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Dumb cuts = more casualisation

Question: What will the latest university cuts mean for students?

Answer: Going by the universities’ past responses, more job losses and program cuts. And more casualisation of university teaching, which means that more students are relying upon lecturers and tutors paid for a few hours a week during semester to provide their learning and teaching. Casually employed academics do the best they can and are grossly exploited by universities relying upon them to put in many hours of unpaid work.

This was the main question the NTEU was asked by journalists after the $900 million ‘efficiency dividend’ cut to university block operating grants was announced by the Government on 13 April. This cut, along with the abolition of $2000 annual scholarships to students on Youth Allowance, plus the complete abolition of discounts for upfront HECS payments, will garner $2.3 billion in savings, which the Government claimed would partially offset the costs of the new schools funding model coming out of the Gonski Review. The Union immediately condemned these further cuts to higher education funding, emphasising that this meant over $4 billion has been cut since 2011. We were dumbfounded at the slashing of higher education to pay for school education, but then so were most people, including Mr Gonski.

The efficiency dividend cut of 2% next year, then another 1.25% the following year with the consequent costs of the new schools funding model coming out of the Gonski Review. The Union immediately condemned these cuts to higher education funding, emphasising that this meant over $4 billion has been cut since 2011. We were dumbfounded at the slashing of higher education to pay for school education, but then so were most people, including Mr Gonski.

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The follow up Lomax-Smith Base Funding Review echoed the call for increased funding. However, the Government ignored the former recommendation and shelved the later review. NTEU has been continuously campaigning for this conservative 10% increase, as has Universities Australia.

Unfortunately, in vice-chancellors’ angry reaction to the latest cuts they failed to state that jobs and programs would be protected as a priority. They could have said they would not cooperate. Instead they declared the cuts would unfortunately lead to job losses and program closures. So what could the NTEU say other than that these latest cuts would make worse the already dire reality in universities, which has already reached a breaking point?

The plight of casually employed academics has been front and centre to the public discussion of the impact of the latest university cuts. There is high recognition that this is not good enough for the future of universities or the next generation of academics. Last month, the NTEU described the casualisation of the workforce as the ‘dirty little secret of university expansion’ at the public parliamentary hearing into Adam Bandt’s Insecure Employment Bill. In a blog response on one website a casual academic said:

‘Yes sadly this is not a secret. In fact I was told by another person working in my institution (he is lucky enough to be on a contract from years ago…) that it’s done to keep us on our toes! I am a woman, who has been working on casual short term contracts for seven years and also deliver a large proportion of lectures in our course. I tried to claim half an hour for administration/planning for the last fortnight and was asked to explain myself. When asked by my HoS what we could do about collegiality and collaboration in the school I thought to myself, well perhaps we need to give people more security in their workplace for a start. It seems to me to be a very short sighted and unsustainable way of educating our future leaders and professionals. Retraining and getting out of this system is very attractive to say the least!’

Casualisation of the academic workforce is no longer a secret, but we are still to see commitments from university management to offer more secure jobs. There is some welcome movement on the NTEU’s enterprise bargaining initiatives for the creation of the Scholarly Teaching Fellows (STFs) as well as Early Career Development Fellowships (ECDFs). The current Labor Government says that it is up to the universities, while the universities blame inadequate government funding. A Coalition Government, going by their past record, will have even less concern for the security of the future academic workforce and, even worse, may directly intervene against union and collective bargaining rights. It is more important than ever to encourage colleagues to join and get active in the Union – and the ‘Uni Cuts Dumb Cuts’ campaign at www.dumbcuts.org.au.

Jeannie Rea, NTEU National President
Dumb cuts harm postgrads

When postgraduate students across Australia woke up on 13 April, little did we know we were in for a rude shock – an announcement from the brand-new Minister for Higher Education, Craig Emerson, of cuts to the already drastically under-funded higher education sector to the tune of $2.3 billion.

Even on its own, $2.3 billion represents the largest amount to be cut from the higher education sector since 1996, the first year of John Howard’s term as Prime Minister. But these cuts also added to the close to $1 billion that had already been taken from research education late in 2012 as part of the Mid-Year Budget Review.

It came as a shock to see a Government that has staked its success on education robbing from universities in this way. It alarmed students further to see the Opposition commit a few days later to supporting these cuts if they are successful at the election on September 14 – even though they would not continue the Gonski reforms the cuts are designed to pay for.

Claiming that the Government has progressively increased funding to the sector since their election in 2007 is an argument that values quantity over quality. 2013 has seen the uncapping of undergraduate tertiary places – this represents an opportunity for young people from increasingly diverse backgrounds to undertake tertiary study, but it also places strain on an already critically under-funded sector.

For prospective postgraduate students planning a return to study after time spent at work or caring for family, the conversion of start-up scholarships into student loans will represent a genuine threat. Many will ask whether further study is really worth all the extra debt.

For Higher Degree by Research (HDR) students, the capping of tax claims on education expenses at $2,000 is a policy change that will disproportionately affect them. Postgraduates at this level are often required to undertake up-skilling, to buy expensive study materials or to undertake travel as an integral part of their research. Our 2012 report into the HDR student experience illustrated that the burden of cost was a significant roadblock to postgraduate students attempting to broaden their research experience.

And for those of us already working within the sector as sessional teachers, or hoping to pursue a career in academia, the $900 million loss in ‘efficiency dividends’ will result in the terrifying prospect of even more job uncertainty. Many universities have already warned staff what these cuts might mean to their careers.

In my own five years as a representative of university students and working within the sector, it is difficult to think of a moment that has so united representatives from across all levels of the higher education environment – from students to teaching staff, from university administrators to peak bodies. Ours has been a united message – taking from the higher education sector to give to primary and secondary education is a case of robbing Peter to pay Paul.

On the day of the Federal Budget, 14 May, CAPA was proud to support the NTEU’s national day of protest as part of the Dumb Cuts campaign. We were out in strong force at the rallies in Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney, Brisbane and Perth, with postgraduates also active at rural campuses across Australia.

For CAPA, these recent events within the higher education environment will mean a federal election campaign that is very tough – and very important to the postgraduates we represent. We will be joining forces with the National Union of Students and the NTEU to bring a message to students of strength in solidarity. We know that postgraduates will be thinking seriously about the implications to higher education as they make a choice at the ballot box, and we will be there to help by lobbying candidates and by providing concise and non-partisan policy information to students across Australia.

I look forward to seeing you on campus as the campaign progresses.

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.

To be added to our mailing list and to hear more about our campaign as the election approaches, send me an email at president@capa.edu.au.

Meghan Hopper
CAPA President
The Presidents of the Council of Australian Postgraduate Associations (CAPA) and the National Union of Students (NUS) recently made a joint visit to Swinburne University of Technology in support of the local student union and sessional academics, with staff currently undertaking industrial action as part of their long campaign for an Enterprise Bargaining Agreement.

CAPA President Meghan Hopper and NUS President Jade Tyrrell joined with Caroline Baker, President of the Swinburne Student Union (SSU), and other officebearers to provide students with information about the industrial action and to share a sausage at the SSU’s weekly barbeque, which is provided free for members.

With teaching staff currently withholding Semester 1 results in an effort to reach a negotiation process with Swinburne University administration, the SSU – which represents both undergraduates and postgraduates – is working with the NTEU to ensure that students are fairly represented through an exemptions process.

Students may apply to the SSU to have their application for exemption considered if they urgently require their results, with the student union President meeting with NTEU representatives every three days to swiftly process applications.

Swinburne University had undertaken an aggressive and misleading public campaign that left students confused about the nature of the industrial action being taken on their campus, said CAPA President Meghan Hopper.

‘After the industrial action was announced, Swinburne University posted a heavily loaded poll on its Facebook page that promoted a lot of misunderstanding and encouraged students to side against reasonable industrial action on their campus,’ Ms Hopper said.

‘We are concerned that some students may have been misled into believing that SSU is responsible for the withholding of results. While the Student Union is supportive of the NTEU’s decision to take industrial action in their pursuit of a fair EBA negotiation, their main goal is to support students through that process and ensure that those students who require exemptions, have ready access to them,’ said Ms Hopper.

‘The NUS President, Jade Tyrrell, and I visited the Swinburne University campus at Hawthorn to draw attention to the exceptional work that the Swinburne Student Union is doing to advocate for students during a very stressful period,’ said Ms Hopper.

‘Exams start on 7 June, so that is causing some anxiety and negativity,’ said Caroline Baker, SSU President. ‘However, students can apply for an exemption if they are suffering from anxiety and this won’t impact students who are graduating.

‘The university has asked students to name teachers who withhold results. It’s a way of naming and shaming them, which helps create this negative feeling.’

Continuing the trend of Swinburne University failing to negotiate in good faith, it took eighteen months for the Swinburne Student Union to secure a Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF) agreement with their University, with the organisation forced in the meantime to fund its activities from student memberships and events. Swinburne is also one of the only universities in Victoria to have used recent State Legislative changes to remove all staff and student representation from its Council.

Ms Hopper also noted the importance of the NTEU’s industrial action for postgraduate students.

‘Many of the postgraduates that CAPA represents are also sessional teaching staff seeking a secure and fair workplace. As we approach the upcoming semester break, with sessionals madly stockpiling their marking and tutoring money to get through the coming weeks without work, it’s important for undergraduates to reflect on the fact that a lot of their teachers are also students, just like them.’
Casualisation is ‘the dirty little secret of university expansion over the past decade’, NTEU told public parliamentary hearings into the insecure employment bill last month. General Secretary Grahame McCulloch said the ‘casualisation’ of universities was directly related to their systemic underfunding over the past two decades.

‘For nearly twenty years grants to universities have been indexed at about 1.5 % per annum (worth only a third of annual cost rises), which ultimately constituted a very large productivity gain. Student/staff ratios nearly doubled, and the casual workforce expanded threefold,’ he said.

McCulloch appeared before a parliamentary hearing on Adam Bandt’s Fair Work Amendment (Tackling Job Insecurity) Bill 2012 on 24 May in Melbourne. McCulloch said it would result in a fairer future for many, many Australian workers, including staff at universities and research institutes.

‘I think most people would not anticipate that casual employment in particular, as well as fixed-term employment, is overwhelmingly the dominant form of employment in the university sector. I think most people’s present vision of the sector would still assume tenured professors and all of the associated cultural trappings that go with that. Nothing really could be further from the truth in the contemporary university environment,’ McCulloch told the hearing.

‘If you looked at the university system 20 years ago, you had a student-to-staff ratio of about 12 to one, but that was measuring a direct full-time labour force. Today, it is 22 to one on average, but it can be as high as 100 to one in some instances. At the same time, the size of the casual labour force has increased almost fourfold so that now the majority of undergraduate teaching is carried out by casual academic labour.

‘To give you an idea of the scale of that, there are about 200,000 employees in the sector, and of that 70,000 are in some kind of permanent standard employment arrangement, 45,000 are on fixed-term contracts of three years duration or less, and fully the balance, which is close to 70,000, is in casual hourly-paid employment. The reasons for this are many and varied, and the bill can only be part, even in our industry, of an overall response.’

The Bill picks up on one of the recommendations from the 2012 Howe Inquiry into Insecure Work (published by the ACTU as the ‘Lives on Hold’ report) by enabling employees or unions to apply to Fair Work Australia for a ‘secure employment order’.

‘The individual right to request conversion from casual or fixed-term employment to on-going was inserted into awards covering general staff at universities back in 2004. However, most employees are too scared of getting the sack to exercise this right,’ McCulloch said.

The orders would be a boon for both long-term casuals and fixed-termers who are denied secure employment as a cost-cutting measure, despite their work being on-going, and for long-term researchers in universities and research institutes who are employed on rolling contracts for a year or more.

‘The excuse always proffered is that the work is supported by external research grants. However, many researchers have general skills that make them deployable from one research project to the next and could easily be employed on an on-going basis. This is an issue that the newly-formed NTEU Research Institute Branch is naturally keen to pursue.’

The inquiry received 20 submissions from unions, employer associations and community organisations. Appearing before the parliamentary hearing alongside the NTEU were the ACTU, which supported the NTEU position, and the Australian Industry Group (AIG), the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry (ACCI) and the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), which were all opposed.

Stephen Smith, AIG National Director of Workplace Relations, told the hearing: ‘The Bill appears to be premised on union assertions that there is a casualisation and fixed-term employment problem in Australia and that employees engaged on a casual or fixed-term basis lack a guaranteed safety net. In reality, there is no such problem... Many employees prefer casual employment—it is not a second-class form of employment as the unions allege... In its attempts to restrict casual and fixed term employment, the bill not only restricts import and flexibility relied on by employers
Member submission: Linda Röhrs

My name is Linda Röhrs and I am a sessional academic. Since I gave up a lucrative career in accounting, I have had the privilege (and pain) of teaching at the Faculty of Business and Enterprise Swinburne and the BEC Swinburne TAFE. To be able to live I have also worked at a number of other universities and TAFEs. My hours have varied greatly, first around 6 hours per week, increasing to around 21 per week, but only during teaching weeks (2 semesters of 11 weeks each year). This year my hours have dropped to 4, giving me barely enough income to buy food. Fortunately I own my own home outright.

For the first three years I was given no facilities, and was not made aware that there might be facilities for sessional staff. I used my private computer, printer and stationery. Once I found out about the FBE sessional office, I made great use of this. It also enabled me to collaborate, learn and then mentor other sessional staff. The camaraderie in this room is truly wonderful. There were times when the computers were all occupied, which sometimes lead to being unable to prepare as much as I would have liked. This room, located amongst other staff offices, enabled us to mix with non-sessional staff again leading to collaboration.

Unfortunately, Swinburne has moved sessional staff to another level well away from non-sessional staff. Whilst the facilities here are in many ways superior, there is no possibility of collaboration with non-sessional staff. We are now cut off from them and from kitchen facilities.

Over the years, there has been some effort made for induction and some education for sessional staff. There have been some staff socialisers, enabling sessional staff to be informed of facilities and to meet other sessional staff. This practice seems to have ceased some years ago. The only training I have received are four online training courses (compulsory) on OHS, bullying, etc.

As I had decided to leave full time work to make a contribution to the education of the next generation of accountants, I was relatively happy with a dramatic pay cut and the likely shorter working hours. My experience though has been that only the last 3 weeks and 1 day I worked just as many hours. Time off to meet family responsibilities and lifestyle choices.

Not surprisingly, Daniel Mammone from ACCI, trotted out similar arguments about how the Bill would reduce business flexibility and ‘create legal uncertainty’ for employers: ‘I can and I do sympathise when I hear from people saying, ‘I need more certainty in terms of paying the mortgage and those sorts of things’. We sympathise with that but the reality is that unfortunately the expectations of employees and workers and the business just cannot meet 100 per cent of the time.

DEEWR Deputy Secretary, John Kovacic, claimed (incorrectly) that the Bill would allow casuals to be converted to permanent employment without their agreement, and then reiterated the neo-liberal ‘flexibility’ mantra: ‘I think that degree of flexibility that sessional staff and some casual workers is an important criterion in preferring that form of work over other forms of work… The other side of the equation is the loss of flexibility for employers.’

It does seem grossly unfair that casual staff are left in the dark on matters of faculty changes, university social events, education and collaboration. We do not have any rights are far as standard employees – leave, unfair dismissal. We are not even hired on a competitive basis. We have no certainty on hours, even having hours cut as late as the fifth week of semester. There is a clause that classes/hours can be cut with as little as one hour’s notice.

It is also quite unreasonable that the university expects flexibility of sessional staff (only) yet does not appear to have any hesitation to make changes to conditions, facilities, hours, etc. It is my understanding that sessional staff make up more than half the teaching hours at Swinburne. This is putting more and more pressure on sessional staff to provide students with their additional learning needs. If only half my students need five minutes of my time each week, I would be adding an extra hour per tutorial each week on top of the already extra time required.

Many people see the high hourly rate $75, and say that I am lucky to earn so much. What is not clear is that I usually prepare approximately 2 hours for every hour of tutorial teaching, with an average of 1 to 1½ hours of (unpaid) associated administration, bring the rate to $16. Lecturing is paid at a higher rate, but it takes roughly 3 hours to prepare for an hour’s lecture. Often lecturing requires far more student contact and this would average to perhaps 2 hours per week. It rises to as much as 5 – 10 hours in the last 2 or 3 weeks.

The impact on my finances has been much worse than I had planned. The pay is quite poor, compared with both non-sessional staff and industry. This year I am looking at earning around $18,000. This means that I am forced to rely more and more on savings to live. This in turn means that my retirement will be delayed, or not as comfortable as planned. The lack of certainty has also made it very difficult to obtain finance/credit. Recently I wanted to change credit card facility. The first bank turned me down flat. Imagine at $53, with a spotless credit record, house paid off many years ago, no other debt, and not being able to obtain a $2,000 credit card. The second company I prepared a statement showing employment over 10 years and they very reluctantly accepted my application.

I love teaching, I love working at Swinburne. I just feel that there should be greater certainty from Swinburne towards sessional staff. The gap between sessional academics and non-sessional academics must be closed. Sessional staff should have some comfort in knowing that they have work for the semester. In fact it is possible to plan with some reasonable certainty for teaching requirements for many years to the extent that sessional staff should be offered contracts with the same rate of superannuation, same leave entitlements and a real sense of belonging. We should be precariously perched on a cliff, being denied the benefits of being regular employees.

On 5 June, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Education and Employment, which called the inquiry, announced it would not be supporting the Bill: ‘The committee shares the concerns raised by stakeholders that the bill’s unclear terminology and inconsistency with current Fair Work legislation, enterprise agreements, and modern awards could create confusion and potentially damage employers’ and employees’ confidence in Australia’s industrial relations framework.’

Bandt responded by saying how ‘very disappointed’ he was with the Parliament: ‘… when we could have had the opportunity to tackle this growing problem, we have seen no legislation action and now have Labor and the Coalition saying, ‘Don’t pass the bill!’ It is very likely that this parliament will rise without having taking one single step to tackle the scourge of job insecurity.

The Bill is likely to go to the vote on 20 June.

More info www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bId=r5028

read online at www.unicasual.org.au
**ACTU election focus**

**Job & income insecurity**

On 5 June, the ACTU launched a campaign for a better life for workers and their families under the banner ‘Australian Unions. Join. For a better life.’ The campaign will highlight the role that unions continue to play standing up for basic rights at work.

While initially focussed towards the federal election in September, this is a long term campaign to increase union membership and activism, as well as identify the issues for workers today and put ongoing pressure upon both Labor and the Coalition’s industrial relations policies.

The campaign launch comes with a series of television advertisements highlighting the increasing pressures many workers face from the demands of their employers, and how these are impacting their lives outside of work.

‘The ads show Australians in situations which are all too common for many workers. Missing out on an important moment in a child’s life, being unable to get a loan from a bank, and being unable to say anything about a problem at work because their employer has too much power, and an individual without support has too little,’ said ACTU Secretary, Dave Oliver.

‘That’s why unions are standing up for a better life for all workers and their families. Joining a union is a positive step that we need to ask more Australians to take so that we can improve the conditions that they have at work and the lives they enjoy outside of work.’

This campaign takes up the themes and issues of the Secure Jobs Better Future campaign and the outcomes of the Howe inquiry into insecure work in which the NTEU had strong participation including both officials and casual academics giving evidence around Australia.

NTEU is now participating in the Public Sector component of the campaign, with Policy & Research Officer Terri MacDonald seconded to provide research and strategic planning expertise.

Watch the ‘Loan’ video at youtu.be/PIWE8GKSjFY and the ‘Race’ video at youtu.be/uopPvsS7UE or visit the ACTU YouTube page www.youtube.com/user/yrawma

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**Brainstorm!**

What advice would you give your supervisors and colleagues?

If you were actually asked, what would you advise your subject or course coordinator or Head of School to improve your working conditions?

What would you put on a checklist for supervisors and sessionals to jointly check off to ensure that working conditions are being met – pay, payment for marking, other payment, facilities, access to professional development, tertiary teaching certificate, department meetings, travel between sites..?

What would you like to ask of your colleagues – to be included in staff professional and social events, course team meetings, moderation and assessment panels, research groups, even a hello at the photocopier..?

Go to www.unicasual.org.au/brainstorm to make your suggestions. We will prepare an advice/checklist to give to supervisors and colleagues.

Or contact NTEU National President Jeannie Rea directly at jrea@nteu.org.au
I’m a senior lecturer in Urban Geography at the University of Sydney. I work closely with people on casual contracts who are engaged as tutors and demonstrators on undergraduate units of study that I teach and coordinate.

Most of these casuals are postgraduate students in my School. And I love working with them. They’re dedicated, energetic, and bring their own perspectives to the material we teach, which keeps things interesting for me and for the students. Based on past evaluations of those units of study, I know how much the undergraduates value the opportunity to engage with, and learn from, research students in their field.

But I’m highly conscious that these benefits to the undergraduate students, and to my School more generally, come at a price to those who work as casuals.

As a unionist, I do what I can to make sure that the casual tutors and demonstrators are paid for the work they do — which means building in reasonable expectations about extras like preparation and marking that too often go unpaid across the sector. But when budgets are tight, and paid hours are tightly constrained, I know that many of them put in unpaid hours because they are committed to doing the best job they can. They’re unlikely to refuse student requests for assistance outside classes, for example, but also unlikely to be paid for this work.

The tutors and demonstrators also occupy a very uncertain place in the academy. They are workers, contributing to the services offered by the School, but rarely find themselves included in the life of the School as recognised members of staff.

They also have to live with the uncertainty of not knowing whether they will have work from one semester to the next. This applies both to postgraduate students who depend on tutoring to add to their scholarships to pay the rent in this expensive city, and to those who are now off scholarship and depending on casual work for their entire livelihood as they search for secure employment. The School’s teaching offerings would collapse without them, but it’s the casuals who are treated as the ‘lucky’ ones if they are offered contracts in any given semester.

It’s time to better recognise and compensate the contributions that people who tutor and demonstrate make to my School and countless others — with less precarious forms of employment and with decent career paths.

Kurt Iveson is an academic at the University of Sydney and an NTEU member.

Watch the video of Kurt, a member of the Sydney University Branch Bargaining Team, discussing Casualisation and the Academic Workforce Claims in this round of Bargaining

youtu.be/MQZuNd8nJ-s

Or visit the NTEU USyd YouTube page

www.youtube.com/user/NTEUUSYD
Strike a Pose
Just how flexible are casual academics?

By Claire Parfitt, Sharni Chan and Janin Bredehoeft

Claire Parfitt is an NTEU member and a research student at the University of Sydney, with experience in the legal profession, environmental and trade union movements.

Sharni Chan is a research officer at the Social Policy Research Centre, UNSW, and an NTEU member. Her PhD examines the ways in which professionals mediate precarious work in their everyday lives. She is a member of the USYD Casuals Network and the Casual Academic Collective.

Janin Bredehoeft is a PhD student with the Political Economy Department at Sydney University, and an NTEU member. Her thesis is investigating ‘work’ at today’s universities in a comparative study between three countries.

Photo: Members of the Sydney University Casuals Network hold a yoga session to explain to management that ‘flexibility’ is about more than asking casual staff to bend over backwards.

Flexibility is popular with university management – but for casual academics, it’s code for employment insecurity, as Janin Bredehoeft, Sharni Chan and Claire Parfitt know all too well.

On 5 May, a group of casual staff at Sydney University showed just how ‘flexible’ they can be by taking part in a yoga stunt outside a high-level executive meeting. Their message to management? Casuals are sick of being forced to bend over backwards in the name of ‘flexibility’.

When we practise yoga, we know that our strength, flexibility and energy comes from a solid foundation whether through our hands, our feet or the top of our head. In yoga we say ‘sthira sukham asanam’: our foundation must be strong, and steady. Equally, true flexibility in the workplace must be based on a secure foundation of respect and equity in the employment relationship. Without such a foundation, flexibility becomes one more way to undermine workers’ rights.

While flexibility has become a popular buzzword in corporate management, from the worker’s perspective it is largely code for employment insecurity. University management uses the rhetoric of flexibility to shift the risk of fluctuating student numbers to staff. NTEU research published in 2012 found that since 1996, the use of casual workers to perform core teaching roles has increased by 81 per cent, with over half of all undergraduate teaching now done by casual academics.

Raised arms
So we can reach for more qualifications, more experience, more publications, more hours, in search of stable work.

Wheel pose
Because casual staff are expected to bend over backwards.
Casual academic workers are not paid extra for entering students’ marks into electronic databases, for dealing with plagiarism or for high levels of email correspondence and student consultations. In addition, one casual told us: ‘Last semester, the department changed our pay system. Now we have to process our own time-sheets, which can take up to an hour each fortnight.’

Casual workers are also under pressure to perform unpaid labour in order to be considered for future employment. A PhD student reported: ‘I was ‘invited’ by my supervisor to give a lecture. There was no discussion about payment, it was just expected and I didn’t feel comfortable to decline. ’This is not about gaining teaching experience; it is free labour.

Less obvious, is that casual staff now directly subsidise the university by contributing to university research funding through their publication output. While casuals may only be paid for the hours they are teaching each week, they are also compelled to maintain their research track record in the hope of making it in the lotto that is the academic labour market.

But casual work gives employees the flexibility to balance work and family, right? While lines like this are regularly rolled out in defence of casual work, they don’t hold up. There are a range of ways in which organisations can support employee work-life balance. A secure job is at the top of the list. By contrast, no sick pay, no holiday pay and an incredibly unstable income is anathema to balancing work and personal life. While work may be increasingly ‘flexible’, expenses and commitments remain fixed.

As one casual academic says: ‘As far as I’m aware you can’t give birth to a fixed-term kid and you can’t contract to pay a rental lease or a mortgage for 13 weeks a year. This is not just about work worked in tiny parcels, this is about being asked to live small lives to even think about having to manage someone else.’ When Elias was asked about this plan for having a family, he too reports insecure work as a barrier — ‘I mean we haven’t discussed it. And I think the reason we haven’t discussed it, about the timing, is because I don’t have an ongoing job... if I did get security, in some form — I think that would be the first conversation we would have... I don’t think [my partner] is willing to make that decision until I have ongoing work – she has actually said that.’

Conversely, Anne left academia once she had her daughter: ‘After nearly a decade of training it became a choice between my family and my job. The hours and income are unpredictable, plus if I got sick or my kids got sick I would lose my whole week’s income.’

The Casuals’ Network at Sydney University, like similar groups in universities around the country, is working with the unions to bargain for claims that will reduce casualisation and provide genuine pathways into academic careers. Flexibility doesn’t work if it is one-sided and unbalanced. As workers, our strength and power in the employment relationship comes through collective action. Flexible working arrangements must be negotiated collectively through our unions and must be grounded by job security.

This article first appeared in New Matilda on 6 May 2013. www.newmatilda.com. Republished with permission.

Watch the video of the Sydney University Casuals’ Network highlighting the difficulties of insecure work at the NTEU & NUS ‘Uni Cuts, Dumb Cuts’ National Protest in Victoria Park, Sydney: vimeo.com/nteutv/yogaaction

Or visit the NTEU-TV vimeo site: vimeo.com/nteutv

Casuals provide flexibility to university managements because they are paid by the hour and can have their hours changed or cancelled at short notice. They are also cheap. They have no access to sick pay or holiday pay and they provide the university with massive cost savings by performing hours of unpaid labour. Casual academics are not paid extra for entering students’ marks into electronic databases, for dealing with plagiarism or for high levels of email correspondence and student consultations. In addition, one casual told us: ‘Last semester, the department changed our pay system. Now we have to process our own time-sheets, which can take up to an hour each fortnight.’

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Casual workers are also under pressure to perform unpaid labour in order to be considered for future employment. A PhD student reported: ‘I was ‘invited’ by my supervisor to give a lecture. There was no discussion about payment, it was just expected and I didn’t feel comfortable to decline. ’This is not about gaining teaching experience; it is free labour.

Less obvious, is that casual staff now directly subsidise the university by contributing to university research funding through their publication output. While casuals may only be paid for the hours they are teaching each week, they are also compelled to maintain their research track record in the hope of making it in the lotto that is the academic labour market.

But casual work gives employees the flexibility to balance work and family, right? While lines like this are regularly rolled out in defence of casual work, they don’t hold up. There are a range of ways in which organisations can support employee work-life balance. A secure job is at the top of the list. By contrast, no sick pay, no holiday pay and an incredibly unstable income is anathema to balancing work and personal life. While work may be increasingly ‘flexible’, expenses and commitments remain fixed.

As one casual academic says: ‘As far as I’m aware you can’t give birth to a fixed-term kid and you can’t contract to pay a rental lease or a mortgage for 13 weeks a year. This is not just about work worked in tiny parcels, this is about being asked to live small lives to even think about having to manage someone else.’ When Elias was asked about this plan for having a family, he too reports insecure work as a barrier — ‘I mean we haven’t discussed it. And I think the reason we haven’t discussed it, about the timing, is because I don’t have an ongoing job... if I did get security, in some form — I think that would be the first conversation we would have... I don’t think [my partner] is willing to make that decision until I have ongoing work – she has actually said that.’

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As one casual academic says: ‘As far as I’m aware you can’t give birth to a fixed-term kid and you can’t contract to pay a rental lease or a mortgage for 13 weeks a year. This is not just about work worked in tiny parcels, this is about being asked to live small lives in tiny parcels — one 13 week contract at a time.’

Casuals also report struggling to find affordable childcare for when they go to work because semester breaks interrupt their income and they face losing their child’s place in childcare.

In addition, casuals are concerned with how much anxiety and stress their children are witnessing at home, as Jen puts it ‘my children are growing up with constant exposure to my job insecurity, frustration and sadness.’ As Elias and Melanie (both in their early 40s) point out, a lack of secure work poses a challenge to having a family at all. Melanie and her partner had decided not to have children, arguing that it is ‘hard enough to manage your own lives with the type of work that we do to even think about having to manage someone else’. When Elias was asked about this plan for having a family, he too reports insecure work as a barrier — ‘I mean we haven’t discussed it. And I think the reason we haven’t discussed it, about the timing, is because I don’t have an ongoing job... if I did get security, in some form — I think that would be the first conversation we would have... I don’t think [my partner] is willing to make that decision until I have ongoing work – she has actually said that.’

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At the NTEU’s first national university teaching conference in April this year, one of the big topics was the MOOCs – the (currently) free massive open online courses launched in 2012 from a consortia of major United States universities. Australian universities have already demonstrated interest in both signing into the consortia and also developing their own MOOCs.

Conference speakers and other participants were, in the first instance, concerned with the impact upon Australian university and academic independence if universities decided to accredit MOOCs to replace locally developed and controlled content. They were also concerned with the impact upon academic and general staff jobs.

Because of the direct association made by university managements between digital technology and cutting labour costs, the ways that digital technology is adopted in university learning and teaching may accelerate existing trends in both the ‘unbundling’ the academic role and casualising academic work.

In the United States, the MOOCs are causing much consternation in an environment of uncontrollable student fees and debt, reduced graduate employment and the tailing off of university enrolments. Arrangements to pay for MOOC accreditation to bypass admissions barriers or replace subjects within a course are rapidly evolving into a business model from the ‘free’ MOOCs. Coursera, a for profit company, is now recasting itself as a platform for credit bearing courses. The MOOCs can be understood as the latest intervention in what is already a sophisticated online education market, which has already stripped away not just academic jobs, but the autonomy and integrity of academic production.

The US university system has always had a two tier system of tenured academics and ‘adjunct professors’, which is just...
a flash name for precariously employed academics working from one semester to the next with little chance of ever being tenured. The casualised academic workforce is even further divided with some tutors employed to teach classes, others to assess, and another group to interact with students online. There is a separate profession of academic advisers. Other people (sometimes academic qualified) develop and maintain the online courses. They are also probably doing the unacknowledged and poorly paid work on the MOOCs fronted by the celebrity professors. We are seeing these developments in Australia as academic work is increasingly taylorised and this was another topic addressed at the NTEU teaching conference in February.

It is often overlooked that the original MOOCs were not made for free. The initial consortia were composed of courses developed by tenured, experienced and highly regarded academics, which were supported by their universities in developing these initiatives. And this is indeed what universities should be doing – providing opportunities for academics to experiment in teaching and research in the public interest and for the public good. Experimenting with open access courses to see if they can be successfully completed by people without the admissions criteria or background in the subject is very important and worthwhile action research into university teaching pedagogies and will have widespread positive effects, further to a few really clever kids being offered places at Ivy League universities.

If Australian universities want to gain the reputational benefits of establishing MOOCs this requires the dedication of substantial resources. Not surprisingly, many academics would jump at the opportunity to develop a classy MOOC, but not if it is at the expense of re-allocating learning and teaching resources and results in further running down the status of university teaching and the quality for students. Whenever securely employed academics have the opportunity to undertake new learning and teaching initiatives, their teaching duties are handed on to other colleagues who are being squeezed into ‘teaching-only’ positions and stalling their academic careers, as research continues to be privileged in promotion. The balance of the teaching is given to casually employed colleagues, who do not have any promotion opportunities or the institutional support to offer the same level of service to the students. This is gross exploitation.

Putting aside the MOOCs, the online environment has already increased the burden upon academics employed casually. The increase in class sizes and decrease in class time is justified by managements by providing the opportunity for students to contact tutors through the digital learning platform, email and increasingly Facebook. But there are no controls on when students make contact and they have high expectations of a rapid response. Casual tutors are not paid for the real time in answering student online queries, facilitating and monitoring online discussion for assessment, downloading marking and uploading assessment tasks... and it goes on.

Even more exploitative is the practice by some more securely employed academics directing academic casuals to write, upload and maintain the learning platform or internet site content – arguing they don’t know how to do it and it is ‘easier’ for the younger generation to do so. This is not the way for overloaded academics to get around their own stress. The academic casuals rarely get any credit (or pay) for this work. However, because universities are enthusiastically getting into ‘learning analytics’ – meaning continual surveillance of students’ online engagement – maybe academic casuals should also be using this electronic tracking to provide evidence of their unpaid work. And we have hardly started discussing where the academic casual does this work. It is generally at home on their own computer, through their own ISP and electricity accounts. This is another form of subsidisation of the university – to help fill the gap in base government funding and university (mis)allocation of resources.

To date much of the conversation on the impact of digital learning and teaching has focussed upon academics in ongoing or contract positions. There has been inadequate focus upon the added workload for academic casuals. The NSW casuals’ network has identified this as the topic for a conference or like event. I am keen to pursue this from a national perspective and welcome any feedback and suggestions.

NTEU National Teaching Conference www.nreau.org.au/ntc2013
There’s nothing casual about casual employment. The working conditions experienced by tens of thousands of casual academics in Australia’s public and private universities demonstrate that casualisation, as an employment strategy, is both widespread and systemic.

Facts and figures from the Department of Industry, Innovation, Climate Change, Science, Research and Tertiary Education (DIICCSRTE) and the Work and Careers in Australian Universities Survey (WCAU) point out how bad casualisation has become.

1. What percentage of academics in Australian universities are casual?

Full time Equivalent (FTE) according to government statistics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>11.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>16.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>19.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>21.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: selected HE stats, WCAU

Estimated casuals according to Unisuper data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>USC</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JCU</td>
<td>13.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CQU</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UQ</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>USC</td>
<td>29.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNE</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UWS</td>
<td>31.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCU</td>
<td>30.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UTAS</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>ADELAIDE</td>
<td>17.1%</td>
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<tr>
<td>MELB</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RMIT</td>
<td>36.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BEST 10 UNI’s</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>WORST 10 UNI’s</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1: Using data from the staff superannuation fund Unisuper, Griffith University researchers estimate that as many as 67,000 (from a total of 110,000) university academics were working as casuals in 2010 (as a headcount). These headcount estimates were backed up by survey data which found that around 50% of all academic staff (headcount) were employed on a casual basis.

2. Is there a trend towards casualisation in tertiary education?

If you randomly walked into a university lecture theatre in Australia, it is more likely than not that the lecturer would be employed casually. At the last estimate 52% of undergraduate teaching was undertaken by casuals.

3. What percentage of casual academics in Australian universities are women?

According to government statistics

54.4%

According to Unisuper data

57%

There is no evidence to suggest that women “prefer” casual employment. As women often take non-linear career paths, they are more likely to find themselves trapped in less secure employment.

Sources: selected HE stats, WCAU

4. How much university teaching is conducted by casual staff?

52%

If you randomly walked into a university lecture theatre in Australia, it is more likely than not that the lecturer would be employed casually. At the last estimate 52% of undergraduate teaching was undertaken by casuals.

Sources: selected HE stats, WCAU

5. Which universities are the best and worst in terms of casualisation of their academic workforce?

RMIT employed the most number of casual academics, 624 by full-time equivalent (FTE) or 36.9% of the RMIT academic workforce in 2011.

The privately funded University of Notre Dame employed the most casuals as a proportion of their academic workforce, only 319 FTE, but a whopping 56.9% of their academic workforce in 2011.

In terms of the Group of Eight universities, UWA employed the least casuals as a proportion of their academic workforce, 104 FTE or 6.8% in 2011.

Notably, the Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education is the only higher education provider that employed no casuals in 2011.
6. Which universities have seen the steepest increases in casualisation?

7. Which disciplines in the university are most casualised?

8. What are the employment aspirations of casual academics?

9. What problems are associated with casual employment generally and casual academic employment specifically?


Sources:


Exploring an open future

By Jonathan O’Donnell
The Research Whisperer

Two things happened recently that might make life easier for Connect readers. The San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA) was released and the International Council for Open Research and Open Education (ICORE) held its first meeting.

DORA addresses research quality metrics and calls for revision of the use of the Journal Impact Factor. It has strong support from Australia: the Garvan Institute, the Institute for Molecular Bioscience, the Association of Australian Medical Research Institutes, the Bionics Institute, the Burnet Institute and the Victor Chang Institute are all signatories.

DORA isn’t just for the medical researchers though. Research quality metrics are a concern of all researchers. DORA says that research assessment should look at the underlying research, not the metrics. The first Excellence of Research in Australia (ERA) exercise showed how journal rankings can be used to compare research across Australia. Once the government does that, universities usually extend the measure to departments, centres and individuals. That can have particularly serious consequences for part-time, sessional and new staff.

For a document written by very established researchers, the DORA (and accompanying press releases) mention ‘early-stage investigators’ a lot. Even though the authors have built their careers around Journal Impact Factors, they understand that rigid use of metrics will make it very difficult for emerging researchers to get started. In an article about DORA, Professor Hugh McDermott (Bionics Institute) was quoted as saying:

‘...younger researchers seem less hung up on being published in traditional journals and are more comfortable with seeking out specific audiences online via open access publications.’

Which brings me to the International Council for Open Research and Open Education (ICORE). ICORE is the first group that is explicitly trying to integrate open research and open education. They talk about open publishing and open data, both of which are important to research and education.

For me, open publishing is a no-brainer. It is based on the proposition that most of the work on journal articles (writing, reviewing, editing) is publicly funded (or not funded at all), so the public should have free and open access to the results. Open access publications have been gaining ground even though, as Professor McDermott points out, ‘these new journals often don’t have any impact factor at all.’

ICORE also champions open data. Open data is a more recent development than open publication, but has quickly been adopted by national funding agencies. The Australian Research Council (ARC) says, in their funding rules:

‘The Final Report must outline how data arising from the Project have been made publicly accessible where appropriate.’

Just as all Australian universities have developed publication repositories, they are now building data repositories to store,
The Australian National Data Service (ANDS) is helping to create the tools, the standards and the techniques for storing, cataloguing and sharing this data.²

Open data allows for research data to be used in new ways. The Humanities Networked Infrastructure (HuNI) project, for example, will combine over twenty-five Australian cultural datasets. Researchers, educators and students will be able to understand relationships between such disparate data as the Australian Dictionary of Biography, the Circus Oz video archive and the Dictionary of Sydney, among others.³

I believe that the open publications and data will be particularly useful to part-time, sessional, casual and new academic staff. To see why, have a closer look at what Professor McDermott said:

• ‘...less hung up on being published in traditional journals...’
• This is a break from the old paradigm of publishing where your mentors have published. New publication avenues are particularly needed for cross-, multi-, and trans-disciplinary research.
• ‘... more comfortable with seeking out specific audiences online...’
• Social media will be a great leveller as researchers find niche audiences for their research. This might be through keeping up with your personal alumni cohort through Facebook, through the development of personal learning network,⁷ or through new opportunities via crowd funding services like Pozible.⁸

• ‘... via open access publications... [which] ...don't have any impact factor at all.’
• For this to work, though, initiatives like DORA must create the space for the old measures to be refreshed or put aside and for new quality measures to emerge. Alternative metrics⁹ are needed and organisations must be willing to embrace them. Initiatives like ICORE can help us to find the best way to use these open opportunities, particularly in combining them with teaching practices.

I don’t believe that an open future will necessarily be a happy future. University academics are under more pressure than ever. But initiatives like DORA and ICORE can help to open up new possibilities, particularly for part-time, sessional and casual academic staff.

References (Web addresses accessed 22 May 2013)

1. San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment (DORA): http://am.ascb.org/dora
2. International Council for Open Research and Open Education (ICORE): http://www.icore-online.org/

Jonathan O’Donnell, with Tseen Khoo, produces The Research Whisperer, a blog dedicated to the topic of doing research in academia: theresearchwhisperer.wordpress.com
12 – 16 August 2013

Bluestocking Week is about celebrating the success of women in higher education – and challenging ongoing gendered discrimination in the construction and transmission of knowledge. It is named for the pioneering women of the 19th century who grabbed the term, which was meant to be a derogatory dismissal of their achievements and proudly wore the badge (and stockings) of serious scholarship.

Last year saw events organised by the NTEU and students that made a space again on campuses to speak out for women and against sexism. The feedback was very positive as women and men learned that their scepticism about the rhetoric of gender equity was justified and in reality we have a long way to go. Men still dominate in the prestige areas; control the money and the senior decision making. The converse is that women graduates still earn less than their male counterparts, and are more likely to be in casual and other insecure jobs and in and outside universities.

For this year’s Bluestocking events, contact your local Branch and visit www.nteu.org.au/women

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DATE

OPTION 3: DIRECT DEBIT

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DATE

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