking place with the workforce, learners and education itself, and to translate these into new conceptualisations of roles and expectations and to implement them. Renewing the academic workforce will involve more than a simple refresh. It will require a fundamental reconfiguration built on an informed reconceptualisation – the aim and intended contribution of this briefing. If academic life is to be an attractive future career choice for clever and dedicated people, then it is necessary to be able to show them a realistic description of what becoming an academic means, coupled with a career structure that meets the reality and expectations of an increasingly diversifying workforce.

This research briefing analyses academic work and the academic workforce in the context of current dynamics

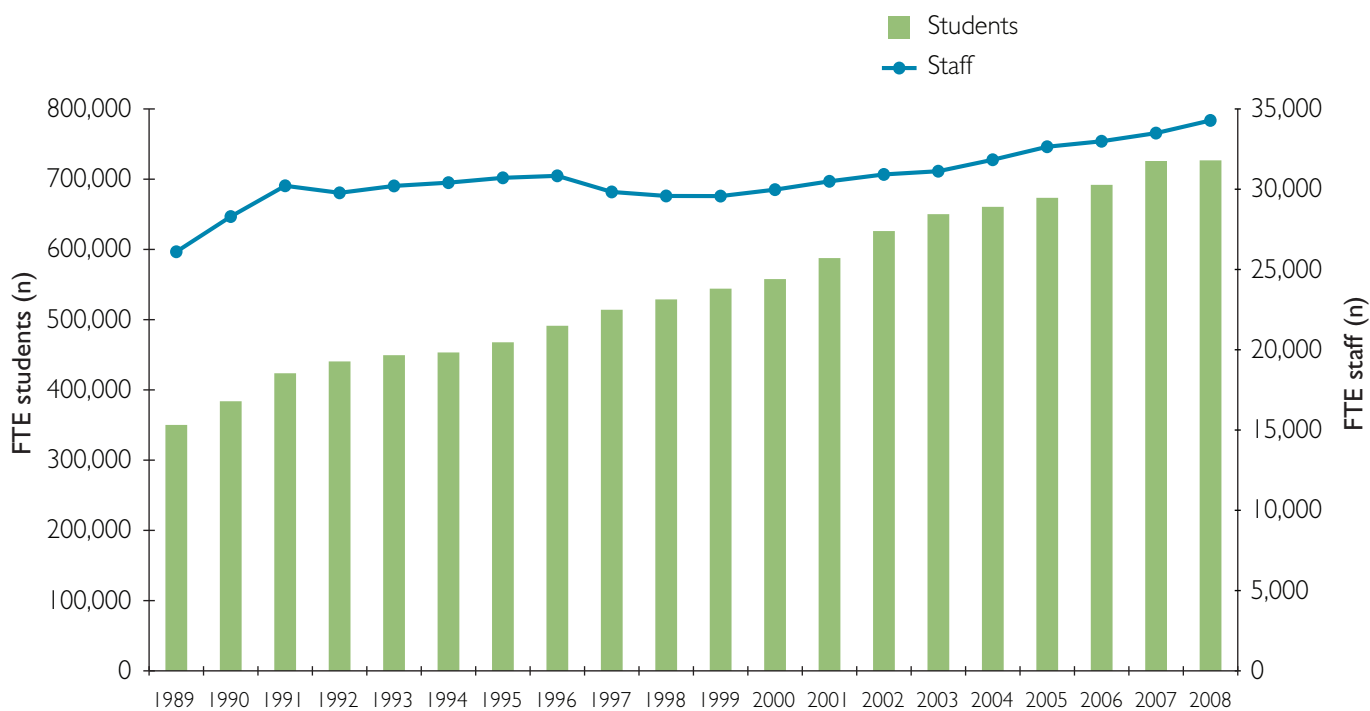


Figure 2 Number (FTE) of students and academics, 1989 to 2008

Sources: Higher Education Student Collection (DEEWR, various years), Higher Education Staff Collection (DEEWR, various years)

and likely futures. It discusses the significance of academic work, reviews workforce characteristics, and analyses tensions and pressures. Prevailing conceptualisations, it is argued, do not reflect the current situation in which the profession finds itself, and would provide a very shaky foundation on which to build the future workforce. There is an overarching need for a fresh conceptualisation of academic work that is authentic and feasible – a complex and significant task.

In resonance with the scholarly process itself, we begin this task by laying a firm conceptual foundation – in this case a typology of academic work. This typology provides an instrument for exploring different permutations of foci. We contend that academic work is not necessarily an ‘integrated whole’, but in fact takes a diverse range of forms.

These conceptual ideas are reinforced and expanded by a case study of sessional academics. In addition to many intrinsically illuminating insights, this testifies to the “unbundling” (Coaldrake, 2001: 12) of academic work that has taken place, and the challenges faced by the academic profession.

We operationalise these challenges in eight strategies for building Australia’s future academic workforce. They document, in broad terms, the need to build workforce capacity by engaging sessional academics, refresh the research degree, expand staff numbers, engage leaders in capacity development and, importantly, build attractive and customised career profiles and trajectories that will sustain and grow the workforce for the future.

The concluding section calls on institutions and the profession, jointly and collectively, to assume responsibility for leading the change required to implement these strategies. For this we sketch the foundations of a roadmap setting an agenda for reshaping the academic workforce and profession. While this briefing is analytical in style, it is intended to be fiercely practical in intent.

As this agenda suggests, building the future academic workforce is an issue of relevance to many stakeholders. At the same time, only concerted effort by disciplinary and institutional groups is likely to seed the change that the current briefing shows is required. While many institutions appear to have given limited attention to workforce planning (Hugo & Morriss, 2010), now is clearly the time to begin. Waiting for a crisis, or for certainty, will be too late and will seriously damage the sector.

Future academic work

A functional typology

The first assumption driving the current analysis is that the prevailing conceptualisation of academic work is almost untenable. This conceptualisation has proved remarkably “stretchable” (Coaldrake, 2001: 16), but now it needs to adapt. Growing uncertainties facing higher education, and changes in the very nature of education itself, are inconsistent with a boutique-type conceptualisation of faculty life (Archibald & Feldman, 2010). The classic conceptualisation of the *homo academicus* – the all-round expert in teaching and research across a broad range of disciplines – is becoming less relevant to the current practices and future needs. More troubling, perhaps, is that spectral illusions may be seeding unhelpful misconceptions, as the current debates on both the teaching-research nexus and the sectoral staking of claims between universities and TAFE so counter-productively demonstrate. Knowledge, higher education and workforce demographics are changing rapidly, with large shifts towards hybrid open and distributed forms of learning and scholarship. Therefore, new pictures of academic – and for that matter tertiary, but for now we limit ourselves to higher education and universities in particular – work are required. This section provides a modest attempt at defining the parameters that can help build a more valid and productive picture of current and future academic work.

We begin by providing a big normative picture of academic work. Broadly, what is academic work? By nature, academic work has many different shades – varying by field, institution, community context and individual. But at a sufficient level of generality it is possible to map out several quintessential characteristics. It is proposed here that academic work is about the creation and dissemination of knowledge by people or groups with high degrees of expertise. This venture manifests itself in several ways, eloquently and compellingly captured by Boyer’s 1990 typology of scholarship. This typology stratifies academic work into the:

- scholarship of discovery;
- scholarship of teaching;
- scholarship of integration; and
- scholarship of application.

In outlining what these types of scholarships entail, we have kept close to Boyer’s original text in order to avoid the ‘flexibility of interpretation’ that this typology has been subjected to over the years. The scholarship of discovery (research) and teaching are relatively straightforward, though Boyer takes these beyond a limited interpretation. For him the scholarship of discovery not only refers to undertaking research itself, it also incorporates the institutional climate that goes with it: “Not just the outcomes, but the process, and especially the passion, give meaning to the effort. The advancement of knowledge can generate an almost palpable excitement in the life of an educational institution” (Boyer, 1997: 17). Likewise the scholarship of teaching, according to Boyer (1997: 23-24), encompasses three components:

[Teaching] begins with what the teacher knows. Those who teach must, above all, be well informed, and steeped in the knowledge of their fields... Teaching is also the dynamic endeavour involving all the analogies, the metaphors, and images that build bridges between the teacher’s understanding and the student’s learning ... Further, good teaching means that faculty, as scholars, are also learners ... teaching, at its best, means not only transmitting knowledge, but transforming and extending it as well.

Scholarship of integration involves “making connections across the disciplines, placing the specialties in larger context, illuminating data in a revealing way, often educating non-specialists, too” (Boyer, 1997: 18) which refers to “serious, disciplined work that seeks to interpret, draw together and bring new insight to bear on original research.” (Boyer, 1997: 19). As such, it



Figure 3 Permutations of academic functions based on Boyer’s typology of scholarship

very much is about synthesising knowledge. Finally, the scholarship of application is taking scholarly expertise into broader dialogues beyond the academy and refers to what today commonly is known as ‘engagement’. Boyer argues that “the scholarship of application ... may be misleading if it suggests that knowledge is first ‘discovered’ and then ‘applied’. The process we have in mind is far more dynamic. “New intellectual understandings can arise out of the very act of application ... theory and practice vitally interact, and one renews the other” (Boyer, 1997: 23).

Imagining permutations

These four functions and their intersections and overlaps provide a useful lens for picturing academic work. Before exploring the components further, it is useful to look at how the different pieces fit together. Clearly there are myriad ways for doing so, and the pie charts in Figure 3 depict just a few illustrative permutations. The top left corner shows a situation in which the activities are distinct and exist in equal measure. The pie chart in the top middle, by contrast, depicts a more applied developmental form of work that is composed of large parts of teaching, a reasonable amount of synthesis, little research, and a portion of service or engagement work. That chart in the bottom left shows a form of academic work that is centred on the creation, positioning and dissemination of knowledge, and which involves no formal teaching. The top-right chart shows a form of academic work in which the activities are tightly related towards the application of scholarly knowledge in ways that reach beyond the classroom into the broader community. These charts are not intended to represent a disconnect between what are obviously highly related activities, and the overlapping diagrams at the lower centre and right of the picture offer a diagrammatic variant that affirms the essential interconnectedness of different facets of academic work.

Hence it is contended here that while academic work in its broadest sense may well involve the four functions defined by Boyer, these functions also can be seen as independent and can be combined, or not, in varying ways and to varying degrees. Faculty work, it is contended, is not necessarily “an integrated whole” (AAUP, 2010: 105). This is a basic assumption that plays a formative role in the analyses and suggestions that follow. It is a straightforward but non-trivial position, based on Boyer’s (1997: 16) central tenet that:

the time has come to move beyond the tired old ‘teaching versus research’ debate and give the familiar and honourable term ‘scholarship’ a broader, more capacious meaning, one that brings legitimacy to the full scope of academic work. Surely, scholarship means engaging in original research. But the work of a scholar also means stepping back from one’s investigation, looking for connections, building bridges between theory and practice, and communicating one’s knowledge effectively to students.

This much more nuanced position is supported by Table 1. Drawing on nationally representative Australian data collected in 2007 for the Changing Academic Profession (CAP) study (Coates, Goedegebuure, Van der Lee & Meek, 2008), Table 1 shows the correlations (multiplied by 100 to remove decimals) between the hours per week academics in Australia self report as spending on teaching, research, service and administration. Results are shown for both teaching and non-teaching periods. It is interesting to note, in passing, that this characterisation of academic work includes ‘administration’ – an important extra dimension that occupies around a day a week of the typical academics’ time in Australia (Coates et al., 2008). Correlations are shown for both teaching and non-teaching periods, and for five different levels. Many correlations are less than 20 and not statistically significant, which suggests that the facets are independent. The many negative correlations, however, are even more intriguing. Perhaps most interesting are the correlations between teaching and research which become more negative as the seniority of roles decreases.

These insights, and those highlighted in the following sections of this paper, resonate with previous studies. Drawing on work by Hattie and Marsh (1996), which finds a zero empirical relationship between research productivity and teaching effectiveness, Enders and De Weert (2009: 8) argue that “the competences needed to excel in teaching do not necessarily coincide with those needed for research”. This is affirmed by Zaman (2004: 5) who found that “we cannot conclude from the information at hand that the link [between teaching and research] is strongly positive. The evidence indicates the relationship may be modestly positive, though it is likely to be stronger at postgraduate than undergraduate levels”. Of course there may be synergies (Jenkins, 2004), but the world of academic work has become much more complex and diverse over the last two decades. It also has seen

Table I Teaching staff in academic departments by tenure status and sex

		Teaching periods			Non-teaching periods		
		Teaching	Research	Service	Teaching	Research	Service
Professor	Research	-26			-9		
	Service	-4	-5		-5	-13	
	Admin	-24	-24	4	-21	-51	-5
Associate Professor	Research	-19			-31		
	Service	0	-7		-8	-1	
	Admin	-16	-21	-12	-13	-35	-11
Senior Lecturer	Research	-32			-35		
	Service	-11	2		-8	-24	
	Admin	-5	-12	-1	7	-29	0
Lecturer	Research	-45			-41		
	Service	-4	7		-3	-6	
	Admin	2	-16	11	8	-19	3
Assistant Lecturer	Research	-60			-42		
	Service	-18	-2		-12	-19	
	Admin	25	-30	1	6	-39	20

the emergence of new professional roles that blend and span the teaching and research divide. As De Weert (2009: 151) writes:

The teaching-research nexus is no longer a simple dichotomy but is linked to various aspects of academic work in a continuous way. Both components encompass an increasingly heterogeneous range of activities. This may lead to more complex configurations and particular tasks, and also to creative solutions as to how to increase the students' exposure to research. The latter would constitute a genuine reinterpretation of what academic professionalism is all about.

And, of course, the picture gets even more complex if we think about the emergence of a 'new' variety of professionals that has emerged in our universities, sometimes referred to as 'third space professionals' (Whitchurch, 2008), who straddle professional/support

and academic roles, such as course designers, learning management systems coordinators, academic enrichment staff, and staff in our teaching and learning centres. All of this is not to argue for a separation of teaching and research. Rather it is to acknowledge, as Jenkins (2004: 30) succinctly concludes, that "[t]he issues are layered and complex... there is not a single teaching-research relationship, there are many relationships. Indeed, perhaps we overstate or distort these relationships by referring to 'a' or 'the' teaching-research nexus".

To explore these relationships, it may be helpful to start with a decomposition of what might be considered traditional conceptions of academic work and hence its workforce. Scott provides an informative overarching interpretation in which growth of what is now commonly referred to as the knowledge society is seen as propelling the reconfiguration of the academic workforce. Scott contends (2009: 69-70, 74, 75), in particular, that:

the academic profession, which has been greatly expanded and diversified by the development of mass higher education systems, has to struggle to identify new notions of professionalism. The two traditional sources of its professionalism – first, as public servants committed to public values that transcend immediate, and individual advantage; and secondly, as guardians of technical expertise grounded in specialist academic disciplines – have both been undermined. ...on the whole the academic profession, like many other professions, finds itself lost in a post-modern fog (partly, of course, of its own making) which makes it difficult to sustain its value structures – and in a volatile and transgressive knowledge society which makes it equally difficult to maintain the social institutions that represent its identity. ...the academic profession is likely to be absorbed into a more diffuse class of knowledge workers. ...The boundaries, both conceptual and actual, of the modern university have been extended. In a similar way new professional roles have been created, and existing roles have been modified, to reflect these new responsibilities. As a result the boundaries of the academic profession have also been extended and the character of academic work has been transformed.

Clearly, as higher education grows in size and complexity to more greatly mirror the contexts in which it thrives, academic work itself will, adaptively and progressively, become more differentiated. Not all people may undertake all functions as equal parts of their role. And some may, for positive rather than negative reasons, be not at all engaged in a particular function. Hence allowing the core functions to move freely together or apart, as situations and roles befit, would appear to be a more valid and effective means of conceptualising the academic profession and academic work.

We return to this analysis shortly, but first let us pause for a moment and examine one group of academics more closely that today encompasses a very large number of individuals, in many cases more than half of all academics working in our institutions, of whom by and large little is known apart from the fact that they are ‘sessional’ staff. (While a large number of terms are often used (Kezar & Sam, forthcoming), we deliberately avoid the term ‘casual’ because, as the following analysis shows, the involvement of these people is anything but casual.) This case study serves to reinforce our central point that uniform conceptualisations of the academic workforce are unhelpful, and that differentiation and ultimately customisation are the name of the game for the next decennia.

Sessional academics: The future before our eyes

Building the future academic workforce in the light of what is suggested above will require many lines of action, one of the most important being successful management of the ‘sessional academic’. This section explores this challenge in depth, both as a case study and as a major issue in its own right. There has been a modest though insufficient amount of research on sessional staff in Australian higher education, particularly compared with USA-based research (AFT, 2009; AAUP, 2006). This briefing seeks to both distil current thinking and to make a productive contribution to future planning and practice.

The analysis begins with a broad review of the current state of affairs, and concludes by extracting lessons that can be learned from this empirical review. These lessons, coupled with observations above, are used in the final section of this paper to suggest a series of strategies for building future academic work in Australia.

Of course a range of other forces are interacting in significant inter-related ways to drive change in Australia’s academic workforce. The Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) Initiative (ARC, 2010) will doubtless have a major impact, stratifying academics by research capability as ‘high fliers’, ‘solid producers’, ‘average achievers’, ‘academic managers’ and ‘underperformers’ – or other similar categorisations. Australia has a small and highly internationalised university system, and global forces will play a major role (Coates et al., 2009). Changes in tertiary policy settings – student-driven funding, institution-specific compacts, the creation of a standards agency, and performance-based funding – will all provide as yet unknown stimuli that will reshape academic work and the workforce. Parts of this we can anticipate, but there are complexities that will throw some serious curveballs. An expanded and more comprehensive analysis must account for these significant contexts.

The current picture

Like the changes shaping academic work itself, the sessionalisation of academic work is shaped by several factors. Universities employ academics on sessional contracts for a range of reasons. Sessional staff can carry lower industrial risk to institutions, a situation

that will only be exacerbated with deregulation of funding, as numbers and hence income fluctuates. Employing and dismissing sessional staff can also be much easier, involving fewer administrative hoops. Yet, as the typology below affirms, sessional academics may also be employed to access particular professional expertise, or because people possess rare specialist knowledge. Other drivers include performance-based remuneration of senior managers (which promotes conservative recruitment), the need for productivity gains, curriculum variability, greater competitiveness between institutions, a more mobile academic workforce, and more new approaches to teaching that enable greater division of academic duties.

It would be helpful to present an informed analysis of the demography and work characteristics of the people who play a substantial role in driving a major Australian export industry, but strikingly little information is available about sessional academic staff. While major players in Australian higher education, very little is known about the current sessional workforce – a

major finding and remit for future work arising from the current study. Nonetheless, it is possible to point to a few indicative trends and developments that help to clarify the current state of affairs.

Much effort and cross-validation was undertaken to define and assure the statistical operationalisation of ‘sessional academics’ for the following analysis. The analysis focused on staff who have an academic classification, have a teaching, research or teaching/research function, and are in the higher education sector. By far the broadest observation that can be made is about the steady growth in the number of sessionals to, at the national level, around a fifth of the workforce. Figure 4 reports information from the national staff data collections (DEEWR, various years), and shows a steady growth in sessional numbers in the 1990s. This has stabilised to around 20 per cent since the turn of the century. This is almost certainly an underestimate, as noted below, not least because it excludes people employed as subcontractors rather than employees.

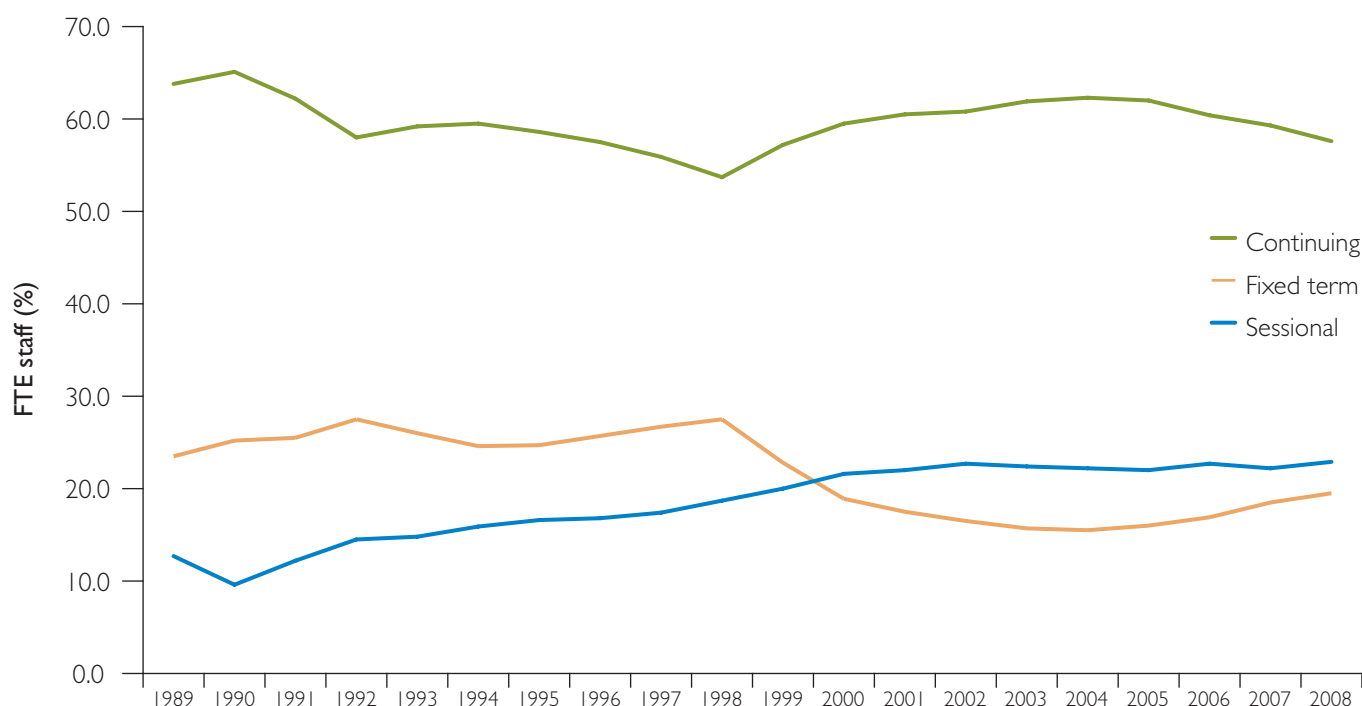


Figure 4 Percentage of academic staff contract types, 1989 to 2008

Source: Higher Education Staff Collection (DEEWR, various years)

Patterns with regards to tenured and fixed-term appointments are interesting to observe. Introduction of the Higher Education Contract of Employment (HECE) award in 1998 increased the number of tenured appointments, a situation reversed since the 2005 introduction of the Higher Education Workplace Relations Requirements (HEWRR). The lagging nature of these statistics means that any impact of the 2009 Fair Work Act is not registered. But these fluctuations have had little if any impact on the extent of sessional employment. From these aggregate figures it is difficult to determine whether the growth in fixed-term appointments reflects the replacement of tenured roles rather than the conversion of sessional appointments, although the former seems a more likely explanation.

While changes in this area are discontinuous due to policy and demographic shifts, making empirical forecasting problematic, simplistically projecting the trends in Figure 4 implies a future in which around a third of all staff are sessional and more staff are employed on a fixed-term than tenured basis – and experience is consistent with that of the USA (AFT, 2009; Kezar & Sam, forthcoming). This level of sessional work appears, broadly, to be on par with other industries and the Australian workforce overall (ABS, 2009). There are variations across industries and roles, with national estimates put at around a quarter of the workforce (Gottschalk & McEachern, 2010).

But there is a complication. The derivation and referentiality of full-time equivalence (FTE) statistics is highly complex and uncertain (DEEWR, 2010), and would appear to be underpinned by very aged industrial reasoning (Ludeke, 1980) advanced for a very different kind of industry than Australia’s university system today. Unfortunately, while Australia has comparatively robust statistics on higher education, due to the way sessional staff are managed and counted within institutions and nationally, it is often not possible to derive an actual count of employees from the FTE figures. One (1) FTE may equal two people working half time, five people who together work the equivalent of a day a week, or even 30 or so people each contributing around an hour per week. Analysis of several in-house institutional data sources suggests that the ratio of FTE to head count is reasonably robust for staff on continuing contracts, reflects only around two-thirds of the number of people on fixed term appointments (many more of whom have fractional appointments), but may denote far more sessional employees – potentially up to 16 times as many. Therefore, the FTE statistic itself appears meaningless, if not misleading. Greater specification should be sought through the collection of more precise information via a national survey, by revising the census data institutions submit to government agencies, and by revising the way institutions themselves manage sessional work.

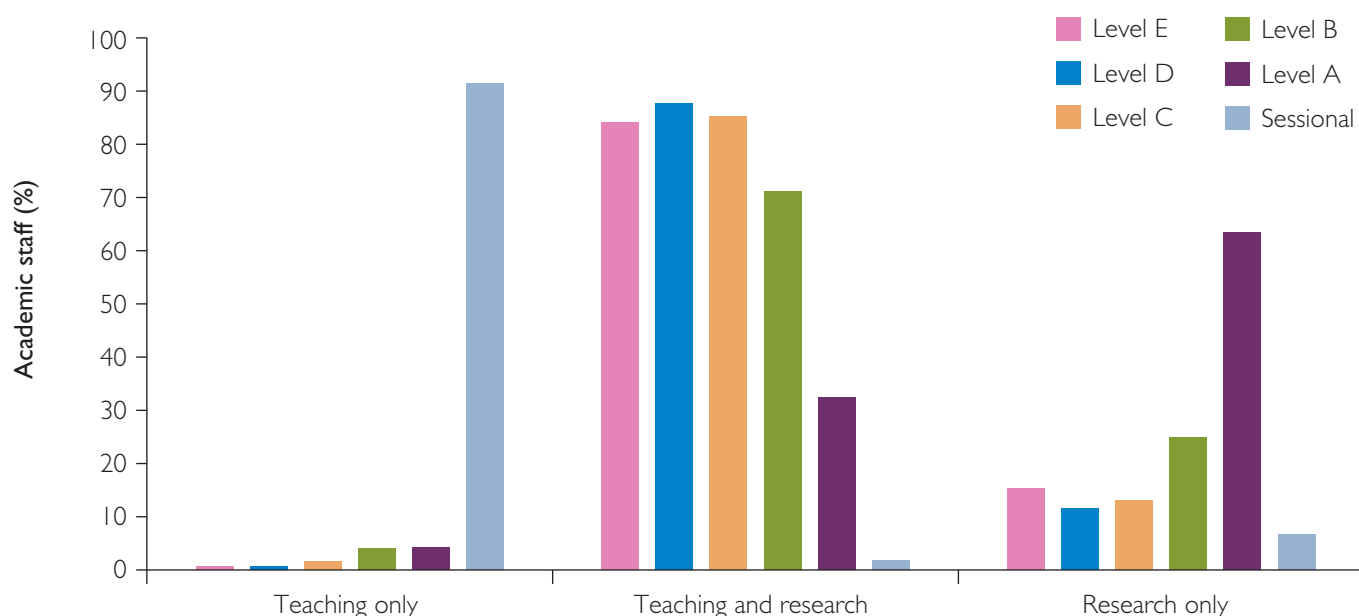


Figure 5 Percentage of academic staff work function by level, 2008

Source: 2008 Higher Education Staff Collection (DEEWR, 2009)

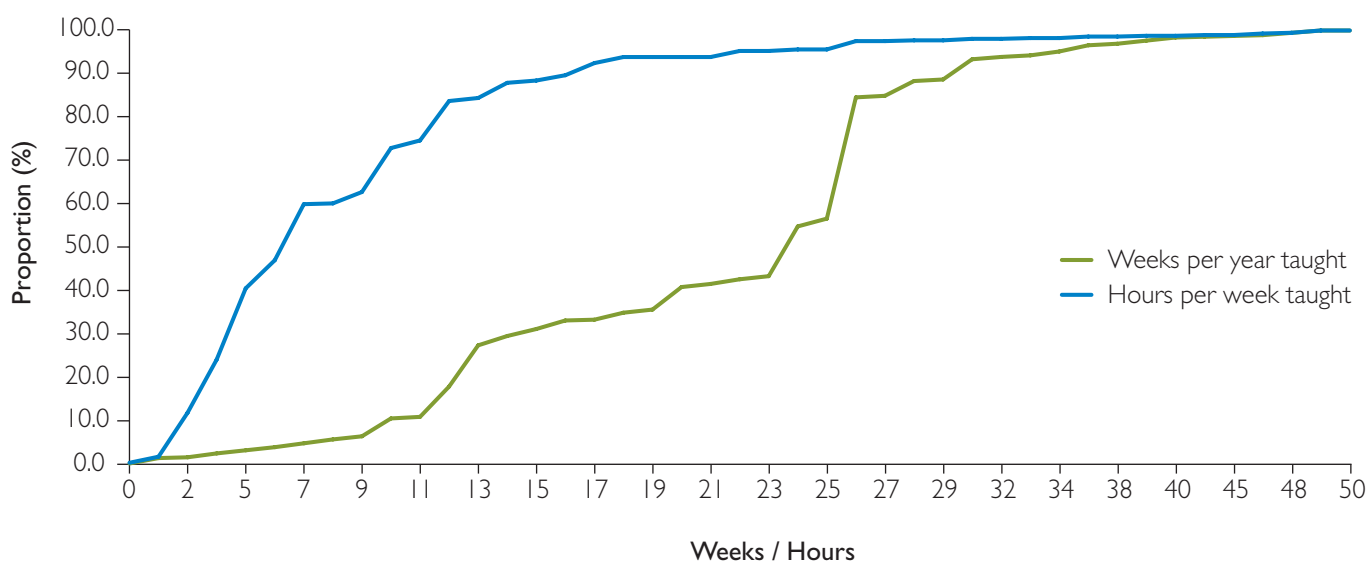


Figure 6 Teaching contribution of sessional academic staff, 2009

Source: 2009 Staff Student Engagement Survey (SSES) (Coates & Radloff, 2009)

Of course a consequence of this ‘underestimation’ is underestimation in the role of universities as employers. The above ratios suggests, for instance, that universities likely employ over twice as many individuals as is currently reported. This also implies that institutions are involved in considerably more human resources management than is otherwise assumed to be the case – management that is less regulated and supported and which accidentally duplicates and subverts formal approaches. This ‘phantom HR’ is highly concerning as it kindles practices that subvert rather than support academic autonomy and organisational delivery.

Analysis of what sessional academic staff do by way of reported work function suggests that they contribute more than is implied by Figure 4. Figure 5 shows that sessional staff, who cannot be classified by level using available data, are overwhelming reported as being involved in teaching only work (around 90 per cent). This category is rare for academics on tenured or fixed-term contracts. While staff classified with a level are mostly classified being involved in both ‘teaching and research’, in keeping with our comments above we consider this a conflation of practice resulting from overly diffuse statistical classifications.

A 2009 survey of staff at around a dozen institutions – the Staff Student Engagement Survey (SSES) (Coates & Radloff, 2009) – captured more detailed information on sessionals’ weeks and hours of teaching. Figure 6 provides a cumulative frequency plot that, crudely put, shows that sessional staff teach for around 25 hours per week for about half of the year. Put together, this implies an annualised academic load of just under 50 per cent. While far from all tenured or fixed-term contracts are full time, these broad remarks portend – and greater levels of specificity are problematic – that sessionals may be closer to a 40 per cent rather than a 20 per cent of the academic workforce. Such figures have been documented previously (Junor, 2004; Percy, Scoufis, Parry, Goody, Hicks, Macdonald, Martinez, Szorenyi-Reischl, Ryan, Wills & Sheridan, 2008) and fuel many risks and solutions discussed in subsequent sections of this paper.

Figure 7 shows that the distribution of contract types varies quite considerably across institutional types. Sessional staff are particularly prominent at ATN institutions, and much less so at Group of Eight universities. The Group of Eight also have fewer staff on continuous contracts, but make considerably more use of fixed-term appointments. Regional institutions have the highest level of staff holding continuous appointments.

Looking at a finer level, the number of sessional staff varies considerably by institution. Figure 8 shows that the full-time-equivalent contribution of academic sessionals varies from around 20 at one institution, to over 600 at another. Again, note that these are FTE figures, not individuals, and hence underestimate actual numbers. Interestingly, as well, the figures show that certain institutions are increasing their use of sessional staff (one dramatically) while others appear to be tapering use.

Of course, FTE numbers need to be contextualised by institutional size or, more relevantly, the proportion of sessional labour to other forms of contract. Figure 9 shows the percentage of all staff having tenured, fixed-term and sessional contracts at 38 institutions. Figure 9 shows that institutions vary in the use of sessional employment – from under 10 per cent at four institutions to closer to 20 per cent – a fifth of all staffing – at around 23. A larger analysis would benefit from investigating the percentage of each institution’s total payroll distributed to sessional staff.

Of course the statistics reported in Figure 8 and Figure 9 are based on FTE not actual head counts. As noted above there remains no robust means of converting

FTE into a head count of sessional employees, often even within institutions. While exact ‘FTE/head count ratios’ are unknown, various estimates give it a lower bounds of two and, as suggested above, potentially an upper bounds of 16. Adjusting the statistics in Figure 9 by alternative estimates of this ratio helps appraise the potential number of people employed on sessional contracts compared with other forms of appointment. To this end, Figure 10 reports the percentage of the 38 institutions in Figure 9 that have sessional staff as the majority of their employees depending on different FTE/head count ratios. For instance, if the ratio of sessional FTE to sessional head count is six, then around 13 per cent (5 of 38 institutions) have more people employed sessionally than either tenured or fixed-term. As this simulation shows, there is a sharp and steady increase between the ratios 4 and 12, followed by a slightly flatter but steady increase between 12 and 40. While crude, this simulation is informative, for it shows that even if one FTE reflects eight sessional employees then around half of all universities in Australia have around half their academic workforce employed on sessional contracts.

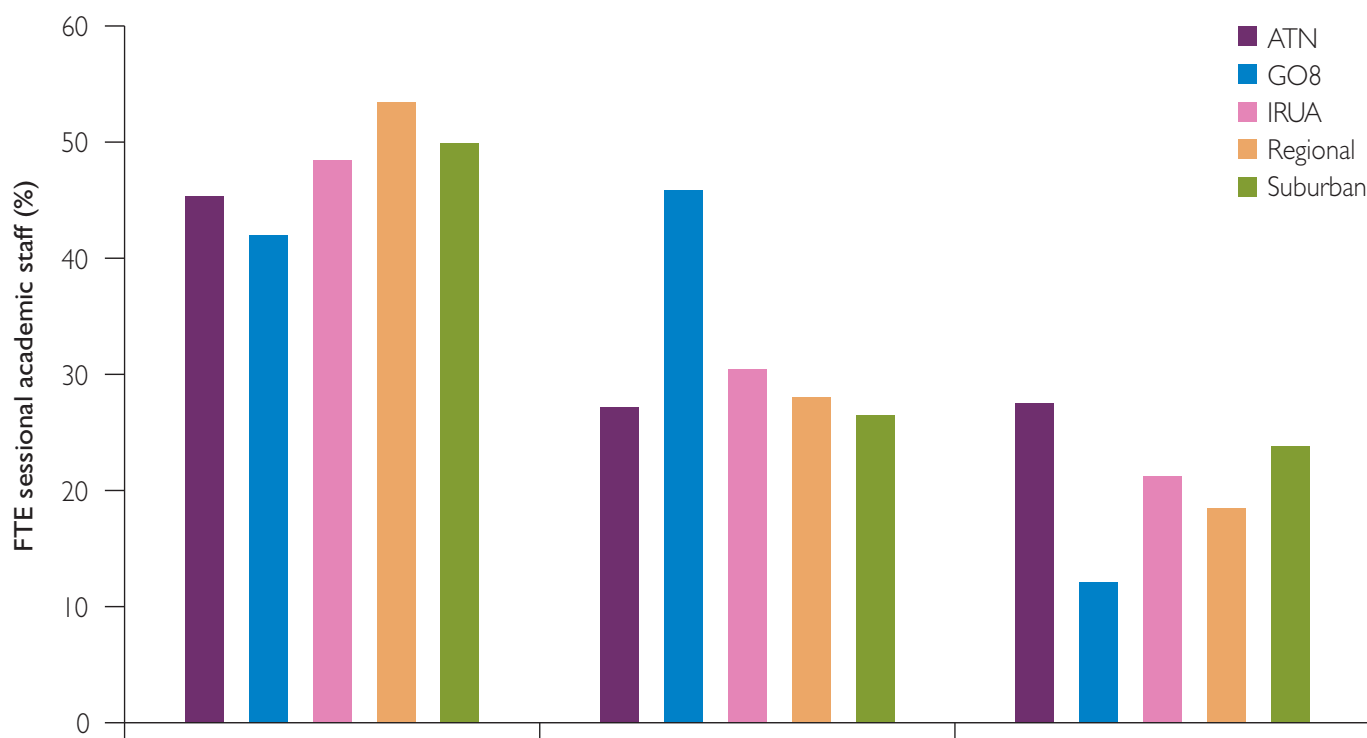


Figure 7 Percentage of sessional academic staff by institution group, 2003 to 2008

Source: Higher Education Staff Collection (DEEWR, various years)

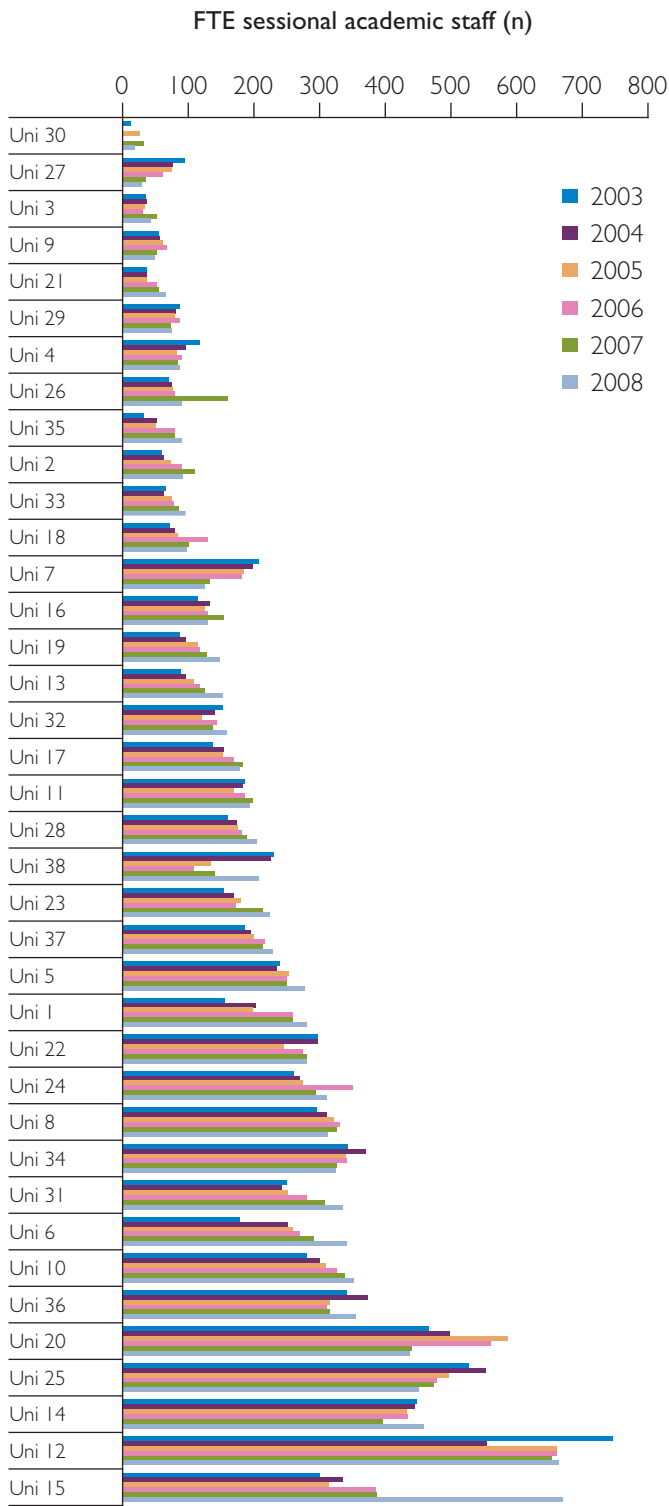


Figure 8 Number (FTE) of sessional academic staff by institution, 2003 to 2008

Source: Higher Education Staff Collection (DEEWR, various years)

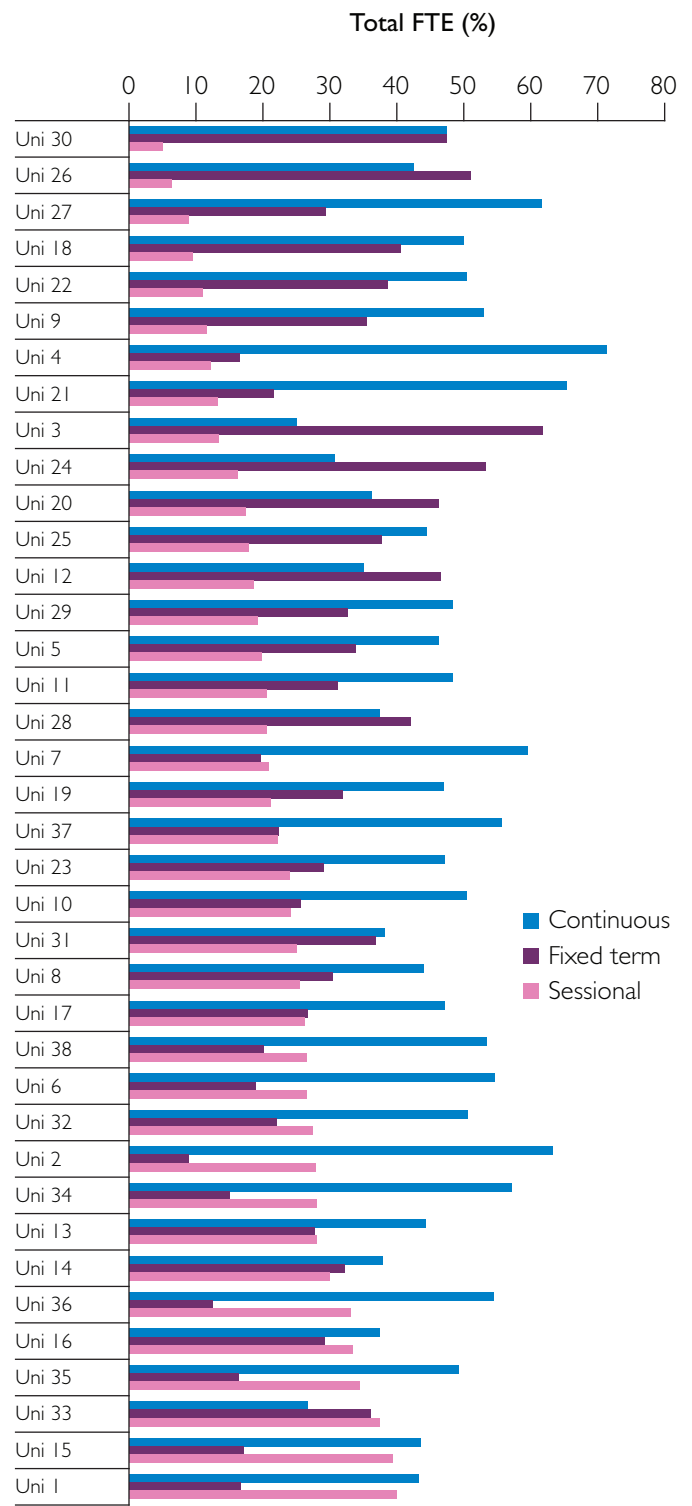


Figure 9 Percentage distribution of contract types by institution, 2008

Source: 2008 Higher Education Staff Collection (DEEWR, 2009)

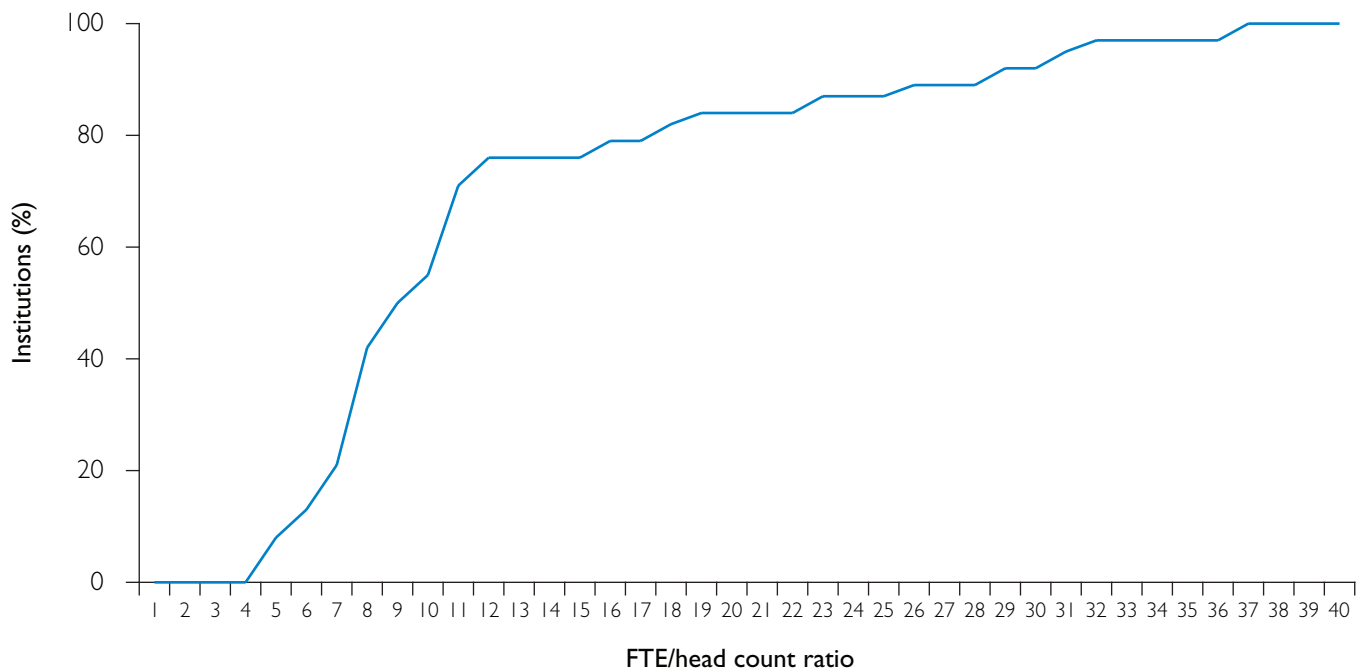


Figure 10 Institutions with majority sessional employees under various FTE/head count ratio simulations

Sessional healing

In many analyses of sessional work it is tempting, after reviewing the incidence of the phenomenon, to extend solutions that seek to somehow normalise this facet of academic life. Which implies, in part, that sessional work is not normal, that it does not itself contain revealing insights into the future of academic work and the workforce. Yet it would appear that this is indeed the case. Hence rather than seek to ‘heal’ the problem of sessional work, it is argued here that interpreting the phenomenon on face value provides a highly useful glimpse into the future of academic work.

This is not to suggest at all that there are not serious problems with, and arising from, the current distribution of sessional academic work. This is clearly the case, and perhaps significantly more so than with other kinds of appointments. Many issues are canvassed in passing in this briefing. Very helpful analyses are provided by AAUP (2006), Junor (2004) and Percy et al. (2008).

Rather than focus on challenges alone it is argued that sessional academic work is a case study of the future before our eyes. Therefore, further unpacking facets of sessional work provides a means of conceptualising and hence constructing future academic work. What, then, are the lessons that may be learned?

One of the most basic insights is that there is a need for better data on sessional academics – a need for better statistics – an observation mirrored in recent UK and USA research (Woodall & Geisslet, 2010; Kezar & Sam, forthcoming). While international experience suggests that Australia has comparatively good institutional and national statistics on university staff compared to many systems there are obvious grounds for improvement. As discussed, the FTE unit used for reporting is vaguely defined, biased, and unreliable. It is currently not possible – even for many institutions themselves – to disaggregate sessional academics by level of appointment, age, or other basic demographic or role characteristics. These data limitations, which are highly pronounced with regards to sessional staff, reflect a broader need to redesign and rebuild the information that is collected on the academic workforce in Australia. There is a need for a complete rebuild, including information on important areas such as qualifications, years of experience, and demographics. A creeping issue, of which very little has and can be said, is finding ways to estimate the extent and contribution of people employed as subcontractors rather employees.

A broader but still measurement-oriented insight is the need for interpretive frames that can be used to structure the analysis of academic staff. In the above analysis we used the term ‘sessional’ to cover a very broad range of roles. But it is useful to bring

more nuance to such work. A well-formed typology provides a useful tool for advancing planning and development. Surprisingly, despite the diversity of this academic body, many analyses of sessional staff rely on implicit/unstated assumptions of the composition of the sessional workforce, or extend blanket analyses that conflate diversity and or are overly general.

Review of available research and statistics suggests that the categories listed in Figure 11 provide a good working start for a typology. Like any sociological classification these categories are intended to be broad and are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The typology builds on earlier work by Junor (2004), Gappa and Leslie (1993), Husbands and Davis (2000), Coaldrake (2001) and Gottschalk and McEachern (2010). Significant value would derive from further validating this typology to achieve consistency of use across the university sector.

Advancing the framework shown in Figure 11 highlights that building the future academic workforce in Australia will almost certainly require a series of differentiated responses. The different types of sessional staff mooted by this typology – which undoubtedly does not cover every facet of academic and professional life – would

appear to have different aspirations and patterns of involvement in higher education. Hence a one size fits all approach is unlikely to succeed. Carefully tuned policy responses will be required to integrate each of these groups into the future of Australia’s diversified academic profession.

Finding ways to engage those highly qualified and talented people who work in industry to teach at universities (‘industry professionals’), for instance, is a challenge and opportunity for business and higher education alike. Industry professionals may be less likely to engage in academic work for money, and perhaps more to make a contribution to or supplement professional practice. They are perhaps less likely to contribute to course development and various forms of training given their substantive other appointment, although we have to note that these are gross assumptions since little data exist in terms of motivators and expectations of this type of sessional staff – as is the case for the other categories. Developing strategies in this area will require new thinking about professional learning, organisational development and support, intellectual property and talent management.

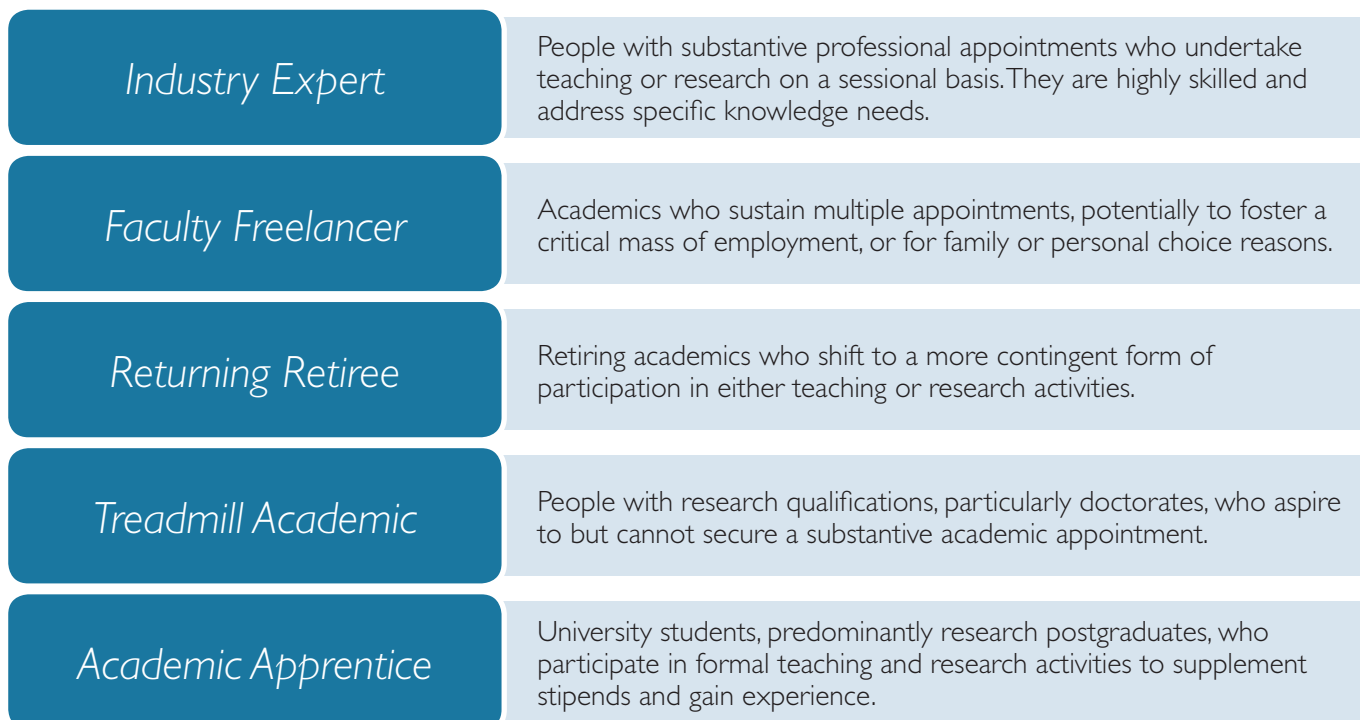


Figure 11 Typology of sessional staff

Treadmill academics, by contrast, are a very different group to the industry professionals. These people have no other substantive role, but are often on the 'treadmill' (Edwards et al., 2009) – participating in a range of short-term engagements to secure living funds and academic experience. These people are seeking, sometimes desperately, to engage with the academic workforce. Finding ways to engage these aspiring academics will doubtless play an important part in the task of building Australia's future academic workforce.

This differentiation of the workforce carries implications for academic work. It reaffirms one of the most basic insights arising from the analysis of sessional staff and picks up on our earlier point, namely that the role of 'the' academic has simply become far too large and complicated to be framed as a uniform whole that necessarily comprises research, teaching and community engagement in a 40-40-20 ratio. The proliferation of sessional work suggests that in mass higher education systems the role of the academic has become far more diversified and fragmented. Academic work appears to be about managing a portfolio consisting of discrete parcels of activity many of which, it would appear, can be delegated. Sessionalisation suggests there has been an unbundling of the classic 'boutique' conceptualisation of academic work. This is hardly surprising given the breadth and diversification of what academics actually do. What is surprising is that the classic view of academic work is sustained as a normative ideal despite increasing deconstruction via fixed-term and in particular sessional appointments.

If it is accepted that academic work has or can be unbundled into several different functions, then it is important to ask what, if anything, may become lost or changed in such disaggregation. Academic work is by nature highly complex and it is likely that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. What happens to students' contact with teachers, for instance, if sessional staff are simply not available to be consulted? How is the validity and efficacy of leadership influenced if people responsible for the delivery of core business are not involved in routine management conversations or lines? To what extent is knowledge work, in a very basic way, even amendable to being parcelled up into discrete contributions? What happens to collegiality? The response to such questions partly depends on how functions have been deconstructed and then reconstructed into new composites – a point investigated later in this briefing. But at a minimum it is important to assure that in any reconfiguration of

future academic work the intangibles do not become hidden, transformed or lost. Which in turn highlights the critical roles to be played by heads of school and course coordinators, for it is at this level that such connections need to be made and sustained.

Another clear insight arising from the analysis of sessional staff is that greater diversification in academic work (such as suggested in Figure 11) and an unbundling of the work itself promotes a need for more strategic forms of management than has been previously required. The extent of participation by sessional staff reveals that highly diversified and complex forms of management are undoubtedly already part of the fabric of higher education. There is a significant amount of management going on – undoubtedly more than is reflected in official reports or statistics. But as flagged above, there are problems when such management is somewhat hidden from formal systems as a result of being devolved to organisational (sub-)units. As has been documented in the USA (Cross & Goldenberg, 2009), human resources processes may be duplicated, protocols may be ignored, and the workload associated with such management uncounted or underestimated and/or undervalued. Hence an important lesson to be taken from the analysis of sessional staff is the need to recognise and develop more management capability and also, very likely, different systems of management at both the central and the decentral level.

Such management arrangements have somewhat obvious implications for individual, institutional and hence broader workforce development. It is true that sessional contracts themselves reflect a blunt and crude form of management. But contractually, sessional staff exist outside most formal management systems. They are also excluded from many forms of organisational development, although increasingly institutions are creating opportunities for sessionals to participate in baseline forms of teacher training. These circumstances carry obvious and highly concerning implications for managing and improving individual and institutional practices. But they also yield an unsavoury dividend for the regeneration of the broader workforce. If today's sessional academics underpin academic work into the future then it is far from optimal that they can practice – potentially for an extended period of time and perhaps years – without management and development. Again, there are broader lessons here for reconfiguring the academic workforce; lessons that the analysis of sessional staff make highly vivid.

Management uncertainties do not just impact managers and subordinates, but can have many diverse implications for the nature and quality of the work itself. The role of sessional staff in Australian universities prompts several major concerns about quality. This, it is argued below, is one of the major areas that must be addressed by any future conceptualisation of academic work. At a very basic level, for instance, it is important to ask if the reliability of provision can be assured when so many front-line teachers are employed on a highly contingent basis and are entitled, in most cases, to quit with a single hour's notice. With almost all sessional academics involved in 'teaching only' roles that conduct up to 40 per cent of this work, it is reasonable to ask if risks to core educational services have been addressed. Ultimately, responsibility for academic standards is vested in teaching staff, and this is increasingly the case as the system grows and matures. But it is difficult to see how the quality of teaching can be addressed if many teachers have only a contingent association with learners or with the institution, bereft of the staff development opportunities that are open to the 'non-sessionals' for very obvious reasons. There is evidence that sessional staff mark students' work differently to people employed on other forms of contract, for instance, which has direct implications for the assurance of academic quality (Kezim, Pariseau & Quinn, 2005). It would be instructive to explore the implications for student retention arising from so much teaching being conducted by sessional staff. Another area of concern is that people in sessional roles are typically not funded to manage all relevant facets of teaching and learning, such as attending regular academic staff meetings, although there are noteworthy exceptions to this across the sector.

These examples lead to perhaps the most general lesson that may be learned from our review of statistics on sessional staff – the need for institutions to think globally about national and sectoral contexts but to act locally with their own faculty and departmental settings. The analysis of sessional staff makes this particularly clear given that these academics perhaps more than others are likely to work across institutions and roles while at the same time having one or more very localised forms of participation. Challenges around academic work and staffing are invariably local,

but they have institutional and national implications. Hence there is a need for concerted local action that synchronises with system-level requirements. This exemplifies the broader point raised at the start of this paper, that building the academic workforce of the future relies on institutional and disciplinary initiatives that are stimulated, framed and supported by systems. Successful reconfiguration of the academic workforce is unlikely to come about unless the system finds ways to support local initiatives, and unless local initiatives together add up to system-level requirements. Most importantly, it is vital to find ways of ensuring that the issue does not slip between institutional/systemic cracks, and that there is alignment between macro- and micro-level activities.

To recap, it is proposed that rather than a perverse accidental growth the rise of sessional academic work provides compelling insights into the changing nature of academic work. A number of insights have been harvested above, namely that:

1. there is a need for better information on academics;
2. there is a need to build interpretative frames to help steer future growth of academic work and the workforce in Australia;
3. building the future academic workforce will require a series of carefully segmented responses;
4. there has been an unbundling of academic work;
5. any reconfiguration of academic work needs to ensure that intangible facets of the experience are not lost;
6. more strategic leadership and management of unbundled academic work is required;
7. individual and organisational development programs must bring sessional academic staff into the fold;
8. there is an immediate need to address several concerns about the reliability and quality of provision; and – importantly
9. institutions and departments need to act locally, but think globally.

These insights chart several lines for improving the experience and contribution of people currently employed on a sessional basis. They also provide fertile insights into how Australia can go about building its future academic workforce and an institutional environment within which a diverse range of professionals can thrive. What are the various ways, for instance, in which sessionals might be involved moving beyond teaching to contribute to an institution's research agenda?

Eight strategies for building Australia's future academic workforce

As the above analysis suggests, building Australia's future academic workforce will require many developments. We foresee an auspicious future, despite the challenges. The supple resilience demonstrated over the last few decades bodes well for the future. By way of preparation, the following section draws together key insights developed throughout the briefing to offer eight strategies for developing the future academic workforce. These inter-related suggestions reflect and extend suggestions made by Coates et al. (2009) on how Australia can enhance the attractiveness of the academic profession, and re-affirm suggestions made by others (e.g. Coaldrake & Steadman, 1999).

Strategy one: Reconfigure academic work

If the need for a reconceptualisation of academic work as advanced in this briefing is accepted, then this invites reflection of how academic work may be constructively reconfigured. What new patterns and varieties of academic work can be envisaged?

Returning to Boyer's typology of academic work, it can be argued that these encompass the full spectrum of scholarly activities academics can engage in, especially if we incorporate the notion that the mix of types can be different for individuals depending on their capabilities and preferences. At the same time, we have to realise that today's academics are engaged in more than just scholarly activities. As we have argued earlier (Coates et al, 2009) our universities have become increasingly large and complex institutions responding to a wide array of external pressures and demands, which makes administration or 'management and leadership' (M&L)



Figure 12 Academic role types

inevitable components of academic life and hence has become an additional function to many academic roles. It is for this reason that we add 'management and leadership' to the four focal areas identified by Boyer, resulting in five 'pillars' that together form the constituent parts of the 21st century academic profession.

One way of conceptualising this is by visualising the five pillars as cylinders in a paint mixer, containing the three primary colours red, yellow and blue, and the two 'non colours' black and white (here, light and dark grey). With these five any colour can be made, depending on how much of each colour is used (see Figure 12), which is exactly how we view the modern academic profession – a wide pallet of possible roles or functions depending on personal capabilities, preferences and institutional needs.

While some combinations intuitively make more sense than others, what it shows is that with a bit of imagination one can envisage an almost endless variety of career options that moves us far away from the simplistic assistant – lecturer – senior – associate – professor ladder. Although this particular conceptualisation to the best of our knowledge is new and unique, the logic

underpinning it is not. It draws on notions of academic identities (Henkel, 2007), the increasing complexity of the academic enterprise and the ensuing fluidity of roles (Gordon & Whitchurch, 2010; Watson, 2010; Whitchurch, 2008, 2009; Whitchurch & Gordon, 2010).

It is easy to see how a classification such as this can be used to map different work functions across an institution or organisational unit. It is equally easy to see how this will complicate operational processes and policies. As Whitchurch and Gordon (2010: 135-136) note:

Within a single institution, therefore, there may exist individuals who see themselves as having different academic or professional identities and different concepts of, for instance, academic autonomy, what constitutes applied research, relationships with students and teaching methods. Thus, programme teams may wish, because of their traditions and/or clientele, to have different criteria and procedures for recruitment and progression. This can create operational and even policy complexities, which have to be managed at both unit/department and institutional levels. There may, for instance, be implications for workload models and promotion criteria that take account of different contributions—not only teaching and research, but academic citizenship (Macfarlane, 2007, forthcoming), network and partnership building, consultancy and income generation. Such models may also be adapted to give recognition to mixed or “blended” roles in an area such as learning partnership (Whitchurch, 2009). Thus an individual with a doctorate and a background of teaching in the school, further or adult education sectors, might be encouraged to develop a research project on outcomes for the institution and students of a regional outreach policy. While it may not be possible to give them an academic title, they might be given an attachment of associateship to, for instance, an institutional centre for teaching and learning.

If we accept, however, that the modern academic profession indeed is one characterised by diversity, then it logically follows that the processes supporting this are reflective of such diversity. As part of this, we foresee the need for greater definition of capability and competence that will help understand and promote diversity. If the above classification is seen to map out a horizontal dimension, then a vertical dimension could also be imagined. Such clarification needs to move beyond crude differentiation of academics as ‘research active’ and ‘non-active’ to more nuanced standards referenced to an academic’s role. We will return to this shortly (strategy four).

Strategy two:

Construct academic career profiles

The colour scheme typology of Figure 12 equally can be used to map career profiles at the individual level. Assuming the perspective of a portfolio career (Handy, 1989), these profiles could show how employees move through a variety of roles, based on their individual ambition, their demonstrated strengths and experience, and the overall needs that the university has in filling a diversity of roles. The academic career path has conventionally been conceived of as a pipeline (Anderson, Johnson & Saha, 2002), but our typology emphasises that it is important to look at the ‘colour’ rather than just the ‘level’ of work.

An example is sketched in Table 2 for a single fictitious academic. While the percentage figures are random, they immediately evoke pictures of the kind of roles an individual may work through during an academic career.

Using the typology as a lens to undertake such mapping across the organisation would yield a range of common profiles and trajectories, as well as a set of more unique ones. This provides a bottom-up means of reinforcing institution-level analyses, e.g. by comparing the aggregate sets to the mission the institution has set for itself. Such analysis provides a sound basis for management and development processes at both the department/school, faculty/institute and overall institutional level – initial consultation suggests a few institutions have already moved in this direction. Although we probably have taken this ‘diversity contribution’ approach to the extreme, it should be noted that in its more rudimentary form much of this forms the basis of talent management agreements that we see emerging across the sector.

As argued before the traditional conceptualisation of the academic career (e.g. Anderson, Johnson & Saha, 2002), as well as its more recent adaptations (e.g. Strike, 2010) generally treat careers in what may be termed a vertical pre-defined pathway. People move ‘up’ the scales from lecturer to professor (the classic “slippery pole” (Strike, 2010: 85)). Or one chooses a career path from a teacher, research, administrator or ‘balanced’ combination, again moving up the scales in relation to one’s capabilities (and

Table 2 Example career profile – percentage distribution of tasks by level

Management and leadership	Discovery	Integration	Teaching	Application	Type	Tenure (years)	Role label
	10%	10%	80%			1	Classic academic
	10%	20%		70%		3	Entrepreneurial researcher
	50%		25%	25%		6	Engaged academic
	33%		33%	34%		9	Engaged academic
40%	50%			10%		15	Disciplinary research leader
25%	25%	15%		35%		19	Entrepreneurial research leader
60%	30%		10%			24	Senior academic leader

sometimes institutional idiosyncrasies) (Strike, 2010: 88). What is surprisingly absent in the existing analyses of academic careers and identities is the realisation that people take up different and distinct roles throughout their career that involve horizontal moves as well as ‘downward’ moves. Simple examples are the ‘classic academic’ becoming an ‘engaged academic’, a ‘research leader’ becoming an ‘entrepreneurial researcher’, and a ‘researcher’ becoming an ‘engagement director’ becoming a ‘research leader’. Hence rather than thinking of academic careers in terms of ‘ladders’ or ‘climbing frames’ as does Strike (2010), we argue strongly for an

approach more like ‘snakes and ladders’ as an appropriate way to conceive of academic career trajectories.

We have tried to capture this way of thinking about academic careers in Figure 13, which plots the trajectory of a single individual who moves through different role types. An equal weighting of constituent tasks is assumed for the roles selected in Figure 13 which leads to different colours to those arising in Table 2. The size of each bubble reflects the number of years spent in each role.

If tested and affirmed by research or applied use, the typology advanced in Figure 12 and exemplified in

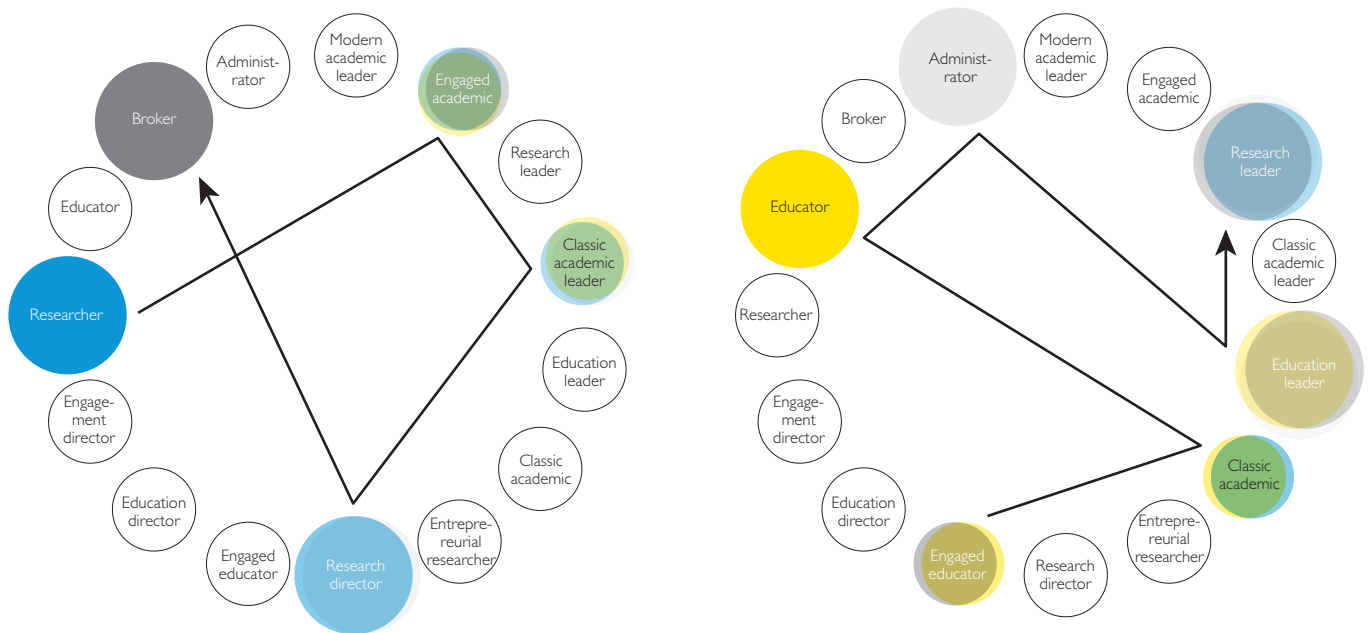


Figure 13 Example academic career trajectories

Table 2 and Figure 13 could be used in a range of ways, including:

- mapping knowledge or management capabilities;
- mapping work roles and requirements;
- recruitment and selection;
- promotion and progression;
- individual management; and
- organisational development.

By way of example, institutions or departments could use the profile to define their aspirational and actual workforce capabilities, and hence to spotlight gaps and areas for development (see: Box 1). The typology could then be used to map out different role requirements, a mapping that could be fed directly into position descriptions and recruitment processes. After commencement, the typology could be used in conversation with new recruits to plan career pathways and development. This initiates the structure's role in various forms of management and development. Clearly, such individual use reflects the kind of parallel work that can be undertaken for an institutional or organisational unit. And, we believe, it could be very beneficial in showcasing how many options and opportunities exist were one to consider pursuing a career in a university. As Henkel (2010: 7-9) argues:

The story is one of the diversification and enlargement of the academic profession. It charts the blurring of the boundaries between academic faculty and other occupational groups within higher education institutions, and challenges previously taken-for-granted status hierarchies. It discredits the idea that academic faculty should be the exclusive focus of studies of identities in higher education... In this world, individuals may have more freedom and opportunity to construct new identities and new images of their present and future occupational selves.

Several institutions in Australia are working jointly on a career framework structure and performance and development framework that will:

- Recognise the diversity of their current academic workforce;

- Anticipate the future requirements and drivers for academic work;
- Anticipate the career expectations of the next generation of academics;
- Provide a broader range of career path options;
- Provide a more explicit performance and development focus; and
- Provide transparent linkages between strategic objectives and individual contributions.

The modelling is underpinned by performance outcomes as the driver of career progression. It includes review of career frameworks, academic staffing profiles, talent management and enhancement approaches, promotion systems, and job design and workload/reward management, and leadership development priorities.

Box 1 Towards new frameworks

Strategy three:

Design attractive customised experiences

If the above reasoning is assumed – that the traditional picture of academic work is becoming less real and that instead a more diversified reconfiguration is required – then institutions must find ways to bring such work about. The current literature on human resource management, or ‘people practices’ suggests that an individualised approach to stimulating, supporting, monitoring and rewarding employees is what makes the difference between an average company and an ‘employer of choice’. Cantrell and Smith (2010: 4-7) argue, for instance, that:

the single most important factor contributing to superior business results was how supported employees felt by their organization's people practices... when rewards, learning, and jobs are customized to individuals, greater motivation and learning result, and people's work tasks become better aligned with their actual strengths. There is no reason to assume that universities or their staff are any different in this respect, and it will be intuitively clear that a customized experience fits with a more granular approach to roles and positions as outlined above.

Table 3 summarises the benefits that in the literature are associated with customisation, both for customers and

Table 3 Benefits of customisation for customers and employees

Potential benefit of customisation for customers	Potential benefits of customisation for employees
Increase revenues	Increase workforce performance and productivity
Improve customer satisfaction	Improve employee engagement
Increase value of existing customer base	Increase value of existing employee base
Improve customer retention	Improve employee retention (and reduce turnover costs)
Attract and acquire the most profitable customers	Attract and hire the most talented employees
Reach a larger, more diverse market	Tap a larger, more diverse employee base – which can breed innovation and help organizations more effectively serve a diverse customer base
Use resources more effectively through more targeted investments of marketing dollars	Use resources more effectively through more targeted investments of HR dollars
Respond more flexibly to a dynamic business environment and changing consumer tastes	Respond more flexibly to a dynamic business environment and changing employee tastes
Create a unique advantage by crafting a customised customer experience difficult for competitors to duplicate	Create a unique advantage by crafting a customised employee experience difficult for competitors to duplicate

Source: Cantrell & Smith (2010: 15)

employees. Universities of course already are a fair way down the track of approaching prospective students as individuals, though not as far as leading companies in other service sectors. While there are some examples of customisation of rewards and learning opportunities, it would appear that much could be gained in this area.

Clearly, there are challenges associated with workforce customisation, but the compelling benefits as outlined by Cantrell and Smith (2010) are supported by a growing body of literature singing the praises of flexible and tailored workforce experiences (Cable, 2007; Cassels, Cong & Keegan, 2010; Dichtwald, Erickson & Morison, 2006; Pocock, Skinner & Ichii, 2009; PWC, 2007). Logically, as Cable (2007: xix) notes, this is accompanied by a more critical stance towards uniform people practices:

Most organizations, it turns out, treat their people just about the same as most other organizations. In fact, companies deliberately benchmark their people practices to the industry average. Not surprisingly, there is nothing particularly distinctive about most organizations' workforces' and nothing the organization produces is particularly noteworthy from a customer standpoint – nothing very strange.

Yet there is also agreement that customisation is not (and should not be) synonymous with individual 'deals', with subjective reward structures or with favouritism. The argument very much is that customisation should be grounded in a set of clear and broadly applicable rules, should be based on transparent forms of workforce segmentation, and should be evidence driven, utilising the increasingly sophisticated information systems that modern organisations have at their disposal.

As we flagged earlier in this briefing, it is critically important that future academic work is seen to be attractive. As with much professional work, but perhaps more so than most, academic work relies on individuals' intrinsic engagement and for this a high-quality experience is essential. Finding ways to inspire and safeguard academic autonomy, broadly conceived, is essential. All work carries challenges, but any reconceptualisation of academic work that threatens peoples' attraction to the profession or desire to fully engage is likely to do more harm than good.

Drawing on phenomena measured as part of the Changing Academic Profession (CAP) study, Coates et al. (2009) defined several distinguishing characteristics of a quality academic experience, namely (in no particular order):

- salary – compared with other professions and academics in other countries;
- overall job satisfaction and commitment to the profession;
- mobility – the capacity to move across institutions, professions and countries;
- opportunity for research, particularly given individual aspirations and contexts;
- environmental support, including inclusiveness, and satisfaction with resources and management;
- contract conditions, specifically the nature and duration of appointments; and
- workload, defined in terms of hours per week, reflecting preferred work-life balance.

Doubtless, other phenomena could and perhaps should be added, but this handful of indicators has desirable properties. As with the list of design strategies as a whole, this is a manageable, heterogeneous, reportable and quantifiable set of salient criteria that, taken together, satisfy the key characteristics of good performance indicators. That is, they should be relevant, unambiguous, not easy to manipulate, and have a modest collection cost (Cave, Hanney, Henkel & Kogan, 1997: 210-211). For working purposes, therefore, it is assumed that future reconfigurations of academic work should address these ‘attractiveness criteria’. As we argued last year (Coates et al., 2009), the Australian academic workforce does not come out as a ‘favoured profession’ nor do universities feature as ‘employers of choice’, flagging challenges that lie ahead. Picking up on the notion of customisation can indeed be one viable strategy to pursue. As Middlehurst (2010: 242-243) argues:

While the design and delivery of professional development have changed in recent decades to become more varied, creative, and responsive to individual needs, both aspects will need to go much further in this direction. Tailored and individualized development will become a demand as well as a requirement if talented individuals are to be attracted to institutions, projects, and professional networks. Development may also become a matter of ‘brand’ and reputation, with institutions vying for the attention of talented professional in a competitive market, where offering particularly challenging and stimulating developmental opportunities may provide the key to recruiting and retaining key individuals and groups.

Strategy four: Design a measured experience

Customisation in principle is underpinned by a fairly extensive set of performance data. This suite of data form the basis for defining an individual’s skills and capability levels, for determining achievements in agreed upon areas of importance to the organisation and the individual, to identify key areas of strength, and areas or aspects open to further growth and development. It also contributes to avoiding suggestions of favouritism and the ‘backroom deal’ phenomenon. Universities may not have gone down the track of customisation in a serious manner, yet they find themselves in a fairly good position to venture down this track. For universities collect extensive data on the key areas of teaching and learning, of research, and to a somewhat lesser extent on community and industry engagement and management and leadership. The potential for performance data in our five key pillars of the academic profession are discussed below in a little more detail. This is done both to further explore the feasibility of a customisation approach as well as to show examples of how this could be tackled should it be considered a viable course to pursue.

In designing such a measured experience it is important to keep in mind why we suggest to go down this road in the first place. The primary objective is to improve the attractiveness of the academic and our proposition is that at least one way of doing this is by highlighting the diversity of work, by explicating how the different components of academic work can be mixed and matched, and how this can lead to different exciting challenges at different points throughout an academic career, again pending on combinations of individual capabilities and preferences and institutional needs and opportunities. Which is a roundabout way of emphasizing that monitoring is not done in order to penalise staff because they haven’t met unrealistic targets, it is not done to ensure that underperformance is wiped out, and it is not done to ‘squeeze the lemon dry’. It truly is about developing people to the best of their abilities in the context of what they are capable of and what the institution needs. Having made this very explicit, let’s consider some possibilities for and examples of a ‘measured experience’.

The scholarship of teaching performance

Learning is one of the core businesses of the academy. While institutions set and monitor academic standards, the responsibility for teaching and learning has, for the most part, been devolved to teachers and learners. This was feasible in elite and mass systems, but with moves towards more universal levels of provision education will almost certainly become an institutional responsibility. Serendipitous collegial approaches evolved in elite systems, repeatedly sundered during massification, are, quite possibly, not sufficient or perhaps even relevant to the demands of universal higher education. New system-, institution- and local-level thinking is required.

In future, teachers will need to demonstrate the contribution they make to learner and graduate outcomes. Such outcomes are notoriously difficult and controversial to define, measure and report (Coates, 2007). No detailed treatment of these complexities is offered here, but in broad terms it seems plausible to assume that relevant indicators of educational performance would reflect whether staff have:

- helped able people, regardless of background, transition successfully into higher education;
- engaged people in effective learning practices;
- added measurable value to people's technical competence, and help people reach defined levels of achievement; and
- developed the more general capabilities required for people's transition into work or future study.

Of course, many individuals, departments, institutions and systems have indicators in place to monitor and improve these facets of university education. It seems reasonable to assume that they will play a formative role in shaping future academic work. Non-quantitative criteria – like teaching portfolios, peer observation and preservice training – are also likely to play a role.

Assessing teaching performance in higher education is difficult, but the absence of data relative to other facets of higher education creates problems and uncertainties for the industry, the profession and learners. As this is a sensitive area industrially and politically the case study given here synthesises practice across multiple institutions.

Almost all universities in Australia deploy questionnaires that seek students' feedback on the quality of teaching (Coates, 2010). These instruments typically yield poor-quality data, but the results nonetheless are used for monitoring performance. Similarly, data from program-level instruments such as the Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) (Radloff & Coates, 2010) and the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) (GCA & ACER, 2010) are used to provide information about how teachers compare with colleagues in benchmark groups in other institutions.

Process measures abound in Australian higher education, but only recently has emphasis shifted onto outcome measures. Two general approaches are being pursued – developing better measures of subject-specific competence and implementing institution-wide outcomes assessments – yet Australia lags other countries in this regard and their implementation and use remains some years away.

Box 2 Sample performance measures

Research performance

However one judges the current Excellence in Research for Australia (ERA) Initiative (ARC, 2010), it will result in the most comprehensive set of indicators available to assess research productivity. In the ERA exercise this will be done at a discipline cluster level, however, for the purpose of collecting the information, within institutions this means that the information will be available at an individual level. While there may be very sound arguments as to why this information should not be made public at an individual level (see, for example, the negative impact of the first Performance-Based Research Fund (PBRF) round in New Zealand (Goedegebuure, Santiago, Fitznor, Stensaker & Van der Steen, 2008) there is no reason why this kind of information cannot be used to support the design and management of career trajectories.

If so, then it follows that the ERA “indicator dashboard” (ARC, 2010: 30) constitutes a key set of indicators when it comes to a formative assessment of a staff member's research productivity. In its current conceptualisation, this indicator dashboard covers the following areas:

- volume and activity of research activity;
- outputs in journals, ranked by quantity and tier;
- outputs in conferences, ranked by quantity and tier;
- number of research contributions available for peer review;
- impact and distribution of citations;

- research income;
- number of patents or similar forms of recognition;
- commercialisation income; and
- esteem arising from research contributions.

As alluded to above, we portend that the ERA will have a much broader impact on academic work in Australia, stratifying roles by research capability, regardless of appointment level. Further work must be conducted to understand and hence manage the impact of these drivers on academic work, the workforce, and individuals' preparations and decisions. Rewarding the above factors, for instance, has the potential to hinder or harm others not counted such as research-related community engagement, research management, or building research capability and infrastructure.

Industry and community engagement performance

As universities make a greater contribution to the public good and assume more central roles in today's knowledge economy, the third but most persistently amorphous pillar of academic work – denoted with myriad terms but most commonly in Australia as 'community engagement' – will grow in significance.

There have been many attempts to design comprehensive sets of indicators reflecting an institution's focus on community and industry engagement (for an overview, see: Goedegebuure, Van der Lee & Meek, 2006). For the present purpose it may suffice to draw on the indicators used for the revised version of the USA Carnegie Classification (Carnegie Foundation, 2010), which also underpins the U-Multirank project (see: www.u-multirank.eu). U-Multirank is being developed for the European Commission and includes a global sample of institutions in its pilot phase.

The 2006/2008 Carnegie classification includes three dimensions:

- Curricular engagement – where teaching, learning and scholarship engage faculty, students, and community in mutually beneficial and respectful collaboration. These interactions address community-identified needs, deepen students' civic and academic learning, enhance community well-

being, and enrich the scholarship of the institution;

- Outreach and partnerships – which focuses on the application and provision of institutional resources for community use with benefits to both campus and community. Partnerships focuses on collaborative interactions with community and related scholarship for the mutually beneficial exchange, exploration, and application of knowledge, information, and resources (research, capacity building, economic development, etc.); and
- Curricular engagement and outreach and partnerships – which includes institutions with substantial commitments in both areas described above.

Collecting data on these facets of performance is hard. It is particularly difficult to move beyond measures of activity and effort to procure information on the impact and quality of contribution. The complexity of the phenomenon being measured seems to demand a move beyond quantitative metrics alone to include other more nuanced qualitative measures.

Leadership and management performance

Leadership and management, sometimes denoted by the somewhat dirty word 'administration' are an intrinsic part of all professional work. Effective administration of academic activities by academic staff will become more important as Australia moves from a mass to a universal system, as academics compete against knowledge workers in other industries, as the academic workforce becomes more complex, and as institutions compete nationally and globally for more competitive resources.

What, then, are plausible criteria for guiding the growth of effective administration of academic work by academic staff? In 2006, the Committee of University Chairs in the UK (CUC, 2006) developed an illustrative set of key performance indicators (KPIs) at the institutional level, based on the following ten areas:

1. Institutional sustainability
2. Academic profile and market position
3. The student experience and teaching and learning
4. Research

5. Knowledge transfer and relationships
6. Financial health
7. Estates and infrastructure
8. Staff and human resources development
9. Governance, leadership and management
10. Institutional projects

Although the CUC's KPIs are designed for use at the institutional level, if we assume that institutional performance in one way or another is an amalgam of the performances of the constituent parts, that is, the departments, schools and administrative units, logic would dictate that these ten key domains in some particular relative weighting would be appropriate to approximate the performance of a particular organisational unit, and hence feature as building blocks for a framework measuring effective leadership and management.

It is important not to underestimate the difficulties of making customisation a practical reality, many of which can be gleaned from promotions experiences. Coaldrake and Stedman (2010) offer examples such as:

- assessing scholarly work in applied contexts where research outputs are not publicly accessible;
- matching flexibility in promotions criteria with the need for standards and rigour (the further someone weights an area, the greater should be the expectation of performance); and
- linking diversity in work roles and objectives at different levels within a university (departmental, faculty or institutional) when promotions decisions may play out at different levels (e.g. professorial appointments being institutional).

Strategy five: Engage sessional academics

Clearly one of the major challenges confronting the renewal of Australia's academic workforce is finding ways to engage the vast numbers of people currently working in sessional roles. A series of reports and institutional initiatives have unfolded over the last decade or so (see, for instance: Chalmers, Herbert, Hannam, Smeal & Whelan, 2003; Junor, 2004; Percy et al., 2008; May, Gale & Campbell, 2008; Kezim, Pariseau & Quinn, 2005). But despite this good work clearly the situation has not changed. More needs to be done.

Different responses are required for different groups of sessional academics, but we focus here on one of

the most critical areas of concern – the engagement of 'treadmill academics'. To recap, these are people with research qualifications, particularly doctorates, who aspire to but cannot secure an academic appointment. They are seeking but – for whatever reason – cannot secure a substantive academic position. There may be good reasons for having some people employed on sessional contracts, but doubtless there are a number of others who would prefer a more enduring form of appointment. Engaging these staff effectively in the academic workforce is one of the core challenges and opportunities facing higher education.

Drawing from literature and practice it would appear that at least the following is required (in no particular order):

1. Create more entry-level early career positions to fast-track people into academic roles (see Box 3);
2. Convert sessional staff onto fixed-term appointments;
3. Develop the capacity of existing managers, and employ specialist managers to coordinate and support sessional academics;
4. Find opportunities to engage sessional academics in the broader life of the academy;
5. Implement management arrangements for sessional staff;
6. Involve sessional academic staff in professional learning activities;
7. Develop quality assurance and risk-management procedures for sessional academic work;
8. Provide adequate on-campus flexible-office spaces so that sessional staff can interact with students
9. Create better data sources and models for understanding the sessional workforce.

None of these will be easy to plan or implement. They will vary by disciplinary context, work function, the demography of sessionals, and institutional constraints. But now is the time to set up a coordinated approach to addressing these and related factors.

The Queensland University of Technology's Sessional Career Advancement Development (SCAD) program is an invitational program for higher degree research (HDR) students who are undertaking sessional teaching at QUT and have aspirations of becoming an academic. The program aims to assist participants with preparing for their future career in academia by identifying potential skill or experience gaps and developing goals and plans to address these.

Program outcomes for participants include:

- Understanding of the Australian higher education sector and the role of an academic;
- Development of the framework for an academic portfolio encompassing teaching and learning, research and service;
- Development of a career action plan focused on obtaining an academic position; and
- Establishment of a mentoring relationship with a QUT academic.

The pilot program consists of direct contact in workshops supplemented by mentoring and eLearning activities. Each of QUT's Executive Deans is asked to nominate up to five participants who they feel possess both the desire and ability to pursue a career in academia.

Box 3 An example of an early career researchers program

Strategy six: Refresh the research degree

If academic work and hence academics are changing, then it is likely that what has become the entry-level qualification – largely the PhD – needs to change too. Broadly, the PhD was established to prepare an elite group of people to undertake highly specialised research work within a defined field of expertise. In Australia today, many people undertake PhDs with the intention of pursuing non-academic careers (Edwards, Bexley & Richardson, forthcoming), and those who seek to secure academic roles have many different career aspirations in mind. There is always a vexed and fuzzy boundary between academic outcomes and employer requirements but as the main terminal qualification the PhD should go much of the way to equipping future knowledge workers with the capabilities that they need to succeed.

As the depiction in Figure 12 shows, it is likely that many people who enter the academic workforce will do things other than scholarly research in a specialised field. This may be stating the obvious, but to the extent that this is so, it is even more curious why the terminal qualification does not address such diversity (see: Poole-Warren & Strugnell, 2010). To ensure that the PhD is designed to prepare people for the academic work of the future it would be helpful to enact the kind of 'redesign' logic outlined by Twigg (2010) to carefully analyse the nature of academic work – as begun in this paper – and backward map the results of this analysis to set desired outcomes from the doctoral degree. Defining outcomes makes it possible to map the 'doctoral curriculum', very broadly conceived, and makes sure that the degree is training candidates in the ways that the profession needs.

Drawing from review of existing training programs in Australian universities, from overseas experiences (see, for instance, the Roberts Review (Roberts, 2002)), at a minimum it would appear that apprentice academics should have some training and experience in each of the key functional areas – research, education, integration, application, and leadership and management. Following the logic of the Australian Government's Commercialisation Training Scheme (DIISR, 2009), candidates could sample from a basket of training opportunities depending on likely or intended career paths. They could then build the portfolio of capabilities that they need to enter and develop a productive academic career. While this already happens by serendipity, there would be value in taking a more directed approach to ensure that Australia is building the academic workforce for the future.

As in all professions there is a division – and frequently tension leading to questions about 'who pays?' – between the preparation that can or should occur during pre-vocational training, and the preparation that can, should or does take place once people secure an academic role. It may indeed be better that certain capabilities are developed by specific employers once people have entered the workforce, and thenceforth in an adaptive and targeted fashion throughout people's career. At an individual level, learning opportunities and needs could be diagnosed during recruitment processes, and

professional learning programs mapped out (Coates, Meek, Brown, Friedman, Noonan & Mitchell, 2010; Edwards, Bexley & Richardson, forthcoming). More broadly, as has been conducted by other industries, professional capability requirements could be mapped and ‘allocated’ to pre-vocational or professional stages of training. This kind of work is important – vital – to support the kind of reflective professional practice and development advanced in this briefing, and of which the academic professional is surprisingly poor. But while valuable such a mapping will undoubtedly be confounded by the great sessionalisation and inter-institutional mobility of Australian academics (Coates et al., 2009), and hence throw back onto the PhD (or a subsequent hitherto undefined intermediary qualification) the need for people to build and demonstrate their academic capacity before they enter the academic workforce. This works back to the need for recent doctoral graduates to have a portfolio of baseline professional skills that can bootstrap them into and sustain them in their future academic careers.

Of course the PhD is more relevant in certain fields and institutions than in others, and the above remarks are intended for those contexts. This variability promotes its own unique uncertainties for defining the profession and hence the careers available within it. There would be value in mapping the standards for entry, as is common in other professions. Such clarification can help promote understanding of and attraction to academic work, and help to build the workforce.

Strategy seven: Expand staff numbers with system growth

Specifying the number of academics required to support and improve Australia’s higher education system is difficult to do. Student characteristics change, the nature of knowledge itself changes, teaching technologies change, outcome standards vary, and courses can be designed and managed in many different ways. Computing scalability is hard, not least because many of the most important facets of higher education are intangible. Large-scale metrics affirm the intense productivity of Australia’s universities (for instance, see Figure 2, and also data on the competitiveness of Australia’s trade in educational services (Lasanowski, 2009)), but recent insights into students’ interactions with staff – one of the most critical facets of quality education – reveal worrying trends and deficiencies (Radloff & Coates, 2010).

But it is not necessary to venture into such subtleties to see that the academic workforce must expand along with overall system growth. If policy aspirations to increase the number of people participating in higher education are to be realised, and if the number of people from economically disadvantaged backgrounds is to be expanded (Australian Government, 2009), then more teachers will be required – potentially 38,000 (Gallagher, 2010). At the same time, if Australia is to maintain and enhance its competitive international research capability, then more researchers are required. The progression of recent government initiatives show that these are no longer controversial propositions (see, for instance: DIISR, 2010). But as such initiative equally demonstrates, it is now necessary to convert these ideas into practical approaches for change.

Driving change on this front will be hard – doubtless a combination of altruism, political conviction and research insights will be required. Building a firm evidence base is absolutely essential (and overdue), but the inherent uncertainties of academic workforce projection along with the time such analysis requires means that strategic advances must be made in advance of firm empirical support. The growth of academic work in Australia requires leadership along with management. Australia’s higher education leaders need to step back, review opportunities and threats, distil workforce growth strategies, and make a call on growing the academic capability of the future. Which brings us to our final point.

Strategy eight: Engage leaders in capacity development

As noted throughout this briefing, building Australia’s future academic workforce requires the engagement of a wide range of stakeholders, not least institutional managers and leaders. Unlike school-level education where workforce responsibility rests primarily with government agencies, developing the academic workforce is largely the responsibility of autonomous institutions. At the same time, institutions are challenged by pressing externalities – not least funding uncertainties – that make planning complex and hard. This, coupled with national interest in the knowledge workforce, impels government, industry and business involvement.

Yet as Hugo and Morriss (2010) found, many institutions appear to have made only sporadic investments in building the future academic workforce. Of course,

much more is likely to be underway than has been captured by this snapshot of cross-institutional practice. But this finding prompts, at a minimum, the need for a more extensive stocktake of what is going on. Such a meta-analysis would yield important insights and, among other dividends, a sound basis for cross-institutional benchmarking.

The foundation premise driving this analysis – which should be framed carefully but pursued with fervour – must be the extent to which leadership, broadly conceived, is engaging with this challenge. To what extent, for instance, are course coordinators engaged in bringing the many sessional staff that they manage into the fold? Are department heads – the people ultimately responsible for implementation – enabled to step back from the daily flux to form local strategies and build coordinated responses? In what ways are deans facilitating change within faculties and working cross-institutionally to spur change across the field? More broadly, what are the most effective strategies that vice chancellors and chancellors can forge to boost the status of the academic profession, to swiftly build workforce capability, and to support succession planning? In what ways can leaders better promote holistic alignment between systemic, institutional, and individual drivers and performance? This briefing has laid some analytical foundations, and has firmed up a remit for a broader national review on leading development of future academic work.

Assuming responsibility for change

Scholarly foundations

Higher education in Australia must take charge of refreshing its academic workforce. We began with the uncontroversial proposition that Australia is a global player in higher education and that this contribution is driven by academics. Yet the workforce is troubled by growth pressures and the changing nature of academic work itself. This leads quickly to the more controversial proposition that the conceptualisation and organisation of academic work and the academic career structure no longer meet the operational

demands of the current environment and create many barriers to success. Rather than a gloomy assessment, we advanced this as the first step towards taking responsibility for change.

We detailed a functional typology of academic work to lay foundations. This conceptualisation invites experimentation of different permutations of academic work. The prevailing conception sees it as combinations of research, teaching, service and leadership, but there are clearly numerous possible reconfigurations. Simultaneously, the model provokes consideration of these alternatives and provides a structure for analysis and management.

Our case study of sessional academics offered insight into changes in academic work, not least of the extent to which change has already occurred. The partitioning of labour is so extreme that many institutions have a significant proportion of their full-time-equivalent academic staff load on sessional contracts. It may even be likely, under conservative assumptions, that around half of Australia's universities have the majority of their academic staff employed on a sessional basis. Combined, these people may be conducting up to 40 per cent of all teaching.

Clearly this situation presents a range of management and educational challenges that are serious and need to be addressed as part of any fulsome development initiative. Rather than grounds for pessimism, we conclude that this situation bolsters rationales for change and development of the academic workforce.

To get things underway, we proposed eight strategies for building Australia's future academic workforce, including the:

1. need for realistic and conceptually robust interpretive frames;
2. development of empirically based academic career profiles, both for individuals and for institutions;
3. design of attractive and customised academic experiences; and
4. formation of an evidence based on individual skills, capability and achievements.

At a more general level there is a need to:

5. engage sessional staff in academic management in development activities;
6. refresh the research degree to provide future academics with a portfolio of required skills;
7. expand staff numbers with system growth; and – importantly
8. engage system, institutional and faculty/departmental leaders in capacity development.

An emerging roadmap

This briefing is designed to prompt research-driven change. It is deliberately bold, progressive and normatively framed. But this does not discount the need for or possibility of change. It may be helpful to advance suggestions, by way of conclusion, about steps that we feel should be taken to bring such change about:

1. The next step surely involves serious discussion of contexts, challenges and potential solutions. What are the sources of resistance? Is this realistic, or merely crisis manufacturing? Who has the power to drive change, and therefore how should responsibility for different work be delegated to national, institutional, disciplinary and organisational groups?
2. An early step involves setting up arrangements to oversee the suite of R&D initiatives that will be necessary to flesh out the full picture of the current academic workforce. At a minimum this needs to include the sessional workforce and the diversity of the academic career. Universities need to take leadership of this work.
3. Target questions must be specified to guide future work. We have used this briefing to spotlight areas of interest, and key questions appear to include:
 - a. What, broadly, are Australia's aspirations for the academic workforce?
 - b. What must be done to engage institutions and academics in workforce renewal?
 - c. How can institutions develop customised and attractive academic experiences within a framework that guarantees equity and transparency?
 - d. How can we learn from successful initiatives undertaken within Australia as well as abroad to re-engage the younger generations with academic careers?

4. What capability needs to be put into place to conduct the research and development that will need to sustain and direct enthusiasm on this matter into the future? How can a coordinated response be pursued?

This is not an area in which central planning will prosper alone given growing competition among providers, and institutional diversification and autonomy. But neither is uncoordinated apathy likely to succeed. Now is the time for Australian higher education to draft and implement an agenda that proactively shapes future academic work and the profession.

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