

## Priorities for the Australian Universities Accord

### Term of Reference Governance, accountability and community

An effective academic workforce is essential to sustaining the future quality of education delivered by the nation's universities and our future prosperity. The Australian Universities Accord provides an opportunity outside of the contested industrial relations environment to examine the structure and effectiveness of the Australian higher education academic workforce and its capacity to contribute to those outcomes. Currently, that workforce is segmented and consists of

- Full time and part time staff in continuing positions who have excellent superannuation conditions and generous entitlements particularly in relation to parental leave, redundancies or forced separations. This group of staff is a decreasing proportion of the total academic workforce. (FTE 31196 Headcount 35401, 2021)
- Full and part time fixed term staff generally employed on an annual basis in research positions with lesser superannuation conditions and entitlements (FTE 16547 Headcount 19056, 2021)
- Casual staff who may be engaged for shorter periods to deliver lectures or tutorials, or by the hour for marking, professional supervision or other duties. Many such staff have other jobs outside higher education or work in multiple higher education institutions. In 2020, casuals constituted 31% of the FTE teaching workforce. Employment arrangements for academic casuals have changed little since the rates and associated times for delivering tutorials and lectures were determined by the Academic Salaries Tribunal in 1979. (FTE 14519, 2020, estimated headcount 43000).

The bulk of undergraduate and masters teaching rests with full and part time academic staff and casual academic staff, as with a few exceptions, industrial regulation restricts the engagement of fixed term staff for teaching. These two groups of staff have widely different conditions of employment and status, influence and opportunities in the institution for which they work.

This submission recommends that a priority area for the Accord is the examination of the casual academic workforce and whether the current structures are optimal and contribute to a sustained and effective academic workforce.

Universities and unions have agreed over the past 20 years on a range of measures to improve the employment arrangements for casual academic staff. These include ratios creating an upper limit of the percentage of casual staff to full and part time staff, arrangements where casual staff can convert to full and part time positions and the establishment of new full or part time teaching only roles limited to existing casuals. Such measures have had limited or no effect on the growth in employment of casual academic staff, and it is unlikely that measures such as limiting the number of fixed term appointments will have a significant impact. That universities have found their academic casual workforces difficult to manage is evident from the extent of underpayments recently identified and rectified at considerable cost.

While there will be further attempts at industrial regulation, these may only have limited impact as the use and patterns of academic casual employment are currently engrained in universities' operating models

Unfortunately, in contrast to the wealth of system wide public data on full and part time staff in Australian higher education, publicly available data on casual staff is limited, although emotions around casual engagement run high. To examine the impact of the current employment structures on a future academic workforce, it is first necessary to gain a better understanding of the value and contribution of casual academic workforce. This will assist in making judgements on the sustainability of the current workforce model. Matters which might be explored include

Gathering data on the casual academic workforce

- types of people who undertake casual academic work and their qualifications
- the tasks that academic casual staff are required to undertake
- the headcount of academic casuals by field of study, institution and nationally

The extent to which current industrial arrangements drive casual employment, including

- the Higher Education Industry -Academic Staff—Award exclusion of the use of fixed term roles for teaching purposes
- the impact of academic workload clauses in enterprise agreements sequestering up to 40% of an academic's time for research, and reducing opportunities for teaching
- relevance of the current Award structures for payment for casual lecturing and tutoring to the work that casuals are required to do

The extent to which institutional structures and processes drive casualisation including

- the ease of hiring processes for casuals compared with extended and detailed processes for continuing academic staff
- the impact of budget models within institutions which devolve authority to departments or schools for hiring decisions, in particular casuals
- the financial capacity of institutions to engage in longer term workforce planning and drive longer term hiring decisions
- the role of research performance in promotion and reward processes which emphasize measurable outcomes in research.

Quality Assurance

- The impact on education outcomes in situations with extensive use of academic casuals, particularly in undergraduate teaching

- Student satisfaction and engagement as reflected in the Quality Indicators of Learning and Teaching

Submitted for consideration as a priority area of consideration for the Australian Universities Accord