

## A Sustainable Training and Feedback Model for Developing the Teaching Capabilities of Sessional Academic Staff

**Authors :** Nirmani Wijenayake, Louise Lutze-Mann, Lucy Jo, John Wilson, Vivian Yeung, Dean Lovett, Kim Snepvangers

**Abstract :** Sessional academic staff at universities have the most influence and impact on student learning, engagement, and experience as they have the most direct contact with undergraduate students. A blended technology-enhanced program was created for the development and support of sessional staff to ensure adequate training is provided to deliver quality educational outcomes for the students. This program combines innovative mixed media educational modules, a peer-driven support forum, and face-to-face workshops to provide a comprehensive training and support package for staff. Additionally, the program encourages the development of learning communities and peer mentoring among the sessional staff to enhance their support system. In 2018, the program was piloted on 100 sessional staff in the School of Biotechnology and Biomolecular Sciences to evaluate the effectiveness of this model. As part of the program, rotoscope animations were developed to showcase 'typical' interactions between staff and students. These were designed around communication, confidence building, consistency in grading, feedback, diversity awareness, and mental health and wellbeing. When surveyed, 86% of sessional staff found these animations to be helpful in their teaching. An online platform (Moodle) was set up to disseminate educational resources and teaching tips, to host a discussion forum for peer-to-peer communication and to increase critical thinking and problem-solving skills through scenario-based lessons. The learning analytics from these lessons were essential in identifying difficulties faced by sessional staff to further develop supporting workshops to improve outcomes related to teaching. The face-to-face professional development workshops were run by expert guest speakers on topics such as cultural diversity, stress and anxiety, LGBTIQ and student engagement. All the attendees of the workshops found them to be useful and 88% said they felt these workshops increase interaction with their peers and built a sense of community. The final component of the program was to use an adaptive e-learning platform to gather feedback from the students on sessional staff teaching twice during the semester. The initial feedback provides sessional staff with enough time to reflect on their teaching and adjust their performance if necessary, to improve the student experience. The feedback from students and the sessional staff on this model has been extremely positive. The training equips the sessional staff with knowledge and insights which can provide students with an exceptional learning environment. This program is designed in a flexible and scalable manner so that other faculties or institutions could adapt components for their own training. It is anticipated that the training and support would help to build the next generation of educators who will directly impact the educational experience of students.

**Keywords :** designing effective instruction, enhancing student learning, implementing effective strategies, professional development

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