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#OverlyHonestMethods
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NTEU resolves to improve pay & conditions for casuals

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The dismal scenario of casual academia

In just 10 years the proportion of university staff in continuing positions dropped by 10 per cent. This means that today just over one third of people working in universities are in continuing employment. On the latest analysis of the workforce data supplied by universities there are around 45,000 fixed term positions and 86,000 ‘regular casuals’. Most of these ‘regular casuals’ are the academics responsible for more than half of the teaching in Australian universities. Research positions have doubled for academic and general staff, but are now more than likely to be fixed term. Rolling contracts on ‘soft money’ (non-recurrent grants) are also common in language centres, student support and digital technology areas.

This is a very dismal scenario for people seeking a career in universities, whether as an academic or a professional in another occupation. Increasingly universities are seeking higher degree graduates to fill the complex and interesting jobs in university administration and management, in student learning and support services, and in research. However, as with those seeking a career as an academic, there are few secure jobs.

After having worked for many years in often precarious jobs while studying, forgoing income while seeing friends progress in the graduate workforce, higher degree graduates should expect the reward of a job that recognises their knowledge and skills – and that gives them fair security of employment. Similarly, those seeking to move into universities (whether in academic or general staff positions) from other professions, often leaving comparatively high salaries in their professional field, should also expect to have job security.

Regular readers of Connect will be well aware that the NTEU has consistently campaigned to both improve the conditions of casual (or sessional) academics and to convert casualised work and workers to more secure employment.

Through both direct campaigning and in collective bargaining with universities (resulting in EBAs – Enterprise Bargaining Agreements), the NTEU has steadily improved remuneration levels including the casual loadings, as well as improving conditions of work. In some universities positions have been created enabling conversion for a few casual academics. After many years of argument and negotiation, in the last round of collective bargaining we achieved separate payment for marking ending the always spurious assertion of management that marking was built into the teaching hour rate.

The NTEU has been monitoring the compliance of universities on payment for marking, but we have to know where there are any breaches and sometimes this may just be happening in a particular course or department (sometimes unintentionally). Do report any breaches of this, or any other EBA clause relating to your employment, to your local NTEU Branch. You can find your EBA on your university website, or contact your Branch.

The NTEU is negotiating new EBAs at all universities this year. We are seeking to improve upon casual academic conditions. Converting existing casual academics to more secure positions continues to be very difficult and the proportion of casualised teaching just keeps increasing, so in this EBA round, we are also negotiating for a new category of academic entry level positions. These Scholarly Teaching Fellows must be created out of casualised work and any casuals who have recently worked in universities are eligible to apply. They will be teaching focussed with a review after three years. The NTEU considers the inclusion of these positions to be mandatory in settling any new agreements. As enterprise bargaining negotiations hot up at your university, get involved in the campaign if you can. Let your colleagues know you are supporting the Union campaign and enlist their support for improving casual conditions and job security.

2013 is also a federal election year, where security of employment will be a major issue. The ACTU has taken up the shocking findings of the Howe Inquiry into insecure work, Lives on Hold, that 40% of the Australian workforce are employed in insecure work, such as casual work, fixed term work, contracting or labour hire. The ACTU has responded with the Secure Jobs, Better Future campaign.

The NTEU will campaign with other unions, industry and community organisations for job security. Over the past few years through a consistent public campaign, we have made the casualisation of university teaching and the plight of academic casuals an issue that has community recognition and support. There is consensus that such high levels of casualisation are bad for students, for the casuals, for their colleagues and the ongoing quality of university teaching. But agreeing that a problem exists does not fix it. The onus is upon university managements and the Federal Government to act. The NTEU will continue to call for increased base funding per student to enable universities to properly staff learning and teaching.

I wish you well in your teaching this year.

Jeannie Rea, NTEU National President

read online at www.unicasual.org.au
The Research Education Experience in an election year

When I was told I would be writing my first editorial for Connect, like any good research student I went out and collected my resources – I studied up on the editorials of previous CAPA Presidents.

Reading back through my friend John Nowakowski’s editorials from 2011 reminded me just how much more brilliant than me he was. I often think that I have a lot more to learn about the higher education sector, but when I read back over John’s work I know it to be so. John, as you will possibly be aware, passed away a few weeks ago at the age of 27 following a long illness. It is immensely rewarding to have the opportunity to go back over his work, and indeed, to follow in his footsteps as CAPA President.

One of the projects John worked on during his time as President went on to become The Research Education Experience: Investigating Higher Degree by Research Candidates’ Experiences in Australian Universities, a report undertaken by CAPA with funding and support from DIISRTE. It is an extensive report that features at its heart a survey of over one thousand higher degree by research students, and the responses of over a hundred case study and focus group participants. John travelled the country, networking with countless students to make this report a reality and to ensure it represented the widest range of views possible.

Earlier this week, I visited Perth to launch our brand new report into the Student Services and Amenities Fee and what it means for postgrads (if you haven’t read it, kindly do so immediately on the CAPA website). Whilst turning vegie burgers at a UWA Postgraduate Student Association barbeque, I was approached by their Equity Officer, Jacqueline, who told me that she views the supervisor-research student relationship as an equity issue. I thought this was an interesting perspective, and not one I had previously considered, even as a former equity officer myself.

Like many of you reading this, I am a research student who also works as a sessional academic. Many of the CAPA officers, and the postgraduates we represent, fit the same description – that’s why the partnership between the NTEU and CAPA that you see here in Connect, is so important. None of us who originate from a research background would be surprised to hear that the findings of The Research Education Experience illustrate a significant link between satisfaction in the supervisor-student relationship, and attrition rates. Basically, satisfaction for HDR students overall hinges largely on the student-supervisor experience.

I have always been disappointed that The Research Education Experience didn’t receive the attention it deserved. For this reason I will be encouraging a re-launch of the publication this year, with significantly more promotion of its content – but also with a focus on how the student-supervisor relationship can be considered an equity issue, and what can be done from the perspective of an equity campaign to improve the HDR student experience. I’m looking forward to working with the CAPA Equity Committee and equity representatives on campus to make this possible.

In this Federal election year, we’ll be kept very busy here at CAPA. The Student Services and Amenities Fee and its student representation guidelines will be under review, and our report on this topic will hopefully feed into that review process and highlight the experiences of postgraduate representatives on campus. The deregulation debate will be on the table, and there is a discussion to be had about the un-capping of university places and the affect this has on postgraduates. Course quality and offerings will be of importance to postgraduate coursework students. CAPA will be striving to ensure that higher education is an agenda item that is kept firmly on the table during this campaign season. We’re especially hoping that Tony Abbott will be taking questions at Universities Australia conference later in February – we can think of a few things we’d like to ask him!

I look forward to seeing you on campus throughout the year.

Meghan B. Hopper is the President of CAPA and a PhD student at Monash University. Keep up to date with her on Twitter @capapresident, ‘like’ CAPA on Facebook, or drop her a line at president@capa.edu.au.
It was with great sadness that the NTEU and CAPA noted the death on 15 January 2013 of postgraduate activist John Nowakowski, 27, after a long illness. As CAPA President, John co-edited Connect in 2011.

Matt McGowan, NTEU National Assistant Secretary, said: “John was well known by many in the sector for his work as President of the Council of Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) in 2011, and Sydney University Postgraduate Representative Association (SUPRA) in 2010.”

McGowan said John worked with many in the NTEU and was known for his open and friendly approach to everyone he met, and for his tireless and effective campaigning for postgraduate students and the higher education sector more broadly.

“On behalf of the NTEU, I extend our condolences to John’s family and to his close colleagues at SUPRA and the University of Sydney. His contribution was significant and we are all poorer for losing such a promising and dynamic individual at such a young age. He will be sadly missed,” he said.

CAPA President Meghan Hopper said CAPA was a better organisation for John’s involvement over the past four years. “He was a person who truly gave unto others. He is well loved and well missed by all of his many friends and colleagues within our current executive and officer team, our alumni, affiliates and friends,” Hopper said.

Hopper paid tribute to John for his “grassroots” approach to advocacy and representation. John, a chemical engineering graduate, had been the driving force behind CAPA’s recent major study, The Research Education Experience.

The full Council resolution can be found at www.unicasual.org.au/article/National-Council-resolution-on-casual-pay-and-conditions-14022

Vale John Nowakowski
Champion of postgraduates

NTEU National Council resolves to improve pay and conditions for casuals

The 2012 NTEU Council Meeting turned its attention to secure work in tertiary education and improved conditions for casual workers.

Council noted their concern at the continued reliance on casual workers in the academic workforce; NTEU member Robyn May estimates that 50% of teaching is now done by casuals.

The National Council agreed to support the current ACTU campaign around insecure work, and NTEU made submission to the associated Inquiry last year. NTEU recently added to our advocacy on behalf of workers in insecure work by responding to the “Bandt Bill” – the Fair Work Amendment (Tackling Job Insecurity) Bill 2012.

Commitments in the 2012 National Council resolution include:

- Prioritising the creation of 2,000 new secure jobs for staff currently working as casuals. These are known in the NTEU bargaining claim as ‘Scholarly Teaching Fellows’.
- Improving conditions where they weren’t met in the last bargaining round, to meet the national standards around marking, casual loadings and Early Career Development Fellowships.
- Improving casual representation, including on each Branch Committee, via networks at Branches and Divisions and key forums such as Bargaining forums, conferences and National Council.

The full Council resolution can be found at www.unicasual.org.au/article/National-Council-resolution-on-casual-pay-and-conditions-14022
NEW YEAR BLUES
The lot of the casual academic

Surviving the long Christmas-New Year break is a challenge for most casual academics. Some can pick up paid work in their field or a job in the local bottle shop. Many are forced to resort to Centrelink benefits. Dr Annabelle Leve told Connect her story.

After the mad rush of Christmas and family, a moment of relief flowed through. I was lucky enough to be given some last minute work that needed to be completed by 7 January so I spent every moment I could in the empty university over the ‘festive season’, along with the security guards, getting it done.

This income then needed to be reported to Centrelink which cuts my (sole parent) payment – even though I am yet to be paid for the work I completed in a time when few other academics would want to be stuck on the computer. I have been offered some marking work for February which is some relief but brings its own challenges with computer access – all marking has to be done online. For some reason I have to re-prove who I am to HR but my passport has expired and so I have to provide a birth certificate but it doesn’t have my current surname, so I’ll need to dig out my divorce certificate I assume…

And then I’ll need to work out exactly how much I will be paid to report to Centrelink, then the hours I work, which may be after my kids are in bed or other brief and often spasmodic times during the day and night, which need to be put on my online pay claim and never seem to work out… But it’s great to have some work anyway, these are just the usual dilemmas that are part of the working life of a casual academic.

However, the university at which I have worked the most over the previous ten years, has not offered me any work. Instead I have received the usual email entitled: End of contract and your computer account access, which goes on to inform me that “The computer accounts associated with your staff ID number, including email access and other IT facilities provided by […], will end early the next day”.

Dark months bathed in sunshine

January is when the depression and hopelessness hits home. I spent as much time as possible at my soon-to-be-taken computer access, checking any job availabilities, making sure I have all of my
documentation up to date, and talking to as many of my work colleagues as I can. I get commiserations, some suggestions and I get encouragement, but nobody can offer me any work. I did however get a couple of extra days – I briefly thought that perhaps this could extend my computer access but no, it is urgent and must be completed by Sunday night.

My year’s contract (that doesn’t mean a year’s work, but a contract that is valid for one year, so that if small jobs like marking come up the paperwork is much simpler) will end the next week. At this point it seems that I will have little reason to go back to my Alma Mater as it is less and less likely anything else will come up. I have exhausted my list of contacts, who all cite lack of funds and tightening of budgets for not being able to offer anything.

I really wanted to use that time that I had, with no students, work commitments and two weeks access to a desk and computer system, to write the articles I so need to publish. Then I got my little bit of work, and hence less time. At the same time, I feel increasingly miserable, distracted, unmotivated. I lose more and more confidence in my work and my capabilities and now the more permanent positions that I may have applied for when I was feeling better, sound like they are too far out of my reach.

Considering the jobs I applied for last year, largely that work that I was already doing at the time, and I did not even get invited for an interview, this is a familiar and scary time for a casual academic – let alone their families!

I wonder about the consequences of universities cutting the numbers of casual academic staff, and instead employing more ongoing staff (many at junior levels, some that I know of yet to complete PhDs or to publish) and putting more pressure on continuing staff. Supposedly, from management level, a department spending more money on casuals indicates a more precarious long term position, and the chances for them to take on permanent staff is more remote. But the view for the near future is not good, either way, in my field.

I am ‘lucky’ my child is only 3 so they are not immediately going to cut off my benefits but I don’t want to be on benefits, I want a ‘real’ job!

These issues just don’t seem to be getting ‘fixed’, just shuffled!

Post scripts

I have just sent off an email to the HR branch which is chasing me (threatening me with legal action) to pay back over $2,000 they overpaid me in error, over a year ago, the pre-Christmas-season before last! It took HR a few months to notice (I hadn’t noticed, I was just happy I could afford to pay the bills that year), then just before the end of financial year, I was told to either pay it back immediately, or pay back with the additional tax if after June 30. The problems just go on! And on!

And, wow, I have some tutoring work for next semester! Different university though, further to travel, but 3 tutorials per week over the 10 week semester will at least keep us comfortable for a while. Shame I don’t have childcare on the teaching day. Hmm, then there’s Easter in there, oh and Labour Day. Just have to hope that the kids or I don’t get sick..., which brings me to another story…

Above: Annabelle Leve received her doctorate from Monash University in 2011 but still has no on-going work. She’s pictured here with her daughter Matilda and son Rani.
The last edition of Connect (vol. 5, no. 2) reported on the 2012 NTEU Bargaining Conference which set the agenda for Round 6 claims.

For casuals, NTEU seeks to build on gains made in the last round of bargaining, including:

- A 25% casual loading.
- Separate pay for marking, and
- The creation of Early Career Fellowships for existing casuals.

Key additional claims for Round 6 are:

- The creation of 2000 on-going jobs (approximately 20% of the current casual academic workforce) from existing casual positions. The NTEU has called these positions ‘Scholarly Teaching Fellows’.
- That required duties are paid for separately, including attendance at School/Faculty meetings and attendance at lectures.
- Agreed remuneration when the work of casual academics is ‘used’ by the University; for example, use of teaching materials.
- An allowance for casual academics required to answer enquiries from students.

Our claims for casuals are around improving their conditions and paying them for work required, whilst trying to reduce the use of casual and insecure work in the sector.

Bargaining outcomes so far

Curtin University and Central Queensland University now have approved Agreements.

At Curtin University, Scholarly Teaching Fellows were agreed and will be phased in at 5% of the existing casual and fixed term academic staff cohort, for each of the four years of the Agreement. Curtin already has a comprehensive clause around casual work, including a commitment to separate payment for marking and staff development. General and professional staff can apply to convert from casual employment.

The new Agreement provides an on-going casual academic category (On-going Sessional Fellows) who will have access to paid leave, incremental career progression and redundancy entitlements.

Central Queensland University were under the threshold required by NTEU to negotiate Scholarly Teaching Fellow positions; that is the work done by casual academics is relatively small. However, the University and NTEU agreed to a new category of ‘Early Career Academic’ positions. These positions are designed to attract and support CQU PhD students and casual academics (and from elsewhere where appropriate), and are two year appointments. These ECAPs may lead to on-going employment. The CQU Agreement also includes provisions around conversion for long-term Professional employees.
Overly Honest Methods is a Twitter trend that highlights what happens when the scientific method and the sheer laziness of humans collide.

In January, in a fit of comedic inspiration, a postdoc named Leigh tweeted a funny lab confession and included the hashtag #overlyhonestmethods. By the end of the day, dozens of scientists had joined in, and the result is nothing short of hilarious.

Connect prints some of the tweets here for your enjoyment. The whole canon can be found by searching #overlyhonestmethods on twitter.com, or check out 75 of the best compiled at storify.com/BeckiePort/overlyhonestmethods

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Overly Honest Method @overlyhonesty
LITERATURE CITED. (But not actually read) #OverlyHonestMethods
Expand

Overly Honest Method @OverlyHonest
These compounds are medically important if you are a genetically modified mouse with an obscure form of cancer. #OverlyHonestMethods
Expand

Overly Honest Method @OverlyHonest
I'm pretty sure this valve is wrong but it was published by my boss so I have to be tacit. #OverlyHonestMethods
Expand

Overly Honest Method @OverlyHonest
PCR conditions are detailed in sup table 1, including optimized underwear color and superstition ritual. #OverlyHonestMethods
Expand

Overly Honest Method @OverlyHonest
Before measurement samples were kept free from contamination & if we dropped any we totally followed the 5 second rule #OverlyHonestMethods
Expand

Overly Honest Method @OverlyHonest
We added glucose to acetaldehyde for reasons I missed whilst learning Japanese numbers from the cute exchange student #OverlyHonestMethods

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You & Your Research CV

By Tseen Khoo
The Research Whisperer

The instant impression a CV makes goes beyond one job-search or grant round. Though you may not score that job or funding for your project, the vibe you create will stay with key readers. It’s relatively common for those who are well-remembered from one round to be invited to apply in future ones.

This street runs both ways, and you’ll also be remembered if you overclaim achievements or puff up your track-record.

For your research track-record, what are the important things to remember when presenting listings of your publications and funding history?

Research Publications

When I’m assessing someone’s research CV, publication trends that set off warning bells with regard to the quality or development of a person’s work include:

• Overwhelming representation from conference papers. WHY? Because it can indicate a lack of follow-through when you present a paper and don’t develop it into an article. It gives rise to questions such as: Was what you said not worthy of being worked up into an article? Was it shot down as nonsense? Are you the kind of academic who perpetually describes what their project is, but haven’t done the work, so can’t present actual findings?

There are disciplines where conference papers are where it’s all happening (e.g. information systems), but - if your conference papers are outnumbering your refereed articles significantly - make sure that your discipline is actually one of these!

• The majority of publications are narrow in terms of outlet. WHY? It’s not a good look to publish only in a couple of journals, even if those journals are good ones. Very new or niche fields may be the exception here, but remember that developing a stronger profile often means framing your work in ways that engage with a broader range of cognate peers. If you’re only ever published in one or two journals, questions may emerge about why you aren’t publishing more widely. That’s not to say that you shouldn’t publish regularly in your area’s peak journals, just not ONLY in those journals.

• Items on the publication list tend to be short. WHY? For many scholars, it’s accepted practice to note the length of your publications (i.e. how many pages they are). This holds for books, book chapters, and refereed journal articles. While the length of a piece is dependent on many things (including disciplinary protocols and particular publications), if your work tends to be on the short side, reviewers and panelists may question your ability to contribute sustained intellectual work. For example, an article that’s fewer than 3000 words is unlikely to be an item of substance.
• Dodgy refereed publications. WHY? Actually, the first part of this may need to be “What?” – what I mean by dodgy refereed publications encompasses a range of things, including papers that are not full articles that happen to be in refereed publications (e.g. as discussion papers or contributions to a topical forum), or fully fledged articles in non-refereed publications. Sometimes, mistakes in listing these can stem from genuine ignorance of what constitutes a ‘refereed (or peer-reviewed) publication’. Other times, however, they don’t; getting this kind of thing wrong sends all the wrong signals.

Funding

When you’re listing the funding that you hold (or have held), make sure you get the details right.

As with my earlier point about listing publications as refereed when they’re not, misrepresenting one’s role in a project or the type of funding that was scored could be done with ignorance or intent. Either way, it doesn’t look good.

These are some of the recurring instances in my history of grant reviewing and job interview panelling that make me go “Hmmm...”:

• People who list unsuccessful grants. The only exception to this is possibly an internal promotion document where you’re showing that you’re consistently research active. Even so, if you’re only ever listing unsuccessfuls, maybe it’s better not to.
• Those who appear not to understand that there’s a protocol to listing a successful grant. The prestige of a grant often rests with the lead investigator; that is, they led the success of the funding and ensuing project. If you are the 3rd named chief investigator, do not swap your name to the front because it happens to be your CV - this makes it look as if you’re claiming leadership of the project.

In the same way, unless you are the lead investigator, it’s not kosher to list the grant as yours, and your collaborators as afterthoughts. If Chris Bloggs is not the lead investigator, Chris should not list it as:


• Listing grants under preparation. This is like including drafts of articles in your publications list. Unless it’s already submitted (therefore, “pending”), leave it out.

• Overclaiming involvement in a project. If you are a research assistant or employed as a postdoc on a funded project, the grant can’t be claimed as ‘yours’. Being put on as a postdoc for a successful grant is different from being part of a competitive postdoctoral round where you are awarded a fellowship. I should add that when I’ve come across these instances, they are not always on ECR CVs. It’s worthwhile getting up to speed on how track-records might be stretched for effect.

A very good way to learn how to present your research career thus far is to browse more senior colleagues’ CVs. Sure, they might have a whack of achievements that don’t apply to you (yet), but they are probably also formatted in standard sector ways that give you insight into the required tone and level of detail.

Dr Tseen Khoo is currently a research developer at RMIT University who helps academics with grant applications and to build their research track-records. She was a research-only fellow for almost ten years, and is the founding convenor of the Asian Australian Studies Research Network (AASRN).

With Jonathan O’Donnell, Tseen created and runs The Research Whisperer blog: theresearchwhisperer.wordpress.com
Over the break I was contacted by a couple of colleagues interested in taking up some tutoring work. I responded with a promise to pass on their details to any coordinators who I knew were looking for tutors, and by forwarding on offers that I couldn’t take on this semester.

One colleague responded with a set of more difficult questions: ‘How much work do you think will be available?’; ‘If I want to quit my job, how many subjects should I take on?’; ‘How can I tutor more of these specific subjects and not others?’

In the first draft of my email response, I wrote, ‘After five years of working as a casual academic I still can’t answer these questions for myself.’ I thought this response was too negative. After several re-drafts, I decided it was best to answer my colleague’s questions over coffee.

The two colleagues who contacted me have secured casual work and there appear to be a number of new faces attending pre-semester gatherings, while some familiar faces are missing this year.

This regular turnover of staff is undoubtedly a direct consequence of the insecure employment conditions offered to casual academics, as they move outside of, or elsewhere within, the tertiary sector.

As most employers would agree, a high turnover of staff comes at a great cost in the form of lost training and skills specific to a role and organisation. I wonder if it would be possible to measure the amount of knowledge, training and skills that are wasted each year through this constant turnover of casual staff?

Admittedly, universities don’t invest heavily in the advancement of their casual academic staff – although last year I attended several paid teaching and learning workshops.
It was at one of these workshops that we discussed the concept of ‘tacit’ knowledge. Tacit knowledge is the kind of knowledge that is too complex to be stated, it cannot be transferred through written instructions; it is shared through regular interaction and personal contact.

From my experience of working for a university, tacit knowledge is integral in the day to day running, planning and improvement of our tertiary institutions. I think it would be an interesting exercise to estimate the value of tacit knowledge possessed by a majority casual workforce – where the information ends up belonging to individuals and not to the institution.

How much capacity building experience and knowledge do universities lose each year through their employment practices?

I shared some of my own tacit knowledge with a new staff member at our school over the break. This new lecturer on a 0.5 FTE casual appointment is taking on a subject that I've tutored over the past three years. In those three years, there have been three different coordinators. Each year the newest staff member taking on this subject asks me the same question: What worked and what didn't work last year?

This is a difficult question to answer, because coordinating is not just about the specific content to the subject. It's about the culture within the school and the course; students' attitudes towards the content; where the subject sits within the course and what the school's expectations are in relation to the subject.

All of this knowledge cannot easily be written down in a manual or list of instructions, as this kind of information is not explicit; it's tacit knowledge.

Tacit knowledge enables schools to develop and deliver better subjects. However, every year this knowledge is lost to universities through the constant turn over of casual staff. Because, for example, the knowledge I have about this particular subject belongs to me and not the university.

I shared my experience, outside of my contract, unpaid, with this new staff member. I am sure I am not the first, nor last, casual academic to freely share this valuable kind of information.

Whether you work in research, teaching or both it's highly likely that you have information to share that is indispensible to your institution. If universities are institutions of knowledge, it would make sense to invest in this tacit knowledge by offering more secure roles for academic staff.

Tacit knowledge has been associated with improving organisational performance, developing organisational learning and innovation, as well as promoting competitive advantage. In struggling sectors it can be a necessity for survival.

However, for organisations to capitalise on tacit knowledge it needs to be shared amongst individuals and this is best achieved through strong ties between staff members.

When I have worked for consultancy firms, the importance of tacit knowledge to job performance has been understood and the sharing of this knowledge encouraged. This required attendance at the odd (sometimes irritating) staff retreat or participation in (sometimes embarrassing) team building physical activity.

If commercially competitive firms are aware of the value of this kind of information sharing to the effective performance of their staff, why aren’t universities also aware of its value?

With the marketisation of universities, I argue that more secure employment conditions for academics would retain academic staff. The return on this investment will be better educational and efficiency outcomes through the preservation and expansion of tacit knowledge.

The Sessional Academic blogs at hyperlinkacademia.blogspot.com.au
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The Greens’ House of Representatives MP Adam Bandt has introduced a private member’s Bill to amend the Fair Work Act, seeking improvements for the thousands of Australian workers affected by insecure employment.

The Fair Work Amendment (Tackling Job Insecurity) Bill 2012 would provide a mechanism for workers employed as casuals or on fixed-term contracts to move to either full-time or part-time ongoing employment.

When the Bill was first released in November 2012, Mr Bandt said, ‘A growing number of Australian workers find themselves in ‘insecure’ employment, such as long-term casual employment or rolling contracts.

“Too many Australian workers have little economic security and little control over their working lives. This makes it harder for them to plan their lives or commit to long term arrangements like getting a mortgage.

“This is a particular problem for women, who are more likely to find themselves in insecure employment.

“The rates of temporary work in Australia are staggering, with around a quarter of employees having no paid leave entitlements. Spain is the only country in the OECD with a higher rate of temporary work than Australia.”

The Bill would amend the Fair Work Act to provide a process for workers employed on an ‘insecure’ basis to be moved to ongoing employment on a part-time or full-time basis.

An employee who is a casual or fixed-term contract employee could ask their employer to move to ongoing part-time or full-time employment. If an employer refuses a request then an application could be made to Fair Work Australia (FWA) who could issue a ‘secure employment order’. In considering the application, FWA would have to consider the needs of employees to have secure jobs and stable employment, and the genuine needs of business to use arrangements that are not secure employment arrangements.

FWA would also be able to make orders to maintain existing secure employment arrangements. The right of small businesses to use genuine casual employees would be preserved, with those employees excluded from the operation of the Bill.

Unions and employer groups would also be able to apply directly to FWA for secure employment orders on behalf of both an eligible person who has had a request refused, and classes of eligible people, such as a particular industry, kind of work, type of employment or employer.

The Greens’ Bill picks up some of the key recommendations in the Lives on Hold report, the independent inquiry into insecure work in Australia chaired by former Deputy Prime Minister Brian Howe and released by the ACTU last May.

NTEU has made a submission to the current Senate inquiry into the Bill, including a number of recommendations to strengthen the Bill’s purpose. These include:

1. The Fair Work Act should be amended to incorporate a ‘Secure Employment Principle’ for Modern Awards and Enterprise Agreements. This would be an overarching principle that enshrines ongoing employment as the ‘norm’.
2. The right to request flexible work arrangements should be extended and strengthened by:
   • Extending the ability to request flexible working arrangements to all workers, not just those with caring responsibilities.
   • Enabling decisions of employers to deny requests for flexible working arrangements to be challenged in the Fair Work Commission as disputes.
3. The Bargaining System should be improved by removing the existing restrictions on the contents of Enterprise Agreements as they relate to the use of contractors and labour hire firms.
4. There should be access to unfair dismissal remedies in circumstances where the purpose of the use of limited term employment is to avoid the employer’s obligations.
5. The Bill should be amended to ensure that the Fair Work Information Statement, required to be given by employers to all new employees advising them of their basic employment entitlements under the Act, includes information about the right to request secure working arrangements and seek secure work orders.

Meanwhile, the ACTU is putting further pressure on the Federal Government to seriously address the growing incidence of insecure work.

Speaking at the National Press Club on 6 February, ACTU Secretary Dave Oliver called on the Government to introduce a portable leave scheme that would enable workers to maintain and move their annual and sick leave entitlements from employer to employer.

He said that schemes enabling employees in the building and construction sector to move their long service leave and other entitlements between employers were long established and successful, and could provide a model for a broader system covering all Australian workers.
The best place I ever worked was a non-union shop. That sounds like an anti-union comment, but it is far from it. The employer in question, Edward H. O’Brien (Milson’s Point), went out of its way to ensure that its employees were both happy and secure in their job. There was even an active feedback system, where staff concerns were actually addressed and acted upon. In response to these arrangements, the staff was extraordinarily loyal and hard working – an outstanding case of the employer valuing the workforce and its contribution to the success of its own business.

My working life now stretches well over three decades, in different industries and sectors. My journey began in the Port Kembla steelworks, through manufacturing, service and publishing industries, and now tertiary education, in Australia, England and the Republic of Ireland. With the notable exception mentioned above, the workplaces where I have been shafted have been non-union.

I have been part of militant and passive unions, but the thing that binds them together is the union. As an individual employee, you have no voice – if the employer wants to change your workplace conditions or pay to something that you do not agree with then that is just tough. Only by standing together does an employee have any bargaining power.

The whinging freeloaders who complain about the unions in society are standing on the shoulders of the unionists who have gone before them, enjoying the benefits that others have fought and suffered for. Even for those who acknowledge the role that unions have played in history, it is placed in just those terms – history, that is, not a needed part of modern society. Quite the reverse is the case, as it is now that unions are really needed to counter the devastation that casualisation causes to family life and wellbeing.

For the last six years I have worked as an academic in the Faculty of Education, University of Wollongong. In that time we have had to move home twice, including over Christmas 2012, on both occasions because our landlord decided to sell the house we were renting. Each time we enquired into mortgages, so that there would be no upheaval for our four children, but were unable to find a mortgage at a sensible rate because I am only casually employed, while my wife is self-employed.

We view ourselves as honest and decent people, so why should the university sector be able to manipulate and marginalise us in order to maintain a non-rationalist agenda? The lack of job security and associated effects are detrimental to employee wellbeing – all the loyalty in the world counts for nothing if you can be terminated tomorrow. Employee welfare belongs at the forefront of any business. That is a lesson that Edward H. O’Brien was well aware of thirty years ago, but has been lost in the university sector in pursuit of profit over excellence and decency.

Russell Walton is an academic at the University of Wollongong and an NTEU member.
The ACTU will make the ‘Secure Jobs. Better Future’ campaign the centrepiece of its campaigning activities around this year’s federal election.

Speaking at the National Press Club on 6 February, ACTU Secretary Dave Oliver outlined the key aspects of the campaign during 2015, and the reasons why.

“The increase in insecure work is affecting more people across workplaces than any other, and is the issue that working people have told us needs to be addressed if we are to keep the notion of a work life balance and a fair go,” Oliver said.

“The rise of insecure work has been a silent, creeping yet fundamental shift in the economy over the past 20 years, with major implications for people’s lives and for our economy.

“We want to work with the Government, we want to work with employers, and we want to work with the best minds from our universities and the community sector.

“To this end we will be hosting a secure jobs summit in Canberra in March - bringing people together to talk about the issue and begin the discussion about ways to solve the problem.

“And we will continue to campaign on this issue no matter who wins the election. This is an agenda that is about working people, not an election cycle.”

The National Community Summit will be held in Canberra on 13-14 March. It is being convened to build a progressive policy agenda for Australia’s future, and form new partnerships between the trade union movement, the community sector and the country’s leading thinkers.

Speakers will include former Deputy Prime Minister Brian Howe, who chaired the independent inquiry into insecure work in Australia that produced the landmark Lives on Hold report; Dr Cassandra Goldie, CEO of the Australian Council of Social Service; Dr John Falzon, Chief Executive of the St Vincent de Paul Society; and leading workplace researcher Professor John Buchanan from the University of Sydney.

Union and community sector activists will be able to attend and participate in wide-ranging discussions about developing successful, strong and equitable communities.
Rhoda, casual administrative assistant, western suburbs of Sydney, NSW

“We are actually looking for a house to buy now... The catch is, I must have a permanent job status to be able to get a mortgage from the bank.”

Oliver also outlined the ACTU’s proposal for a portable leave scheme for workers in insecure employment, that would enable them to maintain and move their annual and sick leave entitlements from employer to employer.

“We live in a world where many people have two or three employers one week, and the next week just one. In this world, entitlements that we all agree should be the right of everyone with an Australian job – things like annual leave and sick leave – don’t translate very well,” Oliver said.

“If you’re doing nine hours at one childcare employer and 18 hours at another, and you get sick, at the moment, you probably have no right to sick pay from either boss.

“Now, some industries have solved this problem. In many parts of the construction industry, those entitlements travel with you, across employers from job to job, accruing regardless of who’s paying you.

“We go into this election saying that all workers should have this. As Australians, we work hard, and we deserve our holidays. When we get sick our bills don’t stop – we need to know that we’ll still be able to make rent or cover the mortgage. They are things that every working Australian should have.

“And the way to achieve that is through a national scheme to make those entitlements available to everyone, by making them portable.”

Oliver called on the Federal Government to provide better protection for penalty rates for working on weekends.

He said, "Of course, the other thing that Australians enjoy is their weekends. It means time with family and friends, it means that you don’t just live to work, but work to live.

"We’re not against weekend work, but working on the weekend should mean something different. There is an extra sacrifice we take when we miss the football or can’t go out with our friends. And employers need to know that working weekends is different. That’s what penalty rates are about.

“That’s why we’ll be asking the Government to enshrine penalty rates for weekend work – in legislation, to protect it forever.”

Further information on the ACTU Secure Jobs. Better Future campaign and the National Community Summit can be found at www.securejobs.org.au.
In early April, NTEU delegates will gather at RMIT University in Melbourne to consider the difficult issues confronting university teaching today. Casualisation of teaching is clearly a dominant workforce and quality issue, but it is the manifestation of an unprecedented challenge to learning and teaching at Australian universities and to the academic profession.

We have rapidly transitioned from an elite to a mass participation system, at the same time as the dominance of neo-liberal ideology has sanctioned the withdrawal of government from substantial responsibility for funding public universities. The traditional structure of university learning and teaching has broken down, and the relationship between academics and students has transformed in a generation. While rose coloured glasses are far too often employed by older academics as they reminisce about sitting at the feet of their learned professor or listening to his “bon mots over a beer and cigar at the pub, this is a far cry from tutorials that are bigger than high school classes and taught by a tutor employed by the hour.

Lectures may not be the best way to learn and teach but a good lecture is a joy – and today’s practice of timetabling lecture theatres too small for the enrolment numbers on the assumption that students will give up trying to get a seat is cynical and unacceptable. Because, of course, the fall back is now that students can ‘just download’ the ‘captured’ lecture and listen in their own time and follow up with the tutor online. It will have to be online because in the overcrowded one hour tute there was no opportunity to answer everyone’s questions – and certainly no time to prompt questions and comments out of those fiddling with their phones down the back. The adaption of digital technologies for the purpose of avoiding employing lecturers and tutors is scandalous and has obscured constructive discourse about digital communication technologies and university learning and teaching. Apparently though, everyone is in favour of ‘blended’ learning. Or are they?

This is only the tip of the iceberg of the serious issues that will challenge the speakers and all participants at the NTEU National Teaching Conference.

The conference is built around the key themes of:

- Learning and teaching in a mass higher education system.
- The digital revolution and tertiary learning and teaching, and
- Autonomy and authority in higher education courses and curriculum.

The conference aims are to more deeply consider the national policy directions and political discourse on tertiary learning and teaching, including the distinguishing characteristics of higher education pedagogies, university autonomy and intellectual freedom; to analyse the current research and commentary on the future of the ‘university’ and the academic role; and to canvass the views and experiences of members engaged in learning and teaching.

Six panels will explore the three themes over the two days, addressing learning and teaching in the digital age; curriculum and assessment in a mass system; what do students want (and need); the work of university teaching; autonomy and accountability; and the internationalisation of curriculum and mission.

Each NTEU Branch is sending at least one delegate and the conference is open to all members. Academic casuals will also be attending from each Division.

“I use ‘his’ purposefully because this supposed halcyon age was also one of men protecting male privilege, as women fought to get into the academic hierarchy – and I am talking only one generation ago.”

Jeanie Rea, National President

For more information, please visit the conference website: www.nteu.org.au/ntc2013

Since 1958, the Australian Universities’ Review has been encouraging debate and discussion about issues in higher education and its contribution to Australian public life.

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I want to join NTEU

I am currently a member and wish to update my details

The information on this form is needed for aspects of NTEU’s work and will be treated as confidential.

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**YOUR EMPLOYMENT GROUP**

- [ ] ACADEMIC STAFF
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- [ ] TEACHING & RESEARCH
- [ ] RESEARCH ONLY
- [ ] TEACHING INTENSIVE
- [ ] OTHER:

**EMPLOYMENT CATEGORY & TERM**

- [ ] FULL TIME
- [ ] PART TIME
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**PAYROLL DEDUCTION AUTHORITY**

I hereby authorise the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) APCA (ACRA Lib ID 660284) to arrange for funds to be debited from my salary by regular instalments, due and owing, (as determined from time to time by the Union), to NTEU or its authorised agents. All payments on your behalf and in accordance with this authority shall be deemed to be payments by you personally. This authority shall remain in force until revoked by you in writing. I also consent to my employer supplying NTEU with updated information relating to my employment status.

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**REGULARITY OF PAYMENT**

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- [ ] QUARTERLY
- [ ] HALF-YEARLY
- [ ] ANNUALLY

**5% DISCOUNT FOR ANNUAL DIRECT DEBIT**

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1. Choose your salary range.
2. Select 6 month or 1 year membership.
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4. If you are casual/sessional complete payment option 1, 2 or 3.

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Processed on the 15th of the month or following working day

Date of expiry: Location and office of service:

- (03) 9254 1910
- (03) 9254 1915
- national@nteu.org.au

**MAIL TO:**

NTEU National Office
PO Box 1323, South Melbourne VIC 3205
T (03) 9254 1910
F (03) 9254 1915
E national@nteu.org.au

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I HEREBY APPLY FOR MEMBERSHIP OF NTEU, ANY BRANCH AND ANY ASSOCIATED BODY ESTABLISHED AT MY WORKPLACE.

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