

Have a BLASST workshop: Leading SOTL with standards for quality sessional teaching

Universities across the world rely on sessional staff to provide teaching. This reliance on sessional staff has been increasing and this significant trend has resulted in sessional staff being integral to student learning across higher education organisations. The increase in sessional staff has not been accompanied by an increase in systematic approaches to quality enhancement and assurance of learning and teaching with sessional staff.

The BLASST workshop opens with a general overview of international trends around sessional staff and provides a forum for discussion about the learning and teaching issues associated with this trend. Participants are then introduced to the Sessional Staff Standards Framework, developed over 10 years of research in Australian universities to provide a systematic approach to quality. The Framework is designed to stimulate reflection and action, and to enable institutions, faculties, departments and individuals to work towards consistency in good practice with regard to sessional staff. It is an evidenced-based foundation for reflective decision-making, and can be used to inform practices and priorities, primarily through benchmarking.

The BLASST Sessional Staff Standards Framework establishes criteria and standards by which we may evaluate current practice in quality learning and teaching, and in management and administrative policy, procedures and systems affecting Sessional Staff. The Framework is also available online as the BLASST Benchmarking Interactive Tool (B-BIT). Workshop participants are introduced to the B-BIT through a 'thinking aloud' exercise.

After this introduction each participant will engage with the B-BIT in an experiential benchmarking exercise, assessing their own educational context against these national standards. At the end of the online benchmarking exercise, participants will be able to generate their personalised colour-coded summary report and action plan.

Learning goals and outcomes

Participants of the BLASST workshop will

- * engage with an online poll to learn about recent research on learning and scholarship of sessional staff
- * listen to a short introduction to the BLASST framework
- * observe a couple of participants practice using the BLASST framework through a 'thinking aloud' exercise
- * benchmark their department/faculty or organisation by working through the BLASST framework - using an online tool so it is easy and efficient
- * reflect on the evidence provided by their colour coded summary report
- * discuss the results of this benchmarking experiment
- * act on the results, by planning an action/method/experiment to work towards improving good practice with sessional staff.

Anyone working as a sessional teacher or with sessional teachers in higher education can attend. People who support and manage sessional staff including departmental or faculty administrators, unit, program or subject convenors, heads of schools and disciplines, and Human Resources staff, may also find the workshop useful.

The workshop is facilitated by Dr Marina Harvey, an OLT National Teaching Fellow who uses Participatory Action Research to investigate sessional staff issues. She has researched this topic for the past decade and her fellowship enables her to continue to work towards national good practice and benchmarking with the BLASST framework. She has facilitated BLASST workshops across many universities and states of Australia.