



# Nurturing Leadership From The Bottom Up:

Supporting leadership and career aspirations for sessional staff.

## Research Report

Prepared by

Ashwini Kanitkar, Joelle Breault-Hood,  
Jane Mears and Tonia Gray

School of Social Sciences and Psychology  
(SSAP) and the School of Education (SOE)  
Western Sydney University



# Authors

— Ashwini Kanitkar, Joelle Breault-Hood,  
Jane Mears, and Tonia Gray

**School of Social Sciences and Psychology (SSAP)  
and the School of Education (SOE) Western Sydney  
University Western Sydney University**

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With respect for Aboriginal cultural protocol and out of recognition that its campuses occupy their traditional lands, Western Sydney University acknowledges the Darug, Tharawal (also historically referred to as Dharawal), Gundungarra, Wiradjuri and Bundjalung Peoples and thank their support and work in their lands (Greater Western Sydney and beyond).

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# Executive Summary

— The higher education experience both shapes the academics' and students' capacity and motivation to contribute to the world as ethical, compassionate and civic-minded global citizens. Western Sydney University has a firm commitment to gender equity embedded into its mission statement having been named for the 15th consecutive year as an employer of choice for gender equity (Glover, 2020). In this report, we demonstrate ways that WSU can fulfill this commitment and can lead the way in creating a socially just and ecologically responsible social transformation by supporting and nurturing leadership and career aspirations of our casual staff.

This project enabled casual academics at WSU to tell us their stories of their aspirations, hopes and dreams, and their suggestions as ways the WSU can support and nurture casuals. As this report illustrates, telling stories is a powerful way for people to influence, teach and inspire. The stories in this report, assist in forging deep connections between colleagues and also tell us about the culture, history and values that unite a group. Although respondents did not meet one another at any stage of the study, their collective stories speak volumes to the collective experience of casual academics.

## Methods:

— An on-line survey was administered to two schools [School of Education (SOE) and the School of Social Sciences and Psychology (SSAP)]. The two lead authors of this report, who are also sessionals, conducted one-on-one interviews with 21 casual staff at Western Sydney University. These narratives form the basis of the qualitative component of the study. These findings were overlaid with the quantitative data obtained from an online survey (N=32) to help define the emerging themes.

the university sector, whilst others anticipated they would be working in another sector. As time went by, many became increasingly disheartened by the lack of formal support for career progression and experienced barriers to career progression in academia. Others were satisfied for the moment with the precarious nature of casual work as they believed it afforded a level of flexibility they needed at this stage of their careers.

For a handful of casuals, barriers to progression was not only their gender but how gender interrelated with other factors, class, ethnicity, age and sexuality to limit their ability to progress in academic roles. The devaluation of teaching was mentioned frequently by casuals as a barrier to career progression. Sessional teaching staff were not given support, acknowledgment or resources for teaching and were given the constant message that research was highly prioritised in regard to career progression.

## Findings:

### Qualitative Results

— The participant profile of the 21 individuals who completed a one-on-one interview revealed:

Almost half who self-identified as older women. Nine who also self-identified as women from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background.

Those interviewed fell broadly into three broad categories:

Domestic and International students doing their PhDs and working as casuals, while studying, to support themselves;

Those who have continued working as casuals for multiple years whilst still in the PhD process or post-PhD; and

Those working, full time or part time in a variety of professional roles in the education and the community services sectors.

Their personal choice to be involved in the university sector as a casual was primarily driven by their intent to build content knowledge, gain new experience and to upskill. In terms of career trajectory, some of those interviewed predicted full-time work employment within

Another theme explored was their role as Unit Coordinators. The lack of pre-semester notification of WSU's expectations and/or roles was commonplace. They were often employed at the last minute to work on units, giving them no time to prepare. Inadequate remuneration for the inordinate amount of time required to do quality lead-up tasks, preparation, delivery and marking was a source of stress and anxiety for casuals. Albeit, the interviewees were reluctant to complain for fear of appearing to be troublemakers and disrupting collegiality. They chose to remain silent for fear of retribution as well as the possibility of threatening their already precarious or tenuous position in academe.

While formal mentorship programs did not exist for sessionals, PhD supervisors and other full-time academic staff proved to be critical in providing informal mentorship for this cohort. Regrettably, many had come to the realisation that no one at WSU was genuinely interested in them. Consequently, the impact on both their physical and mental health was profound.

## Quantitative Results:

The participant profile of the 32 survey respondents is as follows:

When asked 'what is your highest tertiary qualification?':

- 6 had completed their PhD;
- 9 were enrolled in a PhD program;
- 12 held a master's degree;
- 3 possessed an honours degree; and
- 2 held a bachelor's degree.

## Findings:

- 29 respondents (90.6%) had been tutors;
- 18 had also coordinated units as sessional unit coordinators.
- 13 survey respondents also worked as research assistants.
- 3 worked as project managers, and Study Smart advisors.
- A handful were additionally employed in administrative and project roles as casual employees with the university.
- All 32 respondents were engaged in paid or unpaid work outside of the university.
- 14 reported major caring responsibilities for children, children with disabilities, friends and relatives with disabilities, including mental illnesses.
- 30 (91%) had been employed for 5+ semesters which signals the continuous and deeply entrenched reliance on a casualised workforce in higher education.
- 18 (56.2%) of the 29 respondents, had also coordinated units as sessional unit coordinators.

## Recommendations:

Suggestions and proposals arising from our Nurturing Leadership from the Bottom Up report include:

1. Staff card creation for casual academics and researchers for a minimum of two years across the university.
2. Casual academic inclusions on the staff listings.
3. Casual academic inclusions in university, school and workgroup emails.
4. Casual access to all university support sites available to full time staff members, particularly the Academic Careers and Development (ACD) website.
5. Modification of the ACD to include the leadership and career aspirations.

# Introduction

— The authors support the progress Western Sydney University (WSU) has made in recent years and the leading role WSU has played in working towards gender equity. WSU has an impressive record: 22 times voted the most gender friendly institution. The university's impressive progress has narrowed the inequity gap (Glover, 2020) and was recently named for the 15th consecutive year as an employer of choice for gender equity. Against this backdrop, the authors are proud to be working in an institution that values staff and ensures inclusion and socially responsible transformation.

The authors conducted this research in 2019 to make a positive and constructive contribution to higher education. By offering recommendations, we hope to enable WSU to implement effective policies and practices that will both support and enhance the leadership aspirations and career development of casual staff and empower the senior leadership and tenured staff to advocate on behalf of the casual staff.

Much of the research and the majority of the teaching at universities is implemented by casuals. Most face-to-face teaching in Australian universities is being implemented by employees with no ongoing contract (Kniest, 2018a). Sustaining and encouraging the leadership and career aspirations of casual staff is an integral component of a healthy, equitable university environment. Supporting casual staff also has a knock-on effect of enhancing the quality of teaching, the student experience and optimise contributions to succession planning.

This project builds on the previous findings from Gray et al. (2019) and Kanitkar et al. (2019). Gray et al's (2019) mixed-methods study looked at career longevity in academia and exposed the transitory nature of academics and a variety of implications for promotion. Kanitkar et al. (2019) found sessional staff made a major contribution unrecognized contribution to the university. Both reports also identified that sessional staff feel invisible and marginalised.

This present study, *Nurturing Leadership from the Bottom Up*, was designed to provide sessional staff at WSU an opportunity to discuss their career and leadership aspirations and to suggest strengthening strategies to support and nurture career and/or leadership aspirations. Sessional staff were offered a platform and an opportunity to take a leadership role in cultivating their own career and leadership aspirations.

# Background + Context

— Casual employment in an Australian university is typically a short-term, semester long, 12-week contract, where the hours are set for the semester (Yasuka & Dados, 2018). In Australia, some universities use the description 'sessional' staff, who have an assortment of titles - visiting lecturer, teaching assistant, hourly paid lecturer or graduate teaching assistant. In this report, we use the term 'casual' and 'sessional' interchangeably to identify the group of people employed on short-term teaching contracts.

Most casuals at WSU have highly developed skills, knowledge and expertise that they bring to their academic work (Kanitkar et al., 2019). However, they have very little idea regarding what support mechanisms are available to them, both in and outside the university (Kanitkar et al., 2019). Correspondingly, they paint a rather bleak picture of the way in which sessional staff are treated at WSU. This impacts on the broader community and directly effects our students. This current follow-up research seeks ways in which casual employees can be included, respected and embraced.

# Literature Review

## — Casuals: A precarious workforce

With the global adoption of a neoliberal policy agenda, new public management practices, the reduction in government funding, and increased corporatisation, the casual workforce is on the rise (Klopper & Power, 2014; Mauri, 2019; Ryan, Connell & Burgess, 2017; Williams & Beovich, 2019). Kniest (2018b) adds that specialisation in academia is also a factor where more teaching-only and research-only roles are being created. Barnes & Kniest (2019) report that the number of full-time positions classified as teaching and research academics is now less than the number of specialist teaching-only and research-only positions.

Kniest (2018b) reports specialist academics now make up 25.1% of the university workforce, as opposed to 21.7% of teaching and research academics, while tenured academics only account for only 16.5% of full-time positions. A decade ago the numbers were reversed (Barnes & Kniest, 2019). This phenomenon has been called the “rising tide or the flood of insecure employment” (Kniest 2018b, p. 3). Sessional staff will remain a constant feature of the tertiary education workforce (Harvey, 2017; Loomes, Owens & McCarthy, 2019; Mauri, 2019; Whitchurch, 2019; Williams & Beovich, 2019).

The employment landscape for casual staff is bleak. Sessionals receive no sick leave, maternity leave, research leave, no carer’s leave and rarely have access to funding for conferences, travel or professional development (Cantrell & Palmer, 2019). Casual academics obtain no financial remuneration for designing and re-designing teaching materials and curricula; no compensation for attending meetings, organising readings, digitising resources, peer-reviewing articles, replying to e-mails, or hosting negotiations with IT, HR, and Payroll (Barcan, 2019; Cantrell & Palmer, 2019; Kniest, 2018).

# Literature Review

— Consequently, being treated differently from tenured academics results in low morale (Barcan, 2019; Lama & Joullié, 2015) and stymies many wanting to access a meaningful career in the academy. This impasse led to many casual and permanent staff leaving the academy. Understandably, this comes at a high cost to individuals, and ultimately, to higher education. As Standing (2018) points out, the experiences of casual academics are typical of that of the ‘precariat’, the first mass class in history in which unstable labour and low and unpredictable incomes are the norm. However, the precariat has the potential to transform policies and casual workers are becoming increasingly angrier as they manage a life of chronic insecurity as they are being forced to accept a life of unstable labour. They see themselves in a tenuous position with no occupational narrative and/or identify, nor a projected career trajectory (Standing, 2018).

## Gender Inequity

— Although it is difficult to establish the numbers of casual staff in Australia universities as the reporting methods are not consistent or accurate, (Baik, Naylor, & Corrin, 2018; Yasuka & Dados, 2018) in 2017, the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) reported that universities in Australia employed 213,000 individuals and estimated that around 35% were tenured, 22% were on limited term contracts and 45% were casuals (Kniest, 2018a).

Not surprisingly, the casualisation of academic staff has a gendered component, with women making up 54% of the casual teaching load (Baik et al., 2018). Gray & Mitten (2018) describe the professional landscape as one where gender asymmetry prevails and paints a precarious situation for early career academics. Although women outnumber men in the higher education population, the invisibility of women in leadership roles gives the impression they are a minority group.

Bell (2017) refers to the Cass study of 1974 which looked at the situation of women in academics where researchers identified the structure of the academic career as the critical barrier to the advancement of women in academia—a structure that ‘rests on the assumption that academics will not take time out for child-bearing and child-rearing and that they will have domestic support systems behind them, most commonly referred to as wives’ (Bell, 2017, para 5).

Over forty years later women’s career paths are still in constant competition under the duress of employment and career uncertainty. Insecurity has replaced continuing employment and the university landscape is characterised by career uncertainty and low salaries amongst other arrangements (Bell, 2017). Furthermore, Bell calls for a need to break down “gender segregation by field, restructure employment, reframe concepts of merit and individual achievement and recognise the benefits of non-linear career paths—in short redefine the qualities of the ideal academic worker and ideal academic workforce” (2017, para 11). O’Keefe & Courtois’ (2019) research into Irish universities paints a stark picture of gender inequity in academia. They plead that further

work must look downward rather than upward to the lower ranks of academia where women are being funnelled into precarious forms of work. Their research resonates with Heffernan & Heffernan (2019) who look specifically at gender discrimination and inequity in higher education. They warn that as universities continue to casualise the workforce, more women reaching tenure does not equate to women progressing in the lower ranks of academia. O’Keefe & Courtois elucidate that “precarious work brings forth a distinct set of gender issues” (2019, p. 466). Moreover, they suggest as women reach for the upper echelons of academia within the casualised neoliberal university, we are all forced to rely on the labour of their precarious colleagues (O’Keefe & Courtois, 2019).

O’Keefe & Courtois argue “women disproportionately perform the most exploitative forms of precarious work and as such share a status similar to that of the domestic workers relative to that of their manager and colleagues in senior permanent positions” (2019, p. 467). Their research concludes:

As noncitizens of the academy, precarious women academics are kept on the margins of their profession and at the sharp end of gender inequality in the university ... and that the feminization of academic precarity thus widens structural inequality and serves to ensure the university remains a site of privilege. (O’Keefe & Courtois, 2019, p. 475)

Blackmore (2014) recognises that university leadership opportunities are excluding the feminised casual labour force and describes teaching and research work as feminised and the leadership work remaining masculine. Blackmore (2014) indicates leadership opportunities are male dominated as men at the postgraduate and at mid-career have greater mobility, flexibility, time, and more capacity to accumulate the intellectual capital valued by a more entrepreneurial university. Overall, the intensification, diversification, specialisation, and casualisation of academic work limit women’s opportunities. Blackmore’s suggestion to restructure the academic gender regime resonates with O’Keefe & Courtois plea to look downward and not upward to vertically diversify work.

## A Typology of the Casual Academic

— May (2011) identifies a typology of casual academics and suggests the academic workforce is diverse, resulting in staff have differing motivations and aspirations. Those working in the casual ranks are often postgraduate students looking for an academic full-time position. Many of these are aspiring for a career in the academy and others are looking outside academia for a full-time position. In the case of international students, some are already working in universities in their home countries and are encouraged and sponsored by governments and universities. There are also industry experts who are looking outside the academy and within for full time work. There are the casuals 'by choice' – those who are seeking full time in the future, but due to family and/or caring commitments they are in casual work. The last category are the retirees, or semi-retired, those happy with casual work to make a contribution to their profession. This final group report the need to supplement their pension, keep themselves busy and their minds active.

Bryson's (2013) findings on sessional staff in the UK parallels those identifies in May's typology. Correspondingly, Bryson lists the following who are in sessional work: postgraduate students; graduate teaching assistants; early-career researchers; administrators; professionals working full-time outside academia; retirees; freelancers; part-time second income; sole employment and semi-retired.

## Professionals Working as Casuals

— Very seldom recognised in these typologies, are the casuals employed to teach in professional courses, because of their experience and expertise. Many Schools at WSU, Social Science, Education, Law, Business, Nursing, have casual staff, employed as tutors, unit coordinators and guest lecturers. They are experts in their chosen field and, alongside the casual work done for WSU, are working in their chosen professions, (full or part-time, retired or semi-retired). In 2019, at WSU, there were approximately 142 professionally accredited awards. (information drawn from the WSU Calendar, Professionally Accredited Degrees at WSU for 2019).

This group rarely 'fit' the widely understood profile of casuals and are not, generally aspiring for a career in the academy. Most have jobs and well-established professional careers. Many do not have, or aspire to complete, PhDs. It is their decades of industry experience that they are bringing to their teaching. These casuals are a hidden and are generally not included in school and university life and activities.

Sessionals make a crucial contribution to teaching and learning (see May, Strachan, & Peetz, 2013; Mantai, 2019; Richardson, Wardale & Lord, 2019; Ryan et al., 2013; Williams & Beovich, 2017; & Whitchurch, 2019). Heffernan (2019). We found that in Education and Social Sciences, experienced teachers and social workers and community, are making a major, and decisive role within the university.

However, sessionals are precariously employed, the need for career support is a pressing matter, casuals require tailored support and professional development, and teaching jobs are given to sessionals over research jobs, yet higher research yields lead to permanent employment. Research demonstrates nearly all casuals are frustrated with lack of access to professional development and report that many believe they are seen as second-class citizens compared to full time academics (Richardson et al., 2019).

## Casual Academic Turnover

Heffernan & Heffernan (2019) report on a significant workforce turnover of casual academics. Casuals are leaving due to the growing fragility or precarity of casual employment (Heffernan & Heffernan, 2019; Crimmins, 2016). They refer to the disconnect between gaining tenure through research output and a casual workforce hired in mainly teaching roles and reiterate notions above that institutions need to seek ways in which to improve academics' career development and support. In another report on the workloads on academics, Kenny and Fluck (2019) suggest universities rely on the goodwill of their academic staff to follow through with many administrative tasks that are unpaid. In addition, Crimmins (2016) estimates that 67% of tenured academics will have retired or resigned, by 2021. This leads to a significant loss of institutional knowledge and lost productivity.

Barcan's (2019) study on the experiences of giving up an academic career echo the above. She writes "the higher education sector's structural reliance on the sacrificial ethos that animates vocational labour explains why academic life can be simultaneously satisfying and distressing" (Barcan, 2019, p. 47). When interviewing people on their decision to leave the academy, 100% said they were being driven by push factors (Barcan, 2019). Some of the reasons include overwork, erosion of academic values, being unvalued (particularly by sessional staff), imposter syndrome, difficulty balancing work and parenting, and financial insecurity – reasons on par with other literature reviewed (Barcan, 2019). For most sessional staff, "casual academic teaching appointments do not provide a career path" (Strachan et al., 2016, p. 11). Only a very small proportion of casuals will progress to fulltime academic work. Many do not wish to be employed full time in the academy, and already have established careers and are leaders in their chosen professions.

## Over reliance on casuals

In 2019, the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency (TESQA) identified the reliance on sessional staff as a risk indicator (2019, p.8). As Chief Commissioner of TEQSA, Nicoll recommended that sessional staff be "managed strategically, with a focus on professional development, strong course coordination and the enabling of a culture of scholarship" (Nicoll, Chief Commissioner, TEQSA, personal communication, 28 Jan. 2014, as cited in Harvey, 2016). Harvey was instrumental in the development of BLASST (Benchmarking Leadership and Advancement of Standards for Sessional Teaching) in 2014 as part of a fellowship to identify quality learning and teaching issues with sessional staff. Harvey identified the lack of professional development as an educational issue, as did TEQSA in their 2019 Risk Indicator Framework. Without support staff in professional development, students suffer as a result (Brown et al., 2013; Bryson, 2013; Harvey, 2017; Kniest, 2018b).

In Harvey's 2016 report on quality learning and teaching she refers to some key actions informed by the BLASST standards developed in 2014. She suggests that the sector should: collect and maintain accurate data about sessional staff, support sessional staff with professional development, continue to engage tertiary institutions with the BLASST standards and engage university management to lead good practice with sessional staff (Harvey, 2016). Some universities in Australia and abroad have used the BLASST framework to help develop resources for casual staff.

## Initiatives to Support Casuals

— With these compounding issues facing casual academics, it is imperative universities put more funding or resourcing into supporting and ensuring staff retention. In Heffernan's (2018) study, he identified some current issues facing sessional academics; feeling unsupported, no access to funding, no access to mentoring, no access to professional development and feelings of being exploited. He found varying levels of quality professional development available as well as access issues.

Bryson (2013) in the UK examined over a 10-year period whether or not initiatives to support sessional staff have worked. His conclusion was: "apparently not" (Bryson, 2013, p. 8). Furthermore, in the United States, Maisto & Street (2011) recognise some gains and losses in the support of sessional staff.

In Australia, there have been a handful of researchers looking into how to improve the situation for sessional staff in this country (e.g. Bexley et al., 2011; Crawford & Germov, 2015; Hamilton, Fox & McEwan, 2013; James et al., 2015; Percy et al., 2018). They have drawn similar conclusions.

For instance, in 2005, the University of Tasmania initiated a range of professional learning and development programs to reach casual staff. However, Brown et al. (2012) reported there still remains room for improvement in meeting the needs of casuals. They also found that even with new initiatives, they were not reaching the staff. Impediments cited included lack of knowledge of professional development prospects, induction opportunities and access to assistance with teaching awards as demonstrating a disconnect between the institution and the teaching staff (Brown et al., 2012).

The casualisation of academics impacted dramatically on the quality of teaching (Brown, Goodman, & Yasukawa, 2010; Yoo, 2019), on student engagement (Crimmins, 2016), and on the lack of opportunities to access professional development (Baik et al., 2018;

Brown, Kelder, Freeman & Carr, 2012; Bryson, 2013). Baik et al. (2018) reported that after focus group responses and survey responses from 2006-2007 at the University of Melbourne, a framework was developed to offer a whole-of-institution approach to improving the experience of sessional staff. The framework included the areas of recruitment, induction, ongoing training, evaluation, recognition, administrative support, and accountability. Three years after the implementation of the framework a working group (Sessional Teaching Staff Working Group) was formed to review how the university was inducting and supporting sessional staff. Their findings highlight a number of salient issues however, they primarily focus on developing induction programs and to professional development opportunities. The University of Melbourne continues to encourage a whole-of-institution approach to working with sessional staff (their process has been nine years and counting).

Baik et al. (2018) suggested there are no easy solutions and that the problems faced by casual academics require long term strategies. They also argue that other universities should embrace a similar approach which involves policy development, identifying gaps and problems, and designing innovation programs to address any needs (Baik et al., 2018). Gray et al. (2019) explore a transformation change to the institutional culture and suggest that the ad hoc measures used to change the current situation are inadequate.

## Opportunities for professional development for casuals

Currently, at WSU there are a variety of opportunities available for sessional academic staff. WSU has The Sessional Staff Teaching and Learning Program which aims to assist new sessional staff. The program is available twice a year and operates as a flipped module with online modules and an interactive workshop. Staff can claim (if they complete the course) three hours pay for this work.

Casual staff may also have access (if they are invited) to the Foundation of University Learning and Teaching (FULT) program. However, this is more readily available to permanent staff. It is also a flipped model program with online modules and face-to-face. These modules have been developed taking into consideration the strategic priorities of the university, feedback from students and staff on where more investment into teaching practice is most needed.

Sessional academics are also directed to the Staff Enterprise Agreement and the Professional Development Policy. Unfortunately, the Work Planning and Career Development process cannot be accessed by most casuals. The site is only accessible to tenured employees and those on fixed-term contracts. This is also the case for the Academic Career Development (ACD) site.

Baik et al., 2018 suggested there are no easy solutions to deal with the problems faced by casual academics and that we require long term strategies. They also argue universities should embrace an approach which involves including casuals, through policy development, identifying gaps and problems, and designing innovative programs to address the specific needs of casuals needs (Baik et al. 2018).

## Conclusion

This is by no means an exhaustive literature review. Our current study relies and builds on research carried out at WSU by Kanitkar et al. (2019) and the research on women in leadership positions at WSU by Gray et al. (2019). This literature review has focussed on the current situation in Australia, which is parallel to the situation of casuals internationally. It has looked at some of the current initiatives by some Australian universities that are tackling the issues resulting in the precarious nature of their workforce. Standing (2018) describes the potential for transformational change by the precariat and this paper aims to find out some of the ways in which sessional staff at WSU develop strategies to support and nurture their career and/or leadership aspirations. This is the process we are contributing to through our research.

# Methods

— The mixed-methods data for the Nurturing Leadership Project was collected between the July 1, 2019 and December 30, 2019. An on-line survey was administered to two schools [School of Education (SOE) and the School of Social Sciences and Psychology (SSAP)] and 32 de-identified respondents completed the survey. The invitation, was sent to the network of sessional academics from the School of Social Sciences and Psychology (SSAP) and the School of Education (SOE). The research team requested this invitation be passed onto other sessionals who may have missed the latest cohort of current casuals. Distributed in an on-line, anonymous, survey, using Survey Monkey the survey included an invitation to participate in an interview (Appendix 1 Survey Questions).

The two lead authors of this report conducted one-on-one interviews with 21 sessional staff who gave permission to be interviewed. The survey was anonymous and only the two research assistants knew the identities of those interviewed. For confidentiality and fear of future retribution, the respondents are de-identified. One of the binding caveats for their involvement was their understanding they would not be identified. The interview questions focused on career goals and career progression and included open ended questions (Appendix 2 Interview Guide).

# Findings

— Almost half of the participants (10) identified as older women. The majority had jobs and careers working in education and community services, or were semi-retired or with full, or part-time jobs that they were combining with casual work, with education and social work and community welfare students. The 21 casuals interviewed fell broadly into the following three categories:

- Those doing PhDs (Domestic and International students) working as casuals, while studying, to support themselves. Many of these are aspiring for a career in the academy. In the case of international students, some are already working in the public sector and universities in their home countries and are encouraged and sponsored by governments and universities.
- Those who may have started PhDs, or completed PhDs, who started as above, doing casual work while studying, and have continued working as casuals for many years.
- Those working, full time or part time in professional roles in the education and community services sectors, as tutors on subject units in professionally accredited courses and secondly or as academic supervisors to students on field placements. Some of these women were enrolled in PhDs. Most were not seeking full time academic careers.

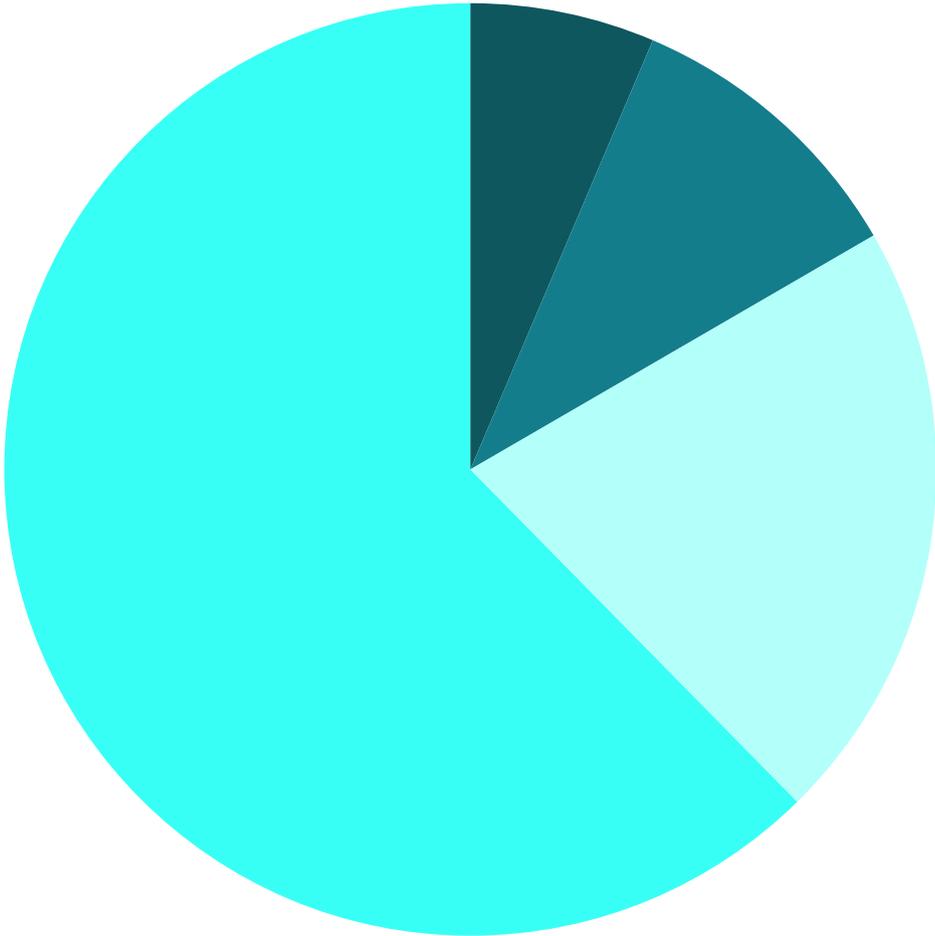
## Survey Participant Profile

Of the 32 respondents who filled in the survey, twenty-nine respondents had been tutors and of these, eighteen had also coordinated units as sessional unit coordinators. Thirteen survey respondents had also worked as research assistants. Three had worked as project managers, and Study Smart advisors. Some were also employed in administrative and project roles as casual employees with the university.

## Semesters of Sessional Employment

This is by no means an exhaustive literature review. Our current study relies and builds on research carried out at WSU by Kanitkar et al. (2019) and the research on women in leadership positions at WSU by Gray et al. (2019). This literature review has focussed on the current situation in Australia, which is parallel to the situation of casuals internationally. It has looked at some of the current initiatives by some Australian universities that are tackling the issues resulting in the precarious nature of their workforce. Standing (2018) describes the potential for transformational change by the precariat and this paper aims to find out some of the ways in which sessional staff at WSU develop strategies to support and nurture their career and/or leadership aspirations. This is the process we are contributing to through our research.

## Semesters of sessional employment at Western Sydney University



- 6% 1 - 2 Semesters
- 13% 3 - 4 Semesters
- 22% 5 - 6 Semesters
- 59% More than 6 Semesters

Table 4.1 Semesters of sessional employment at Western Sydney University

## Older women, CALD, with disability and LGBTQI+

— Ten of the respondents identified as older women. Nine identified as women from a culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) background, two identified as having a disability and two identified as LGBTQI+. Thirty-seven responses were given by the 32 respondents with some respondents belonging to more than one group. Fourteen respondents stated that they did not identify with any of the groups.

## Caring and Work Responsibilities

— All respondents were engaged in paid or unpaid work outside of the university. Of the 32 respondents, 31 provided around 50 responses when asked about responsibilities they had been assigned. Fourteen described major caring responsibilities for children, children with disabilities, friends and relatives with disabilities, including mental illnesses, six were engaged in some form of voluntary work, 16 were engaged in other paid work and 14 were studying.

## Educational qualifications

— Of the 32 survey respondents, when asked what is your highest tertiary qualification:

- Six had completed their PhD
- Nine were enrolled in a PhD program
- Twelve held a master's degree
- Three possessed an honours degree
- Two held a bachelor's degree

## Professional Experience

Of those who competed this section of the survey, 18 worked in community services, as managers, consultants, or social workers, in the public sector, in NGOs and in the private sector. Thirteen worked in the education sector, universities, five (three lecturers at institutions other than WSU and two researchers), six in secondary schools, one in early childhood, one in private tutoring and one in international education.

## Qualitative Data Findings And Analysis

In this section, we analyse and discuss our findings highlighting the following themes: the career aspirations of casual staff, the implications of the lack of career support for casual staff, the barriers to career progression, overcoming barriers and to conclude, the recommendations. This section analyses the findings from all the qualitative data collected from the open-ended responses from the surveys (32) and from the interviews (21).

### Section 1

Discusses the career aspirations of casual staff, focusing on their career aspirations when started they started at the university, with some aspiring to academic careers and some aspiring to careers in the education and community services. We then discuss the changes to these career aspirations over time.

### Section 2

Looks at the implications of the lack of career support for casual staff, the loss of good staff, the decline in teaching quality and most disturbingly, the impact on the mental health of those who were still working as casuals.

### Section 3

examines the barriers to career progression, barriers such as the way the university is organised, the move towards the corporate university, the deteriorating employment and working conditions of casual staff, the difficult conditions international staff and students are working under, the devaluation of teaching and community engagement, the lack of recognition and acknowledgement of work done, the difficulties they experienced accessing support, the lack of opportunities to meet with colleagues and finally and most significantly, the lack of support from the university in regard to their career and leadership aspirations.

### Section 4

offers ways of overcoming barriers, such as mentoring and significantly, informal support networks whilst Section 5 outlines the recommendations. The suggestions from our participants for ways to initiate meaningful change and to support the career and leadership aspirations of casual staff were to: include casual staff in all university staff lists and emails, involve casuals in school and university activities and governance, enable access to academic career development resources, issue staff cards for casuals for a minimum of 2 years, instigate mentoring programs for casual staff, use SFTs to enhance career development, support casuals to publish, convert casual contracts to on-going positions, provide subsidised childcare support and encourage collegiate staff wellbeing initiatives. Most of these recommendations could be implemented immediately at minimal financial cost to the university.

## Career aspirations

— In this section, we specifically look at the career aspirations of our participants when they first started at WSU and the changes to career aspirations over time. Most of our participants were disillusioned with pursuing a career in academia and spoke of their aspirations for permanent, satisfying full-time work. However, despite the fact that there were very few jobs, some were still tenaciously pursuing career paths in academia. Most were exploring other career possibilities, in the public sector and in the community sector. They spoke of colleagues and friends who had managed to get senior, influential and exciting jobs outside the academy. These colleagues were great role models and opened up new opportunities for them too.

## Career aspirations when started

— Nearly all participants came serendipitously into casual work following conversations and invitations from supervisors and Unit Coordinators (UCs). Some were recommended to UCs by other tutors. Our participants fell into two main categories- those doing PhDs, (both domestic and international students) and professionals, who were also working, full time, semi-retired and some, retired, in education, social work and community work. The PhD students (which also included some of the professionals), had been invited and encouraged to apply, initially, by their supervisors, and the professionals, who were not doing PhDs, by UCs.

We invited them to talk about their aspirations when they first started tutoring and their aspirations now. They had all commenced tutoring with very high levels of enthusiasm and

saw tutoring at WSU as an excellent opportunity to share their knowledge and expertise with students. All were very excited to be part of the university community. Most had not given much thought to long term career planning.

For the professionals, what stood out in this discussion of aspirations was the complexity of the motivations, experiences and expectations. Most had been in paid work for a long time, many had well-established careers working as senior teachers and school principals, as senior social workers and community workers. It was because of their working knowledge and expertise, that they had been invited to tutor. They had not come into academia expecting or aspiring to a career in the academy.

I don't want to be a casual academic in three years' time. I want to have a good job to set up a good life. I don't want to be waitressing. I don't want to be worrying about money. (Shelley, SOE)

Many had been invited, by PhD supervisors and UCs to tutor on particular units. Others were invited to work as tutors (and later as UCs) because of their professional expertise. They all had postgraduate qualifications. Some had completed PhDs. For the PhD students, some started working as tutors, at the same time as they commenced PhD studies. This had expectations that their employment as casuals would be just for a year or two, and then they would progress to fulltime work.

## Careers in the University

— Some respondents voiced that their choice to be in the university sector was to build their knowledge, gain new experience and to upskill. Some anticipated full-time work in the university sector and others anticipated working in another sector. Findings below suggests a range of career aspirations and a change of career aspirations after having the experience as a casual in the university sector.

My career aspirations involved building my academic knowledge and then applying it in the community sector. I did not aspire to be an academic in the beginning however as I took on teaching I really enjoyed the face to face interactions with students and started contemplating a career in academia. (Survey participant)

I expected to gain teaching experience that would later lead me to getting a full-time job at the university. (Survey participant)

Before my children were born I expected that I would finish my PhD and teach and continue with research. When I started tutoring as a casual staff person I was hoping to get back into university work. (Survey participant)

To develop an academic and research career in Criminology. (Survey participant)

I was aiming to complete my PhD and gain academic employment. (Survey participant)

Others were more interested in teaching focused roles within academia as suggested below:

To be the best educator for students who come into WSU. My hope was to gain a fulltime position with a teaching focus. My success in this area can be seen through the SFU and SFT percentages. (Survey participant)

Some of the respondents were focused on developed a career in research:

I really wanted to work full time in academia. I especially wanted to get into research. I hoped I could make a difference with research and partner with industry to create new innovative

knowledge. (Survey participant)

Others were accepting of the precarity of casual work as it afforded a level of flexibility.

Given where I live, I was looking for family-friendly work that would make use of my skills. I actually have very little desire to return to academic work, but there are few jobs where I live that meet my skills. At this stage I am happy to have a sessional job that pays relatively well, has flexible hours, and doesn't require me to become too involved in the machinations of university bureaucracy. (Survey participant)

One respondent envisioned themselves consulting independently after a short time in academia: I still want to learn more about my field of work, this may be in academia for a short time, but I do not see myself becoming a full-time academic. I have not been encouraged by others either in the university or those working successfully with children and young people to pursue this career. I would like to consult independently using my academic skills to purposely inform practice. I'm keen to train/teach others what I have learnt, and this may or may not be within academia. (Survey participant)

For some casuals, as time went by, they became disheartened by the lack of formal support for career progression and experienced barriers to progression to academic work. We asked if career goals had changed over time. Some suggested that due to their experience at the university, they have had a shift in their career aspiration goals, as evidenced below:

Absolutely yes! I have been a casual for approximately eight years now and I have definitely changed my career goals. Basically, I shut off the door to an academic career in my mind because I got to see the poor conditions under which casual staff work and the lack of female friendly policies in terms of career advancement for women who have caring and other responsibilities. (Survey participant).

Another respondent alludes to the uncertainty of work in a precarious workforce:

“Yes, my goals have changed because Western Sydney have recognised my teaching efforts but have not followed this up with consistent work.

I was involved in a small non-teaching project but only for one semester. I am now more involved with WSUOnline and Deakin University and only marking for one unit for Western Sydney University. I don't know if I will be getting any more work in the future." (Survey participant)

Another participant shares her dismay with the lack of opportunity presented to her:

The goal had not changed but the opportunity to attain that goal has not been presented. (Survey participant)

It is clear from our respondents that their initial aspirations saw the potential for full-time work in either teacher or research, or both, yet, for a variety of reasons have not developed further than casual contracts.

## Careers in the community sector

Some envisioned themselves in various sectors where they could utilize their academic skills including the public sector and in community work and project management roles.

I still want to learn more about my field of work, this may be in academia for a short time, but I do not see myself becoming a fulltime academic. I have not been encouraged by others either in the university or those working successfully with children and young people to pursue this career. I would like to consult independently using my academic skills to purposely inform practice. I'm keen to train/teach others what I have learnt, and this may or may not be within academia (Survey participant)

My career aspirations involved building my academic knowledge and then applying it in the community sector. I did not aspire to be an academic in the beginning however as I took on teaching I really enjoyed the face to face interactions with students and started contemplating a career in academia. (Survey participant)

## Changes to career aspirations over time

For most, as time ensued they became disheartened by the lack of formal support for career progression and experienced barriers to progression to academic work. Their level of disappointment recounted was both voluminous and crestfallen:

... in the beginning, I was really enthusiastic and I don't think I've lost that ... I have become disheartened but I was enthusiastic. I was enthusiastic for the future, I was enthusiastic for what I could do, I was enthusiastic for the whole landscape of research and academia. (Louise, SSAP)

I do think my goals are very much shifting because I think the landscape is a shifting landscape and because it is a very complex landscape and it's just not that easy to situate yourself somewhere. (Joanne, SSAP)

One respondent alluded to feeling exploited by her work as a casual:

Over the last 10 years, but particularly in the last 5, the way in which the university views its Casual/Sessional staff has altered dramatically. We no longer matter and are viewed as cheap labour. If we don't work the same amount of hours as a full-time staff member, then we're not achieving our responsibilities in our role; but if we do, then we're exploited. Being a full-time academic no longer holds much appeal. (Survey participant)

I used to love this University, I would recommend this to students. I would no longer do that, to recommend them to continue their studies at Western Sydney University, I no longer wish to gain any form of permanent employment with the University. I am getting older... I came to university to change my life, but it's all been shattered. (Casper, SSAP)  
I have been a casual for approximately 8 years now and I have definitely changed my career goals.

Basically, I shut off the door to an academic career in my mind because I got to see the poor conditions under which casual staff work and the lack of female friendly policies in terms of career advancement for women who have caring and other responsibilities. (Survey participant)

My goals have changed because although Western Sydney have recognised my teaching efforts, this has not led to consistent work. I was involved in a small non-teaching project but only for 1 semester. I am now more involved with WSU Online and Deakin University and only marking for 1 unit for Western Sydney University. I don't know if I will be getting any more work in the future. (Survey participant)

The goal had not changed but the opportunity to attain that goal has not been presented. (Survey participant)

I was looking for family-friendly work that would make use of my skills. I actually have very little desire to return to academic work, but there are few jobs where I live that meet my skills. At this stage I am happy to have a sessional job that pays relatively well, has flexible hours, and doesn't require me to become too involved in the machinations of university bureaucracy. I am not really thinking about the future. (Survey participant)

To continue this trajectory; there are no opportunities available to me in academia that aren't casual work. (Survey participant)

The jobs aren't there. I also don't feel that the work I do gets any recognition, especially teaching. Having taught for 10 years and done so much RA work, I hoped I would get a post doc, or some kind of support from the school. When I talk to people about a conversion to a permanent position, they say that there are no gaps in the subject areas I teach. It makes little sense to me as I teach across so many subjects and am employed every semester. I'm not sure why permanent positions can't be made. (Survey participant)

There are no roles that are hundred percent teaching. So that sort of makes me go, well do I want a job where teaching is not really the priority... I think I'm going with it because I love teaching and seeing where it leads and trying to do a bit of RA work and bit of publication work on the side and I don't know I'll figure it out. I'm at a bit of a crossroad at the moment. (Zoe, SSAP)

I think the defining moment of I have my PhD I don't have to stick around anymore, I can go somewhere else and do something else, I think it's actually like hey look I've got these skills which I acquired through my PhD and I'm clearly persistent because I've been doing it for x number of years so you know give me a job (laughs). That has benefits and jobs that afford me some extra pay, and gives me leave entitlements, and maybe some sense of self-worth. (Fraya, SSAP)

When I started a PhD I was completely aware of the labour market. My own PhD supervisor is publishing all the time on the precarious labour market of academia. As I went through though I started to live it. I guess I'm having second thoughts about a career in academia. I'm aware of the limited job opportunities in academia and I'm aware of its undesirability. It's a difficult place to work. I'm fully aware of the money crunching that the university is doing and the limited jobs for early career researchers. (Shelley, SOE)

Collectively, these dispirited reflections conjure a bleak picture surrounding the level of disillusionment and disappointment of academe.

## Implications of the lack of career support for casual staff

— The implications of quashing ambitions had serious implications, for the university and for the community services sector. The stresses, the strains the continuing job insecurity and not knowing if you will have on-going work over the year, the lack of appreciation of the work done by managers and UCs had led to a substantial number leaving the university. Some left the university broken, angry and disillusioned and some had secured permanent and exciting jobs working in the public sector, NGOs and in community based agencies.

Those who stayed missed their experienced colleagues and witnessed a decline in teaching quality and an increase in their own stress levels. All participants spoke of the effects of this stress on their own mental health and those of their colleagues. This was of major concern and very worrying.

## Loss of Good Staff

— The hemorrhaging of quality and talent in the casual workforce was mentioned frequently.

WSU is facing a brain drain, people have left, the DAPS are so overworked. No one really cares about how units are run. All they care about is that there are no more than 10% of fails. (Anonymous)

Good people, decent people, are getting jobs elsewhere. ... In the private or government sectors there's actual growth in some areas. It would have been worth investing money into these people because you are going to get back fivefold or tenfold what you pay them in the effort that they put into this place. (Fraya, SSAP)

All the good people are leaving, I'm working towards leaving the system also. (Anna, SSAP)

In the last eighteen months or so, several very good hard working competent decent staff members have significantly reduced their teaching or have simply left. We are losing people who you love working with. There is no future here. (Fraya, SSAP)

## Decline in Teaching Quality

— Given that casuals do the bulk of the teaching, the pressure put on casuals, the decline in working and employment conditions and the lack of career opportunities, (with the resultant stress placed on casuals, puts casuals on an impossible position. The personal and social impact is widespread, and most importantly, has direct implications on the quality of teaching at WSU.

I have tried to keep motivated, but the University is not interested in actually creating an intellectually challenging space for students and staff. It is interested in a 'pass factory' where students who have no place at University (and quite frankly quite a few unit coordinators) are simply churned through the system. (Survey participant)

I think you need to be supporting some of your sessionals that have been around that have ideas, I mean most people that I know just get sick of being sessional, and then just go and move onto something else and they move away from, they move away because they know that the opportunities are not there. Or fighting for the opportunities is just too hard. (Joanne, SSAP)

Listening to the heartfelt stories was distressing and poignant. There is no paucity of evidence that good people, coming to the university with hopes and dreams for their future, only to be ground down by what they viewed as an unsympathetic system. Eventually they came to the grim realization that nobody was really interested in them and the impact on their both physical and mental health was enormous.

## Barriers to Career Progression

— The discussions about the barriers they faced, was both enlightening and crystallising. Participants had a sophisticated understanding of the barriers that were stymieing their career progression. They could see that it was not necessarily WSU that created these barriers, but the framing of WSU policies and practices within neo liberalism, that created problems. They singled out the move to the corporate university, driven by competition and market economics, that left little time and space for academic staff to build network, support groups and to foster collegial and cooperative relationships.

As the university continued to cut budgets, the casual staff took the brunt of the cuts, and experienced deteriorating working and employment conditions. The impact on the precarious position of international students, combined with harsh migration policies, meant international students were further marginalised. They saw teaching being sidelined and devalued, as universities chased the research dollar.

Their own contributions to teaching and community engagement were neither recognised or rewarded, they experienced difficulties accessing basic resources, there were no opportunities for mentoring and no consideration or support for the career and leadership aspirations of casual staff. Emergent themes included:

responsibility to model this for students and the broader community. This isn't happening at WSU. It's like a company, with neoliberal values. This idea of human growth in fact could prove to be a selling point for students; you could meet the financial needs of the institution, but also focus on being a good model. (Name withheld)

I don't think the University cares, senior management simply do not care about their staff, whether full time or part, they certainly seem to care even less about their casual staff than they have ever done. They rely on our personal integrity and professionalism to exploit us. (Anonymous)

Universities being so highly business orientated and we know the problems with the neoliberal university, it means for us we can see that there is no real future, it's not really higher education, it's actually a business institution and because the bottom line is profit making. (Fraya, SSAP)

I have to be honest with you, this whole system is broken... the culture of misogyny and white male entitlement is so deeply entrenched. (Felicia, SSAP)

The hyper-masculinized model of career progression in Universities works against women... we need to think of better ways to support mothers and carers... so these amazingly talented women are not lost out because of gender and organizational policies and practices that leave us little opportunity. (Genevieve, SSAP)

## The Corporate University

— A good department within a University or any big institution should be focused on human growth. As a university, we have a social

## Deteriorating Employment and Working Conditions

— All interviewees spoke about their experiences of deteriorating employment and working conditions. Most of the casuals had experienced pay cuts and were finding they were doing more and more unpaid work.

The pay has been cut... (we put in) extra effort that is uncompensated, plus the preparation (has) increased

the amount of time we actually spend teaching ... there is certainly a resistance to consider real compensation for those sorts of things and for simply navigating the systems and the changes in the systems, that we have no part in deciding about, that certainly presents a challenge. (Fraya, SSAP)

You want to have what's best for the students, but not getting paid for what you've been told to do, and also not feeling like you are doing a good job, it's definitely tricky... (Zoe, SSAP)

## International Students

— We asked international participants about the barriers they have faced in achieving career goals and aspirations. They articulated feeling exploited and unrecognised and those with overseas qualifications had different experiences those residents of Australia. Clearly, international students, working as casuals faced their own unique set of barriers as depicted below:

If they want international students to teach, then they need to consider visa status and migration issues.... small bits of work are not valid. (Anna, SSAP)

Those with overseas qualifications faced similar difficulties.

My status as an international intellectual has made getting a permanent position difficult but for a permanent residency application, these short-term sessional contracts are meaningless, I need a proper contract something like 20 hours per week. (Anna, SSAP)

## Devaluation of Teaching and Community Engagement

— Casuals were given the constant message (as are full time academics) that research was highly prioritised, while teaching and community engagement was devalued, and not given support, acknowledgment or resources.

I have seen how undervalued teaching is, it's the bread and butter of the university, (it's where) they get the majority of their money. (However, they are not) investing into their students. Instead what we are seeing is an erosion of student experience... My ability to help students is limited because of the lack of hours allocated (to teaching). (Fraya, SSAP)

(There is) less face to face contact with tutors, doing things more online, it's cheaper to do and because of that there is more of a disconnect from our students so... and because of that the passion to teach or the ability to really teach students is so limited. You are cramming so much stuff into whatever contact you have and constantly referring students to other people. I feel like this tiny little person in this big city of administrative bureaucracy. This makes it not a very enticing job... (Fraya, SSAP)

## Lack of Recognition and Acknowledgement for Work done

— Without exception, all worked over and above what was expected of them in the contracts for tutors or UCs. They spent countless hours preparing for classes, marking and submitting results for students whilst also been involved in planning and reviewing curricula. The extra work undertaken was not acknowledged, valued or appreciated.

It's not valued and even if it is valued you don't get paid for it, or they then streamline it anyway because you know everything you create on a contract is owned by the University, and so pretty much they are running the show... 'We won't give you a job, but we own all of your intellectual property' (Joanne, SSAP)

It was also frustrating... not being acknowledged for the work that I had done developing units in undergraduate and postgraduate courses. I'd done so much and I could see that this could go on forever and nobody was ever going to acknowledge anything that I had ever done and there weren't any permanent positions that I could apply for. (Sarah, SSAP)

## Difficulty accessing resources and support

— Being unable to access many of the resources available to full time staff also posed an additional burden.

I just print (materials for teaching) from my workplace where I actually work. Sometimes I use my own computer and my own printer. (Sarina, SSAP)

## No opportunities to meet colleagues

— Opportunities to meet with people at work were either scant or non-existent.

I'm working with someone from another school right now and they have morning teas with one another like, where they all talk and they interact with each other and it's fun and they get to know about each other and they learn about each others projects and they meet each other in the hallways. (Joanne, SSAP)

There are no processes and structures that say here are all of the staff at this amazing University, here are the ways we are going to bring you together. I don't think I've ever been in a room with all of the staff from my school. There is no sense of collegiality. I know on vUWS they have got this sessional site and staff place but really what is that about? That's just another added place where I have to go to get information and it may or may not be the information that I need (Sarah, SSAP)

Sessionals need opportunities to actually network with the permanent staff... Permanent staff are never on campus... which means that casuals never meet them or network with them... In the past, you would meet your coordinator face to face, go to their lectures... Now, everything is online, we never meet them, so we never get a chance to develop relationships. Our chances of career progression are really reduced. (Foxy Le Strange, SSAP)

## Little Support from the University for Career Aspirations

— Another area of noticeable deficit was the lack of time invested in their career trajectories of casuals.

I don't feel like the University has supported me. (Zoe, SSAP)

Overall in terms of career goals there has however been little formal support from the University. (Genevieve, SSAP)

The University offers some professional development programs and other research specific workshops, but not for sessional staff though. I think it can be done better because what is being done now is not sufficient at all. (Survey participant).

The Uni has no targeted career advancement programs for casual/sessional staff that I know of. (Survey participant)

I don't actually know if the University has any kind of support with the publishing or research.... I don't know what support the University gives. (Nadine, SSAP)

I have no networks in the university other than my supervisors. No collegiality.... I have little to no opportunity for networking or taking part in university offerings such as professional development or workshops. (Jacqui, SOE)

My problem was mainly with the system. In the current system, I can't plan ahead. I create a social network with unit coordinators on certain units but then when the Unit coordinators change there is no connection to the unit anymore, but to the people who-if I am lucky- give me work at another unit- otherwise I have to apply for positions at the last minute. (Anna, SSAP)

## Overcoming barriers

— Despite this uninviting and bleak picture, we found a number of 'promising practices' and models of informal and formal, support and mentoring by HDR supervisors, Unit Coordinators and most importantly, other casuals. The career support provided by HDR supervisors and UCs, sometimes, but not always, the same person, can be traced back over 5-10 years of career development and were excellent illustrations of innovative practices taken on by a handful of committed senior academics, who challenged and contested the dominant culture and conscientiously created collegial and support working environments to support and nurture casuals.

## Mentoring HDR supervisors

— He's (supervisor) has acted as a mentor since I was an undergraduate. He got me to work as his research assistant. He would totally be responsive if I needed to find some work. (Shelley, SOE)

I have been lucky, in that my secondary supervisor has been very supportive of me and allowed me the opportunity for research work and discussed presenting the findings at conferences, helped in submitting an abstract and indeed continues to support me in trying for publications- basically she has adopted the role of a mentor. (Genevieve, SSAP)

I wouldn't say I have a formal mentor but I have academics and lecturers and professors at the

University who I can meet with... I had that privilege to work with all of them in one or another way and I'm having conversations with them every now and then. I think in terms of getting support from the University for mentoring and giving feedback, I have had that. (Sarina, SSAP)

As a PhD student, the support I have had from my supervisors in terms of research, writing and thinking skills, is enormous. These are all important skills that prepare me for my academic career. (Survey participant).

through teaching, has been beneficial. They have supported me in different ways. They have helped me broaden my knowledge in various fields, understand how the Uni system works and how to position myself amidst the challenges of gender and race (Survey participant)

My friends and colleagues have never disappointed me, providing emotional support and navigating the university systems when the going gets tough (Survey participant)

My sessional colleagues have created for me a sense of belonging, in what otherwise feels like a strange sort of workplace... Support has been emotional or practical, support with marking, having a sense of belonging, (Rachael, SSAP)

When viewed holistically, these positive initiatives are 'models' that could easily be adopted by all managers, UCs and supervisors, working together, collectively to support and enhance the career and leadership aspirations of casual staff.

## Informal Support Networks

— One of the most important positive aspects of the job was the invaluable relationships and informal networks formed with colleagues, tenured academics and with other tutors. These networks, were important in keeping updated on what was going on, and thereby securing casual employment.

I have very good networks with a couple of people, and those people, and I'm lucky because those people have good positions in the School of Social Sciences and they pass on that to me, so they are in the know, they know what's out there, and then they pass on the knowledge of what's going.... It's kept me employed. (Joanne, SSAP)

These informal networks were critical to ongoing employment and mentoring:

A lot of the support I have had has come informally, through the networks I have developed here at the University, (Unit Coordinator, name withheld) has been one of the really key players in that regard. Her support in providing work opportunities, her mentorship and encouragement have been invaluable, also the support of other colleagues in the school. (Rachael, SSAP)

Building meaningful relationships with academics,

## Summative Comment

— We can only speculate, and rely on the information that the casuals we interviewed had given us as to where casuals are finding other work. There were successes. Five positions had been created in Social Sciences for long term casuals. Others had gone to jobs to other universities, and some had been very successful in getting very good jobs in the community sector, working for NGOs, Commissions, the public sector and in policy jobs. To get a true picture of these successes, we would need to track casuals who had left the university.

# Recommendations

— When asked what about ways to better support casuals, some strategies suggested included; mentoring and formal support for all sessional staff, funding for PhD students for publishing opportunities, inductions packages for all staff, cross disciplinary publications workshops, inclusion in school based research groups and platforms to share and collaborate with full time staff, addressing specific barriers to women's access to ongoing opportunities (intersectionality), valuing professional experience and skills rather than focusing so heavily on research publications along with teaching focused roles with less of a demand for research output. Some further recommendations included:

1. Subsidised childcare support for women (particularly international PhD candidates)
2. Short-term ongoing contracts for staff who have been long-term employees with WSU
3. Changes to the EOI system for Unit coordinators
4. Holistic staff wellbeing initiatives
5. Create staff cards for casuals for a minimum of 2 years across the university
6. Include casual academics on the WSU Staff listings
7. Include casual academics in university, School and Workgroup emails, so they are informed and aware of what is going on, and have full access to the opportunities for participation in university life.
8. Enable casual staff access to all WSU support sites available to full time staff members particularly the ACD website.

# Conclusion

— Sessional staff will remain a constant feature of the tertiary education workforce (Harvey, 2017; Loomes, Owens & McCarthy, 2019; Mauri, 2019; Whitchurch, 2019; Williams & Beovich, 2019). Nurturing and supporting casual staff in universities, has the capacity to bring about transformational change, particularly in the central core business of the university - teaching. Ironically, our excellent record on gender equity, as cited at the beginning of this report was a continual and galling reminder to casuals, that they were not generally included in the university policies and programs that supported gender equity.

The authors are profoundly moved by the stories these courageous women told and as a result, have a far better understanding of the barriers and difficulties casual staff experience. WSU can bring about a social transformation and we can invest in ways to meaningfully include casual staff. Enabling casuals to move from the margins to the centre and to nurture and build on their experience, talents and commitment should be central to staff wellbeing. The university has the leadership, the expertise, knowledge, awareness and the wherewithal, to turn this around and to nurture and support our casuals career and leadership aspirations. Enable us be vanguards of change by leading the way in treating casuals with the same parity of esteem in which we treat full-time staff.

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# Appendix

## Survey Questions in Survey Monkey

- How many semesters have you been employed as a sessional academic at WSU?
  - 1-2 semesters
  - 3-4 semesters
- Do you identify with any of the below (tick all that apply)
  - Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander
  - Woman with a disability
  - Woman from a culturally and linguistically diverse background
  - Older woman
  - Gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, intersex or queer
  - Don't identify
- Do you have responsibilities that impact on your work as a sessional staff member?
  - Caring responsibilities for children, an older person, a person with a disability or a person with a mental illness
  - Other forms of paid work
  - Study commitments
  - Unpaid or voluntary work
  - Other (please specify)
- In what capacity have you worked as a sessional at WSU?
- Tell us about your education and work experience (paid and unpaid)
- What were your career aspirations or goals when you began employment as a sessional staff member with WSU?
- Have your career goals/aspirations changed? If so, how and why?
- What support have you had in realising your goals?
- What would you say are the most significant barriers you have faced in regards to achieving your goals and aspirations?
- How can the university leverage your skills and experience and better support you in realising your career aspirations?

# Appendix

## Interview Questions

1. Please tell me your name and the year you were born
2. Please chose a pseudonym that you would like us to use in our report.
3. In what capacity have you worked as a sessional at WSU?
4. Can you tell me about your educational background?
5. What paid work experience have you had prior to joining WSU?
6. Tell me about your unpaid work/ family responsibilities e.g. caring for and supporting children, older people and those with a disability?
7. What were your career aspirations when you began working at WSU?
8. Have these changed? If so, how and why?
9. What supports and hindrances have you experienced in realizing your career aspirations and goals? (From the university, the school, AWG)
10. What supports and hindrances have you experienced in realizing your career aspirations and goals? (From family, friends and colleagues)
11. What would you say are the most significant barriers you have faced in regards to achieving your goals and aspirations?
12. Could you suggest ways that you could be better supported in realizing your career aspirations?
13. Is there anything else that you would like to add?



# Nurturing Leadership From The Bottom Up:

Supporting leadership and career aspirations for sessional staff.

## Research Report

Prepared by

Ashwini Kanitkar, Joelle Breault-Hood,  
Jane Mears and Tonia Gray

School of Social Sciences and Psychology  
(SSAP) and the School of Education (SOE)  
Western Sydney University

