



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**NEWCASTLE**  
AUSTRALIA

# **The Sessional Academic Workforce: The University of Newcastle – An Australian Case Study**

**Professor John Germov and Tina Crawford**

# Increasing 'casualisation' of the Australian workforce

- The growth in student enrolments in the Australian university sector has seen a parallel expansion in the sessional academic workforce
  - Estimated at between 20 to 25 per cent of the academic workforce
    - This cohort is responsible for a substantial amount of teaching delivery
  - Rise of the 'precariat': Proportionally mirrors that of the overall Australian workforce
- Some non-tenured academic staff have become so entrenched in the university sector that they are effectively 'permanent sessionals'
- Australia is not alone in witnessing the rise of precarious forms of employment in academia, with comparable trends in many Western countries

# Changing proportion of Australian sessional workforce

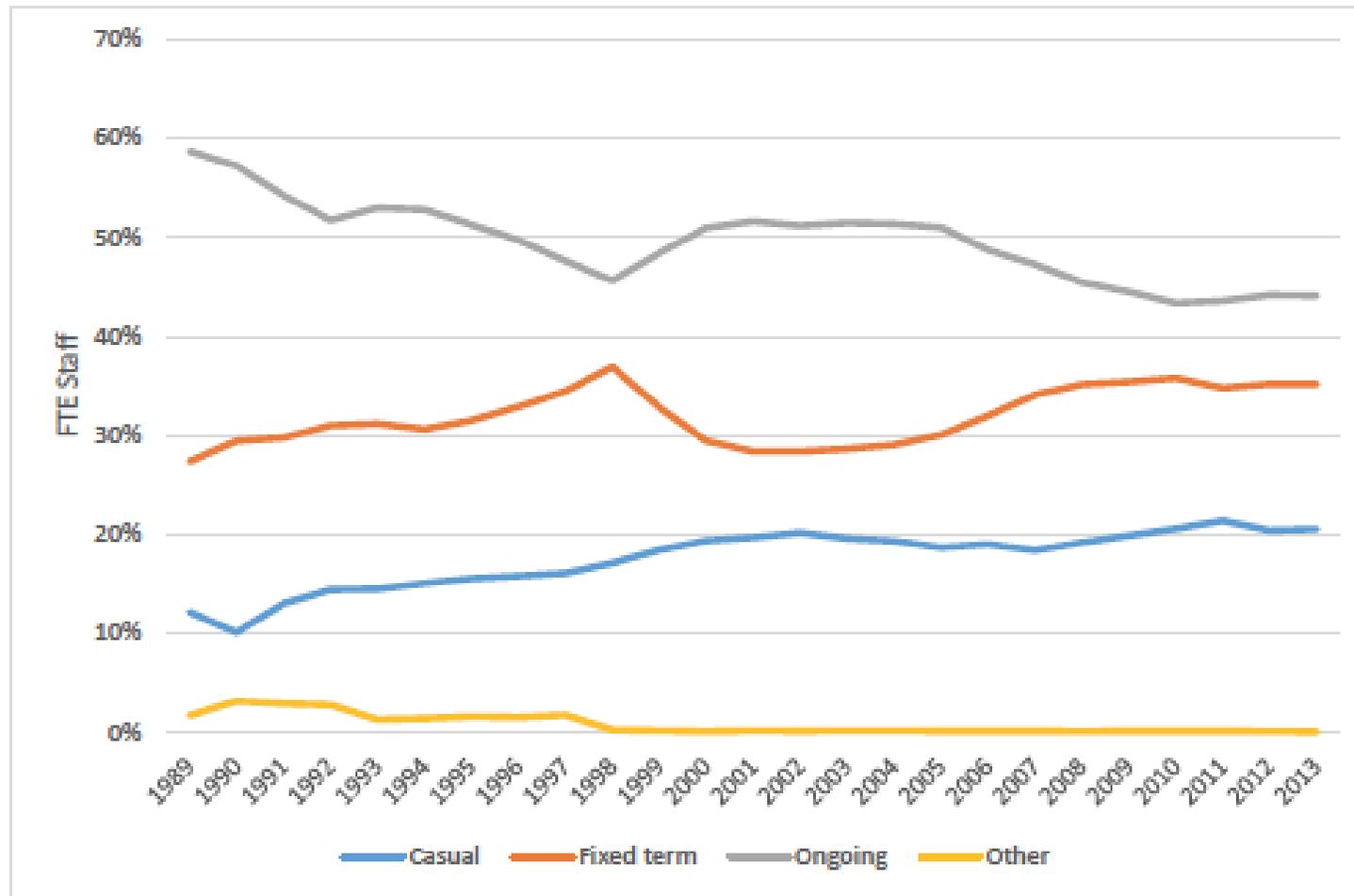
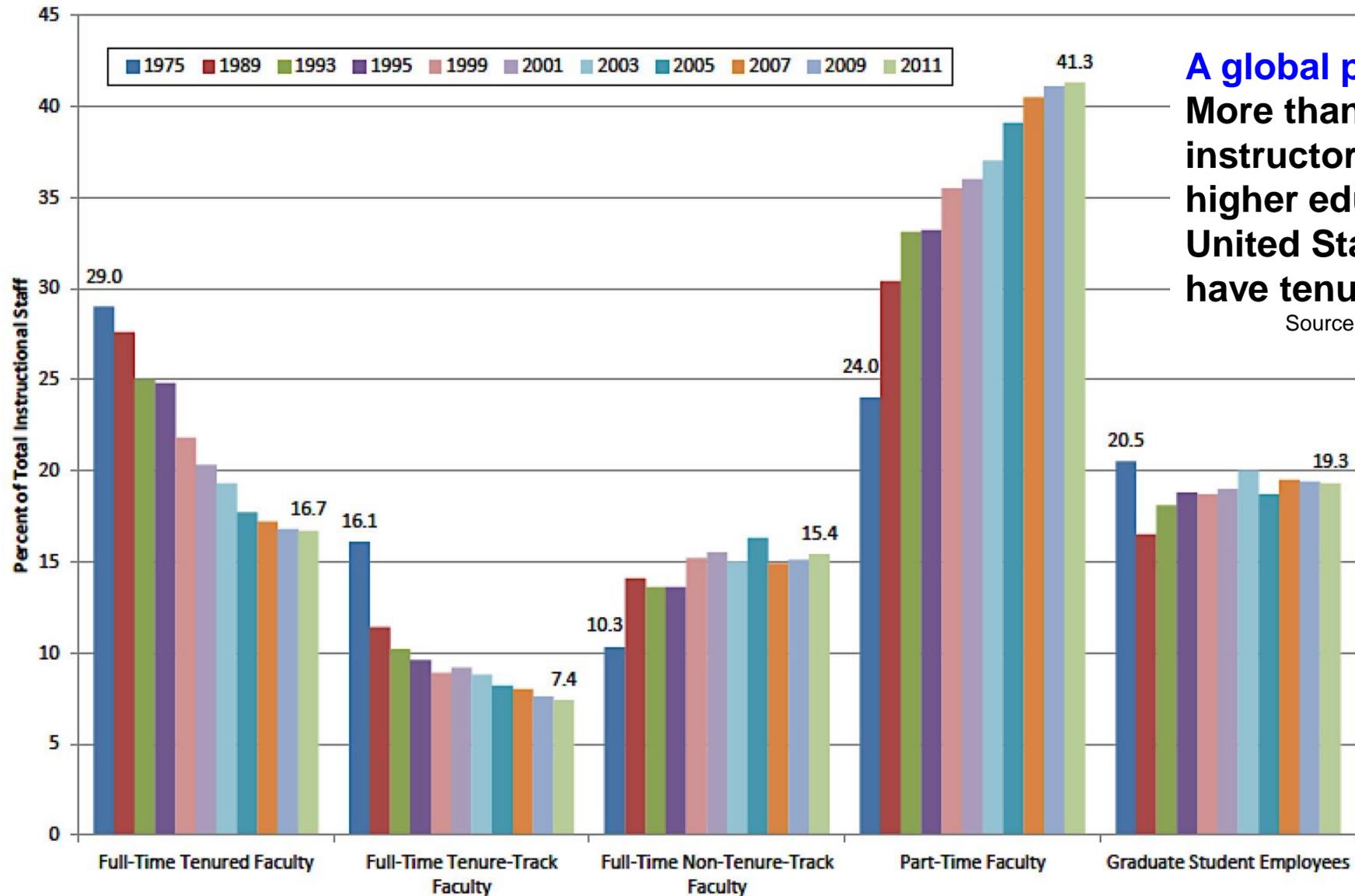


Figure 2. FTE academic staff by contract type (%), 1989-2013 (Source: Australian Government, 2015a)

## Trends in Instructional Staff Employment Status, 1975-2011

All Institutions, National Totals United States



**A global phenomenon?**  
**More than 75% of the**  
**instructors teaching in**  
**higher education in the**  
**United States do not**  
**have tenure**

Source: Inside Higher Ed, April 2017

Notes: Figures for 2011 are estimated. Figures from 2005 have been corrected from those published in 2012. Figures are for degree-granting institutions only, but the precise category of institutions included has changed over time. Graduate student employee figure for 1975 is from 1976. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: US Department of Education, IPEDS Fall Staff Survey. Tabulation by AAUP Research Office, Washington, DC. Released April 2013.

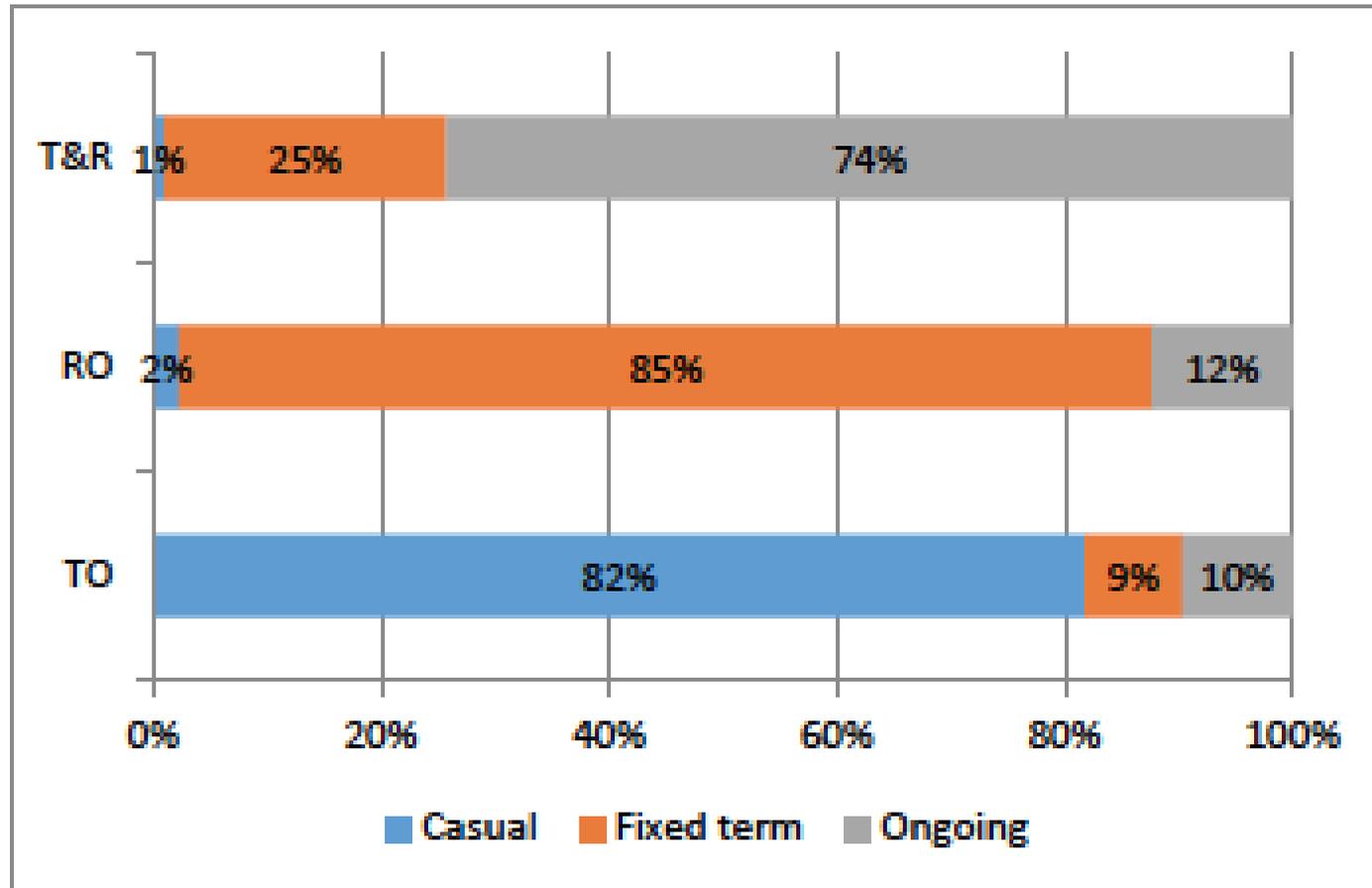
# The value of the sessional workforce

**Traditionally**, this workforce has been used in instrumental ways to address:

- Real declines in public funding per student
- Increased enrolments in response to the Demand Driven System in Australia
- Improve operating margins to fund university strategies
- Expansion of full fee / offshore / online delivery of degree programs



# Sessional workforce by function in 2013: 'Teaching fodder' approach



- Majority of teaching-only functions performed by sessional staff
- Majority of research-only staff are on fixed-term contracts
- Majority of ongoing (tenured) staff are employed in a 'teaching & research' function

Figure 3. FTE academic staff by function and contract type (%) in 2013 (Australian Government, 2015a)

# The increasing value of a satisfied sessional workforce: Student Experience, Completions and Employment



Budget 2017-18



## Proposed...

- 2.5% efficiency dividend in 2018 & 2019 (on CGS)
- 7.5% of each university's Commonwealth Grant Scheme (CGS) funding will be put into a 'contestable pool' tied to performance – a move towards an Australian version of a **Teaching Excellence Framework**
  - In 2018, this will be linked to admissions reform and transparency of research and education costs
  - From 2019, universities will be assessed on retention and success
  - Any funding withheld from a university will go to others better meeting their performance indicators
  - The return of the 'teaching-only' institution?

*“In a world where universities rather than Canberra bureaucracies determine the number of students they enrol and the disciplines in which they are enrolled there must be a mechanism that ensures accountability to public policy priorities, especially the quality of student outcomes”*

*Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham, Minister for Education and Training*

# A shift in workforce capabilities...

## AUSTRALIAN HIGHER EDUCATION WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE

JANUARY 2016



### AGILE AND FLEXIBLE

- Volatility in student expectations and study patterns
- Greater focus on completions and graduate employability
- More flexible workforce management

### PROFESSIONALISATION

- Systematic, strategic and dynamic professional development
- Need to focus on sustained currency of capability and skill sets
- Reconceptualising the nature of academic work

### SPECIALISATION

- Moving away from the 40/40/20 academic profile
- Permanent sessionals
- Rise of hybrid and specialist roles: Practitioner academics / 'para-academics' / 'third space' professionals: digital learning designers / student enrichment officers



# A universal 'culture-shift' is required: Treating sessional staff as a valued workforce cohort

- A **culture-shift** is required in the sector: Sessional staff are often **without representation or voice** and lack tailored support, development and recognition
  - Often left to 'fend for themselves', sessionals are rarely included in staff communication, engagement and development activities
  - Sessional staff are under-valued in terms of their impact on the student experience
- Sessional academic staff are an **integral** part of the overall university workforce
- While all staff matter, the **quality** of the student experience and student outcomes will be substantially shaped by the **satisfaction and performance of the non-tenured workforce**



# **UON Academy**

**A community for sessional academic staff**

# The Sessional Workforce: A Strategic Priority

**NeW DIRECTIONS  
STRATEGIC PLAN  
2013-2015**



## UON Future Workforce Plan

### **Strategic Objective 3.2:**

**Establish the ‘UON Academy’ to recognise the importance of the contribution of sessional and casual academic staff by providing systematic support for their engagement, development and performance**

# Aligned to UON's workforce strategy

	Performance & role clarity	Leadership capability	Talent attraction & retention
<b>Objective 1:</b> Staff are supported to perform at world class levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure proportion of ongoing academic staff with doctoral qualifications &gt;80% by 2015</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Introduce UON Professional Development Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recruit &amp; retain outstanding staff</li> <li>Introduce a sector leading Employee Value Proposition</li> </ul>
<b>Objective 2:</b> Build leadership capacity & capability to deliver 2025 vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ensure effective succession planning processes</li> <li>Provide access to robust, real-time &amp; relevant performance data</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a Leadership Framework that articulates skills &amp; capabilities supported by development programs</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attract outstanding leading academics to UON as global innovation chairs</li> </ul>
<b>Objective 3:</b> Clarity about roles & performance to support career aspirations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop a new Performance Review &amp; Development Framework (PRD) that defines performance expectations &amp; career aspirations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide systematic support &amp; development to sessional staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Enhance career pathways &amp; mobility of professional staff</li> <li>Revise the induction process for all staff</li> </ul>

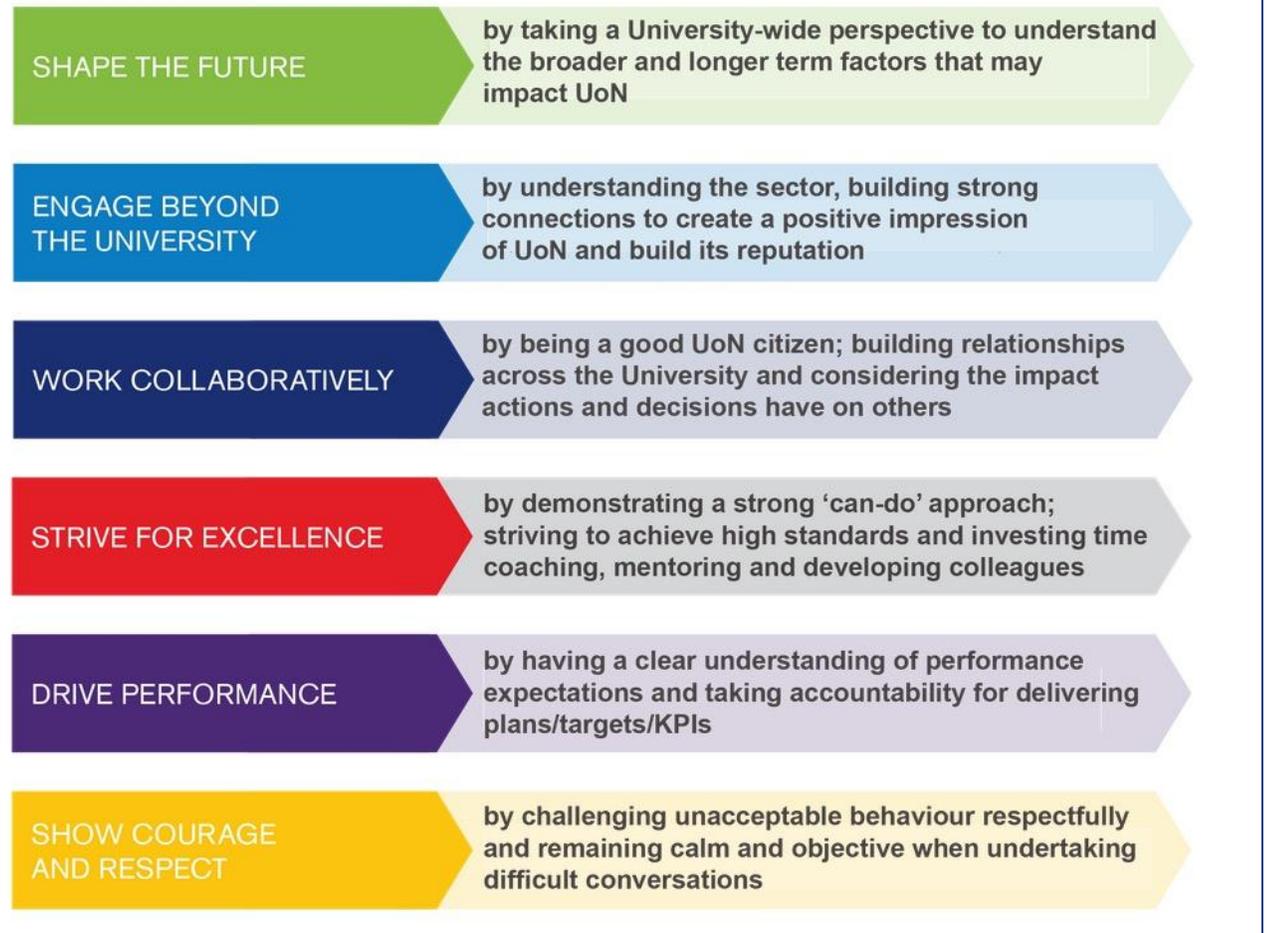
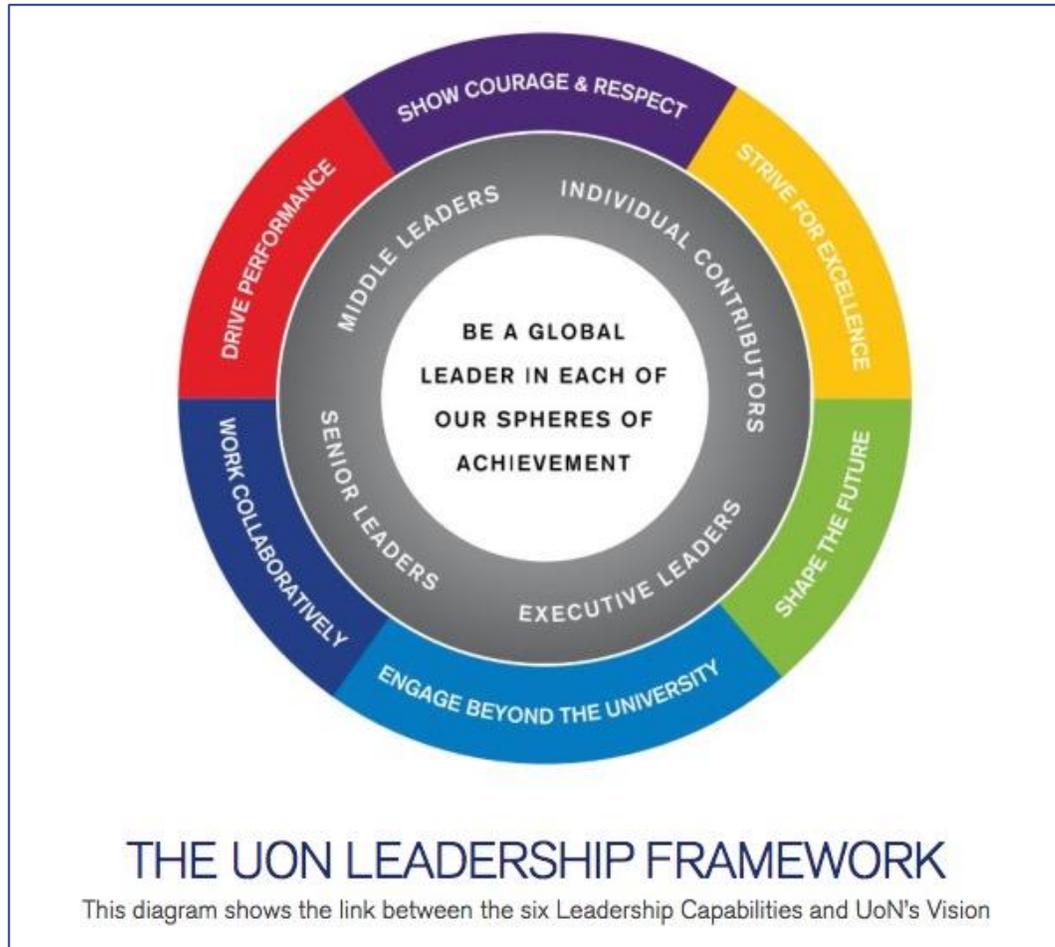
# Consultation and stakeholder engagement

- Sector consultation and benchmarking
- Executive committee endorsement and project sponsorship
- Formation of advisory group: Cross-section of University staff to obtain feedback on draft initiatives prior to implementation
- UON's sessional academic workforce was heterogeneous and consisted of distinct cohorts:
  - 'Permanent sessionals'
  - Qualified academic job seekers
  - Higher Degree Research students
  - Multiple job holders and self-employed professionals
  - External industry experts
  - Retired academics
- Mutual agreement between the NTEU and UON was reached on the establishment of the UON Academy and written into our current EA (clause 34.38)
- One-on-one meetings with HOS and Executive Officers to understand the business need

# Establishment of the UON Academy

- The UON Academy aims to **engage**, **support** and **develop** a highly-valued community of sessional academic staff
- Two main streams:
  - Practical framework components related to services, access, communication and information
  - Leadership behaviours that would be required to ensure successful implementation of the changes and sustainable cultural shifts in the value placed on sessional staff

# Aligned to UoN's Leadership Framework

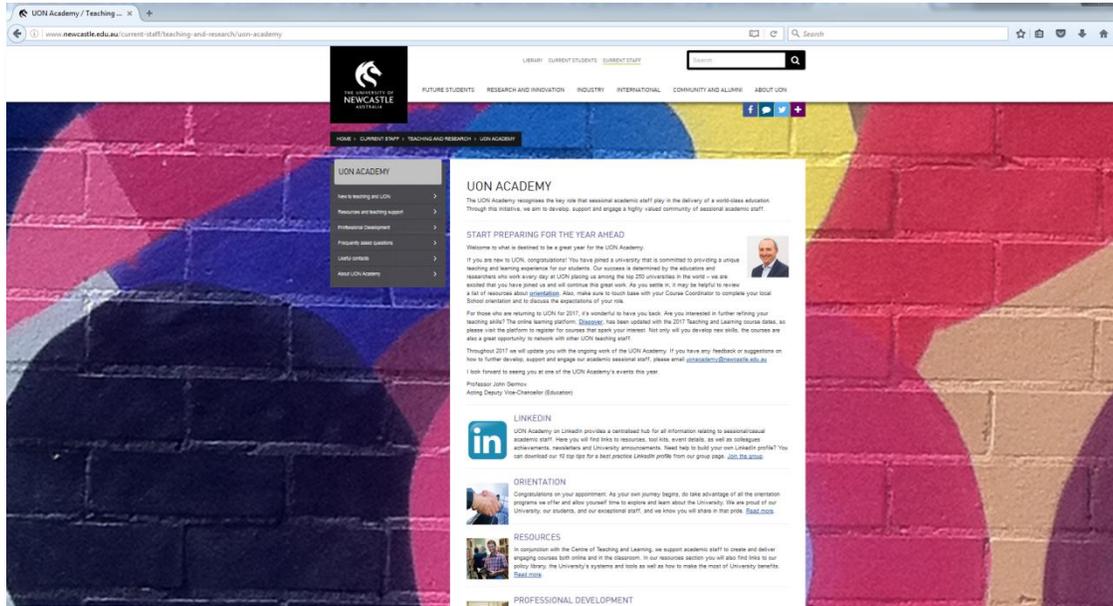


# Practical components for great impact:

## Services, systems, access and information

- **Transparent recruitment:** Recruitment, Selection and Appointment for Casual Academic Staff guideline
- **Orientation:** Induction to the University and UON Academy orientation, together with the Health & Safety and Equity & Diversity orientation (all online)
- **A 'one stop shop':** Dedicated UON Academy website established with links to the Centre for Teaching and Learning; Plus dedicated e-newsletter and communication channels such as a LinkedIn group
- **Development support:** Refreshed professional development courses
- **Expanded benefits:** Salary sacrifice superannuation
- **Systems continuity:** Library, parking and IT access for all sessional academic contracts implemented across the entire year
- **Tailored sessional staff survey:** A revised version of the Your Voice Survey
- **Reward and recognition:** Teaching awards; Sessional academic staff scholarships for professional development; Changing terminology from 'casual' to 'sessional academic staff'

# Involve, Support, Develop



**UON Academy**

Professional development by UON Academy

**Date:** Thursday 16 March 2017

**Time:** 3 - 4pm

**Place:** DB-212 or online streaming

**RSVP:** Monday 13 March 2017

**Traditional to tech: supporting your teaching in the digital age**

**UON ACADEMY news**

Issue #1 - April 2016

Keeping sessional staff up-to-date with all UON Academy activities and achievements.

**Welcome**

It was my great pleasure to launch the UON Academy 2016 program on Tuesday, 19 April in the company of the Vice-Chancellor and colleagues from across the University in the wonderful surrounds of our Fifehallia theatre.

The UON Academy, initiated under our NISM Directors' Strategic Plan and continued under Neil's Future, aims to engage, support and recognise the key role that sessional academic staff play in the delivery of a world-class education. The foundation of the UON Academy is about recognising how central our sessional workforce is to the functioning of the University and providing systematic support for this cohort.



**Recognising the inspiring**

Tess Rendto, special education teacher, won UON Academy's inaugural \$1,000 professional development prize in recognition of excellence and providing an exceptional student experience.

The UON Academy received a number of remarkable nominations after asking the UON community to recognise sessional academics in a 200 word submission. The runners up were Adam Manning, a percussion teacher in the School of Creative Arts and Megan Sharp who works in the English, Language and Foundation Studies Centre. Both were nominated by colleagues.



# Listening and responding to sessional staff: 2016 Your Voice Survey results

## What our sessional academics say?

- **96%** – **“Like the kind of work I do”**
  - 8% above the sector benchmark
- **80%** – **“My supervisor provides me with good support”**
  - 12% above the sector benchmark
- **78%** – **“I feel a sense of loyalty and commitment to UON”**
  - 11% above the sector benchmark
- **85%** – **“I am proud to tell people that I work for UON”**
  - 3% above the sector benchmark

# Key Success Factors

- ✓ Embed in institutional strategy
- ✓ Get executive sponsorship and support to drive implementation of initiatives and support a culture-shift across the institution
- ✓ Align with workforce strategy and key workforce tools
- ✓ Include the sessional 'voice' in decision-making
- ✓ Review, adjust and close the feedback loop



# Next steps: 2017 and beyond...

- Closer alignment of the UON Academy and our Centre of Teaching and Learning to deliver targeted professional development for sessional staff
- Pilot two-way feedback processes for sessional staff in academic organisational units (e.g. Schools / Departments / Discipline)
- Host a sector networking forum to share experiences in supporting sessional staff and learning from each other
- Embed a continuous improvement approach towards communication and engagement with sessional staff
- Provide ongoing recognition of excellence in our sessional staff cohort



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**NEWCASTLE**  
AUSTRALIA

# QUESTIONS

[www.newcastle.edu.au/uonacademy](http://www.newcastle.edu.au/uonacademy)