Quality learning and teaching with sessional staff: systematising national standards

Final report 2016

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Benchmarking leadership and advancement
of standards for sessional teaching

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List of acronyms used

ACPET	Australian Council of Private Education and Training
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ANU	The Australian National University
BLASST	Benchmarking Leadership and Advancement of Standards for Sessional Teaching
B-BiT	BLASST – Benchmarking Interactive Tool
CADAD	Council of Australian Directors of Academic Development
CoP	Communities of Practice
COPHE	Council of Private Higher Education
EDIN	Educational Developers in Ireland Network
HEA	Higher Education Academy (UK)
HECA	Higher Education Colleges Association
HERDSA	Higher Education Research and Development Society of Australasia
IJAD	International Journal for Academic Development
ISSOTL	International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning
OLT	Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PIBT	Perth Institute of Business and Technology
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
SEDA	Staff and Educational Development Association
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
QUT	Queensland University of Technology
WAND	West Australian Network for Dissemination

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Executive summary

"Quality learning and teaching with sessional staff: systematising national standards" is a 2014 National Teaching Fellowship awarded through the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT)[1] and hosted at Macquarie University. It was completed in 2016.

The majority of teaching in Australian universities is undertaken by sessional staff, yet they have been at the periphery of learning and teaching plans. This fellowship addressed the issue of systematising good practice for learning and teaching with sessional staff through engagement with national standards across the higher education sector. It built upon and extended the outcomes of the project "Benchmarking Leadership and Advancement of Standards for Sessional Teaching (BLASST)" (2011-2013) (Harvey, 2014) and worked in synergy with the extension project "Recognising and rewarding good learning and teaching practice with sessional staff" (2014-2015) (refer to Appendix C for details about this project). The BLASST Sessional Staff Standards Framework was used in the fellowship and in the extension project activities as the national standards.

Henceforth, my fellowship is referred to as the BLASST fellowship.

The BLASST fellowship was contextualised by three **main theoretical frameworks**; these, in turn, informed the methodology used throughout the fellowship:

- Reflective Practice (Harvey, Coulson & McMaugh, 2016), which underpins
- Participatory Action Research (PAR) (after Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2014) and
- Distributed Leadership (Jones, Harvey, Lefoe & Ryland, 2014).

The diverse program of activities aimed to accomplish strategic change in higher education institutions; **achievements** included:

1. Benchmarking fora engaging 207 participants representing 34 national and international institutions.

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1. [1] *The OLT ceased on the 30 June 2016; the Australian Government Department of Education and Training continued to support the fellowship through the Promotion of Excellence in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education program.*

2. Participatory Action Research projects that achieved innovation and good practice with sessional staff.

3. An affirmation of the transferability of the BLASST national standards (and the benchmarking workshop) across private and non-self-accrediting higher education providers, as well as for the United Kingdom and Spain (as a European example).

4. Expansion of both national and international collaboration and networks for sharing research, innovation and good practice with sessional staff; for example, through the Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA) in the United Kingdom, the Council of Private Higher Education (COPHE) in Australia and others.

5. Dissemination of key research findings through scholarly publications.

These **key findings** and factors critical to the BLASST fellowship's success (page 21 of this report gives details) were:

- Participatory Action Research, together with reflective practice and distributed leadership, achieves outcomes for learning and teaching innovation.

- The strategic invitation of respected national and international leaders in quality learning and teaching with sessional staff as members of the fellowship's reference group, is a critical key to fellowship (and innovation) success.

- Building on past OLT projects and working in synergy with current projects to enhance impact is crucial.

- Research, evaluation and dissemination must be built in from the start.

- The BLASST standards framework and benchmarking workshop are effective in quality assurance and quality enhancement for learning and teaching with sessional staff.

- THE BLASST online Benchmarking Interactive Tool is robust and user-friendly.

- Australia is recognised as leading in sessional staff standards.

Impact examples include the international acknowledgement that the BLASST standards provide one "positive approach" (Brown, 2015, p.189) to ensure standards for quality learning and teaching with sessional staff. Nationally, examples of the impact on enhanced learning and teaching practice have been formally recognised by a 2016 *Australian Award for University Teaching for Programs that Enhance Learning* for QUT's Sessional Success Program, and by a 2016 *Citation for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning* to the University of Adelaide for their provision of outstanding support of sessional staff. Internationally, the higher education sector can "learn most" (EDIN & HECA, 2015, p.28) from Australia, as "Australia gives most cause for hope" (p. 29). Moreover, the Irish National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education has recommended that they develop their own standards that are informed by the BLASST standards (EDIN & HECA, 2015, p. 96). Australia is leading quality learning and teaching with sessional staff.

Given that all indicators predict a continuing reliance on sessional staff (Jaschik & Lederman, 2015) more needs to be done to systematise good practice. The fellowship activities, informed by the BLASST standards, identified four key actions for the sector. Namely, a need to:

- collect and maintain accurate data about sessional staff,
- support sessional staff, as the providers of teaching in our institutions, with professional development,
- continue to engage private and non self-accrediting higher education institutions with the BLASST national standards, and
- directly engage university executive and management to lead good practice with sessional staff and through the BLASST standards (Harvey, 2017).

One insightful observation has been that many university executives are unaware of sessional issues and facts. The involvement of Deputy Vice-Chancellors (Academic) will effect a more systematic approach to good practice with sessional staff. Strategically assisting and working with the Deputy Vice-Chancellors (Academic) is hence an important next step for Australian higher education.

At the conclusion of the fellowship, Australia is well placed to continue to lead the scholarly enhancement of learning and teaching with sessional staff. Having engaged nearly all of Australia's universities, awareness of sessional staff issues has been heightened; and the outcomes of the BLASST fellowship activities will continue to emerge as individuals and institutions realise their actions plans.

1 Fellowship context and aim

Sess·ion·al Staff /sessional stǽf/ noun.

Any teachers in higher education employed on a casual, short-term contract, or sessional basis. This may include lecturers, tutors, unit, program and subject convenors, demonstrators and markers.

The majority of teaching in Australian universities is undertaken by sessional staff (May, Strachan, Broadbent & Peetz, 2011), yet they have been at the periphery of learning and teaching plans. The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) identified a need to assure and enhance the quality of learning and teaching with sessional staff and to see sessional staff "managed strategically, with a focus on professional development, strong course coordination and the enabling of a culture of scholarship" (*Dr Carol Nicoll, Chief Commissioner, TEQSA, personal communication, 28 Jan, 2014*).

The fellowship identified quality learning and teaching with sessional staff as an educational issue. This issue affects the entire higher education system, government and private, as an increasing reliance on sessional staff (with a 174 percent increase between 1989 and 2013) (Andrews, Bare, Bentley, Goedegebuure, Pugsley & Rance, 2016, p.11) sees them responsible for the majority of teaching in the sector (May, et al., 2011), yet there is little, or only ad hoc, strategic management of this issue.

Higher education institutions' policies, programs and initiatives for assuring quality with sessional staff have been judged to be unsustainable and wanting (Bryson, 2013) in achieving good practice. The fellowship provided an opportunity to systematise good practice for quality learning and teaching, offering a standards-based approach, which Bryson recognises as a "new approach to sessional staff", with standards serving as "a way to leverage up good practice across the sector" and "a very useful model for the rest of the world to follow" (*Colin Bryson, Newcastle University, personal communication, 7 February, 2012*). These standards can help "build a world-class education".

The BLASST standards framework had already begun to inform higher education governance. "...TEQSA Chief Commissioner Carol Nicoll would also like to endorse Macquarie's Sessional Staff Standards Framework as an example of effective methods for ensuring quality standards for institutions that employ sessional staff" (*S. Young, personal communication, 4 April, 2013*).

The next step required "a sector-wide commitment to, and engagement with, the [BLASST sessional staff] standards to realise their potential for quality learning and teaching" (Harvey, 2013, p.10). The fellowship aimed to do this, with activities to establish leaders in the development of sessional staff standards across the nation. Engagement with such new standards would strengthen higher education through its educative function and enhance the quality of learning and teaching with sessional staff, thereby managing any risk to students (as identified by the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency, 2012, p. 25).

This fellowship aimed to address the issue of systematising good practice for learning and teaching with sessional staff through the implementation and embedding of national standards. It built upon and extended the outcomes of the BLASST (Benchmarking Leadership and Advancement of Standards for Sessional Teaching) (Harvey, 2014) and worked in synergy with the "Recognising and rewarding good learning and teaching practice with sessional staff" extension project (2014-2015) described at Appendix C.

The BLASST Sessional Staff Standards Framework (Harvey, 2014) was used in the fellowship and in the extension project activities as national standards. The fellowship commenced with the premise that the BLASST Sessional Staff Standards Framework was uniquely positioned in Australian higher education to become our national standards.

The BLASST fellowship's intend outcomes were:
1. Change across the higher education sector as the sessional staff standards, and good practice, are systematised by providers through the use of benchmarking and other activities,

2. Sustainable leadership capability development for quality learning and teaching with sessional staff across the sector, and

3. Recognition and dissemination of sector good practice and scholarship around quality learning and teaching with sessional staff.

The fellowship activities were developed to strategically achieve these outcomes. Overtly, these strategies were based on the strategies developed by Jenkins and Healey (2005) and included:
- organising events such as the Communities of Practice (CoPs) fora and institutional benchmarking;

- developing institutional strategies such as the action plans by using the B-BiT or BLASST Benchmarking Interactive Tool (Harvey, 2014);

- auditing policies and practices with reviews, assisted by benchmarking with the B-BiT;

- ensuring that sessional staff quality issues are central to induction, professional learning, recruitment and promotion – all criteria that make up the framework for the BLASST standards; and

- developing robust quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms at multiple levels within an institution by using the BLASST standards framework.

2 Fellowship approach, including methodology

My BLASST fellowship adopted three main theoretical frameworks that, in turn, informed the methodology used throughout:

- Reflective Practice (Harvey, Coulson & McMaugh, 2016), which underpins

- Participatory Action Research (PAR) (after Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2014) and

- Distributed Leadership (Jones, Harvey, Lefoe & Ryland, 2014).

All three approaches were embedded, role-modelled and enacted throughout all fellowship activities, resulting in activities that were described as "informative and engaging" (QUT participant, 24/10/2014) and even "fun" (VU participant, 16/03/2016). The rationale for choosing these three key theoretical approaches included that reflective practice develops practitioner capacity for considered and transformational learning through higher order thinking, and that PAR actively engages all participants in activities and research. This aligns with the distributed leadership tenet that all participants have strengths they can draw on when appropriate to the activity and outcomes.

A *community of scholars* supported the fellowship activities and were members of the fellowship's reference group. The reference group members played a pivotal role in making the activities possible. National and international scholars were invited to join the reference group based upon their expertise with sessional staff. Members included: Dr. George Brown (The Study Group, as a liaison for private providers); Colin Bryson (the leading UK expert on sessional staff and co-facilitator of the workshop at Newcastle University, UK); Professor Jillian Hamiliton (co-facilitator of the Queensland workshop at QUT), Professor Sandra Jones (co-facilitator of the Victoria workshop at RMIT); Dr Kathryn Sutherland, Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand (leading New Zealand expert on sessional staff and senior editor of the *International Journal of Academic Development*), a Council of Australian Directors of Academic Development (CADAD) representative (Professor Denise Chalmers, who issued the invitation to present at CADAD) and a TEQSA representative (Paula Kelly , Regulation and Review Group).

3 Fellowship outputs and findings

The BLASST fellowship aimed to work towards systematising good practice for learning and teaching with sessional staff through the implementation and embedding of national standards represented by the BLASST Sessional Staff Standards Framework (Harvey, 2014). Originally five activities were planned to achieve this aim, but one activity was not realised. The piloting of inter-institutional benchmarking using the BLASST framework was not adopted by any of the activity participants, although they were made aware that this is one possible form of benchmarking. While this activity was not essential to systemising national standards, it had been offered as an activity that could enhance sector collaboration, and inter-institutional capacity development around sessional staff standards. For institutions to participate in inter-institutional benchmarking a strong foundation of trust is needed, and establishing this takes time. In terms of future plans for inter-institutional benchmarking, a longer time period is needed to allow institutions to find benchmarking partners, and small, funded benchmarking projects need to be prioritised.

The four key, and enacted, fellowship activities were planned to advance learning and teaching in Australian higher education and to stimulate strategic change in higher education institutions. These activities and their outputs are now reported.

3.1 Activity – state-wide benchmarking fora

The fellowship provided national support for benchmarking using the BLASST framework and interactive tool, through a series of collaborative, interdisciplinary and multi-level Communities of Practice (CoP) fora using the successful BLASST workshop program (developed through the precursor OLT project and available under benchmarking at the BLASST website and via Harvey, 2014). The online location of the benchmarking framework was provided to participants on a bookmark, illustrated at Figure 1.

Up to four state-wide CoP fora were planned and achieved. Members of the fellowship reference group working with professional bodies, including CADAD and Staff and Educational Development Association (SEDA), were essential in ensuring the success of these fora. Research and evaluation were built into every fellowship activity (Wadsworth, 2010). Key lessons learned, from reflecting on the evaluation data, were used to inform the next research cycle of activity.

Fora participants were from multiple organisational levels and disciplines, as the responsibility for sessional staff is often distributed across organisations. In addition to a focus on learning and teaching with sessional staff, the fora aimed to promote a model of distributed leadership and action research, integrating and reflecting the methodology of the fellowship.

The first state-wide forum was in Queensland, hosted by QUT (22 October 2014), followed by Western Australia, hosted by Curtin and supported by WAND (29 October 2014). Before the next state-wide forum the forum facilitators returned to their host university and facilitated the workshop with the Faculty of Science (17 November 2014), as they had yet to participate in benchmarking.

The next state-wide forum was in the ACT, hosted by ANU (20 November 2014) and supported by the ACT branch of HERDSA; the fourth was in Victoria and hosted by RMIT (02 December 2014). A host-university workshop for the Faculty of Business and Economics (13 February 2015) was the last in this series.

Additional workshops were then facilitated by invitation: at the University of Canberra for leaders of learning and teaching (11 August 2015) as well as an open session for all interested in the BLASST standards (11 August 2015); at Monash University for leaders of learning and teaching (20 August 2015) and for the School of Biomedical Sciences (21 August 2015); for an international group at the ISSOTL conference (27 October 2015); and the last at Victoria University city campus (16 March 2016).

Figure 1 The BLASST bookmark distributed at CoPs giving participants easy access to the website address

3.1 Outputs – state-wide benchmarking fora

Key outputs for participants of the fora included:

- engaging with an online poll to learn about recent research on learning and scholarship of sessional staff;

- listening to a short introduction to the BLASST framework;

- benchmarking their department/faculty or organisation by working through the BLASST framework, using the online B-BiT tool (at BLASST.edu.au);

- generating baseline data about sessional staff standards in their context, provided by the BLASST colour-coded summary report; and

- acting on the results by planning an action, to work towards improving good practice with sessional staff in their organisational context (i.e. action plans).

The action plans developed by the fora participants are discussed in the next section.

3.2 Activity – small action research projects

The participants' action plans formed the basis for the design of an action research project to either sustain or enhance quality learning and teaching with sessional staff. Participants were invited to submit an expression of interest for the BLASST fellow's support for their projects. This strategy was inspired by a model developed by the 'Subject coordinators: Leading professional development for sessional staff project (Lefoe, Parrish, Malfroy,

McKenzie & Ryan, 2011). Project leaders were then invited to participate in a national webinar to share learning. These projects are one example of how the fellowship developed the leadership capability of the sector.

3.2 Outputs – small action research projects

Examples from across the sector of the projects initiated as outcomes of the BLASST action plans include:

- Tutors' Participation Enhancement Proposal
  Esther Elly Matemba, Curtin University

- Tutor Profiling and Curation for Teaching Quality Assurances
  Dr Nicholas Tse, Department of Engineering, Macquarie University

- Fixed and Flexible: Reusable resources for Postgraduate coursework students
  Dr Elizabeth Ellison and Dr Lee McGowan, Queensland University of Technology

- Mathematical Sciences tutor development framework
  Judy-Anne Osborn, University of Newcastle

- Sessional staff professional portfolios
  Penny Wheeler, ACU

An example of an action research project that rapidly achieved impressive impact was the *Sustainable and systemised support for sessional staff at RMIT*, led by Kellyann Geurts, Design and Social Context College Office, RMIT University. Ms. Geurts' project, with a focus on professional development for sessional staff, went on to be judged as a finalist at the BLASST 2015 National Awards for good practice (OLT BLASST extension project, refer to Appendix C). Figure 2 shows Ms Geurts receiving the award. The award of good practice was determined by assessment against the BLASST Sessional Staff Standards Framework (Harvey, 2014). Detailsabout Ms Geurts' project is also available on the BLASST website. In addition to this national recognition, her project was acknowledged by her university and she received congratulatory letters from her institutional leaders (specifically: Professor Gill Palmer, Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President, Academic Office; Professor Geoff Crisp, Dean, Learning and Teaching, Office of Dean Learning and Teaching; Professor Paul Gough, Pro Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President, DSC College Office; and Dr Rosemary Mulraney, Senior Manager, Learning Strategies) and went on to present about this project at the 2015 ISSOTL conference. As such, the project impacted the department and whole college (faculty) and through wider dissemination will be providing authentic good practice examples for the national and international sector.

Figure 2 Photo of Kellyann Geurts receiving her 2015 BLASST national good practice finalist award (by Michael Catabay)

3.3 Activity – engaging the private sector

Having engaged nearly every university in Australia with the BLASST framework through the fellowship activities and/or through the 2015 BLASST National Summit (Appendix C), the fellowship now aimed to explore the transferability of benchmarking with the BLASST framework to private and non-self-accrediting higher education providers. These benchmarking workshop actvities would also serve the purpose of expanding the reach and influence of the national standards with this large body of providers. While three organisations expressed their interest in this activity before the fellowship started, all three experienced staff attrition, resulting in the loss of the fellowhsips' local champion and meaning that the organisaitons were not imiediately ready to participate in a benchmarking workshop.

Alternative strategies had to be explored in the next action research cycle. Direct invitations to participate in the BLASST fellowship workshops were made during September 2014 to January 2015 through the professional organisations for private higher education providers, the Council of Private Higher Education (COPHE) and the Australian Council of Private Education and Training (ACPET).

The potential for interest in BLASST and the benchmarking workshops was not realised via this alternative approach. This is in contrast to the fact that private higher education

providers also rely on sessional staff to undertake the majority of the teaching. It is possible that the Australian Government 2014-15 Budget announcement about changes to higher education may have diverted private providers' attention and resources to the public debate and discussion about deregulating the provision of Commonwealth supported places. It is also possible that private providers, at that time, required greater lead-time to be part of the opportunity made available through the BLASST fellowship. Instead of workshops with individual providers, COPHE did invite me to present about the BLASST fellowship and the national standards for sessional staff at its Quality Assurance and Benchmarking Workshop (31 March 2015).

The third action research cycle under this activity benefited from serendipity. Connections were made with private providers through the BLASST state-wide fora (for example, with Lina Ridley, Perth Institute of Business and Technology, PIBT); through an invited BLASST presentation at an Informa conference where representatives of the private sector were participating (Carolyn Barker, CEO Endeavour Learning Group); and through the BLASST presentation at the COPHE workshop. The outputs resulting from these almost serendipitous connections are now described.

3.3 Outputs – engaging the private sector

Ms Carolyn Barker AM had formally written about her organisation's good practice with sessional staff and submitted this as a nomination for the 2015 BLASST national good practice awards. This submission, *Sessional Staff – Ensuring our Institutional Ambassadors Protect our Brand in the Classroom*, was judged as a finalist; details can be found at the BLASST website. Barker was a one of the finalists recognised at the 2015 National Summit (Figure 3).

Figure 3 Photo of Carolyn J Barker AM receiving her 2015 BLASST national good practice finalist award (by Michael Catabay)

One participant at the COPHE workshop, Dr Andy West, Universal Business School Sydney (UBBS), used the BLASST standards in July 2015 to benchmark his organisation against the national standards. The resulting UBSS internal report is being used to develop strategies to enhance practice. Dr Zachariah Duke, Academic Assistant to the Dean of Studies, The Broken Bay Institute, undertook a similar benchmarking activity and disseminated his findings at the 2016 Higher Education Compliance and Quality Network (HECQ) Forum. The BLASST standards were used to work towards 'Quality assurance in unit design and delivery with sessional academic staff'. These activities suggest the transferability of the BLASST standards to the private and non-self accrediting sector.

3.4 Activity – international and national collaborations

Having validated the BLASST standards across the Australian higher education sector, the fellowship aimed to expand both national and international collaborations and networks for sharing research, innovation and good practice with sessional staff.

An original plan was to work with the Higher Education Academy (HEA) in the United Kingdom, and specifically with Dr Sally Bradley (Academic Lead – Accreditation, Recognition and Reward) to engage learning and teaching leaders with the BLASST standards; for example, through presentations at their national conference and workshops. However, in 2015 no learning and teaching conference was held as the academy responded to a change in structure. In addition, communication with relevant academy staff to discuss possibilities was challenging, partly due to staff attrition.

The next action research cycle necessitated different strategies. SEDA were contacted and were supportive of BLASST workshops in the UK. Consequently, two BLASST workshops were offered. Several other international invitations for collaborations emerged throughout the period of the BLASST fellowship: a guest editor role for the *International Journal of Academic Development* and a special issue on sessional staff, an invitation to present at an international conference hosted at the University of Barcelona and an invitation to present a BLASST workshop (27 October, 2015) and to lead a symposium panel (30 October, 2015) at the ISSOTL (International Society for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning) conference.

Nationally, the fellowship lead to an invitation, which I accepted, to be an expert review member on the OLT-funded Smart Casual project (Heath, Hewitt, Israel & and Skead, 2014) and another to present at the 2015 Informa Future of Learning in Higher Education Summit (16-17 February 2015); the latter then led to an invitation by the Vice-Provost of University College London to meet with their learning and teaching team.

3.4 Outputs – international and national collaborations

New and emerging national and international collaborations resulted in a diverse range of fellowship opportunities and outcomes, summarised in this section.

In collaboration with SEDA, two BLASST workshops were facilitated in the UK. Fran Beaton (University of Kent and SEDA Conference and events committee) co-hosted the London workshop, while Colin Bryson (Newcastle University and BLASST reference group member)

co-hosted the Newcastle workshop (July, 2015). Figure 4 shows photos from these events. The two workshops tested the transferability of the BLASST standards framework beyond the Australian sector, and found it to be valid. The success of these workshops has several implications for Australian higher education and the BLASST standards: they are transferable internationally; the acceptance of the BLASST standards recognises the Australian sector as leading the world (in good learning and teaching with sessional staff); and this international recognition gives the standards greater legitimacy and gravitas across our Australian sector.

A meeting was held with Professor Anthony W. Smith, Vice-Provost (Education) of University College London, followed by a meeting with their learning and teaching team to introduce the BLASST framework. This meeting followed an invitation by the Vice Provost (after the BLASST presentation at the Informa conference) to disseminate the BLASST standards at University College London.

Collaboration with Ann Coughlan, Higher Education consultant, resulted in the attachment of the BLASST framework to her [commissioned report](#) to the Irish National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning in Higher Education. An example of impact from the BLASST fellowship is her recognition that the international education sector can "learn most" (EDIN & HECA, 2015, p.28) from Australia as "Australia gives most cause for hope" (p.29) she then recommends that Ireland develop their own standards informed by the BLASST standards (p. 96).

The Australian Studies Centre, University of Barcelona hosted a panel at their 2016 world congress (18-22 January, 2016) focusing on quality learning and teaching with sessional staff. Collaborating with SEDA and University of Barcelona colleagues, the world congress group members convened the panel "Sessional university teaching staff: on the academic border or belonging?" with 90 participants. The panel members were Kristina Everett (Australian Catholic University), Bill Phillips (Head of Department Universitat de Barcelona), Fran Beaton Senior (Unit for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching (UELT) University of Kent, UK), and Maria Grau-Perejoan (Universitat de Barcelona). Sessional staff issues are international, and the conference panel affirmed the transferability of the standards beyond the Australian context. From an Australian higher education perspective, a most interesting finding from both the national and international activities is that BLASST has been confirmed as leading the way both in Australia and across the world.
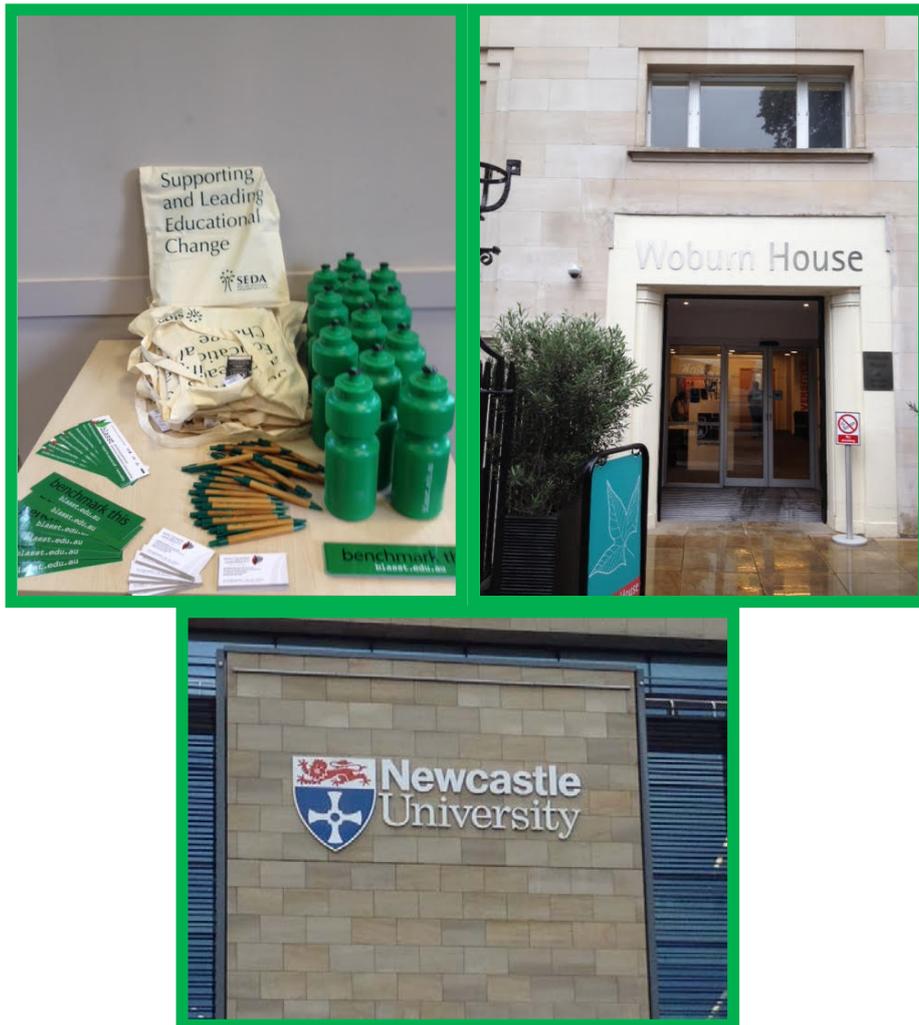
**Figure 4 Images from UK BLASST
workshop: resources, Woburn House
London, and Newcastle University**

4. Key learnings and outcomes

The BLASST fellowship achieved a range of outcomes.

4.1 Key learnings

Participatory Action Research, together with reflective and distributed leadership, achieves intended outcomes.

The inherent flexibility offered by PAR enables serendipitous opportunities to be considered reflectively and, if judged as offering potential to achieve positive outcomes, to be embraced and acted on; the lack of outcome from one research cycle can also be reflected on to inform new and alternative strategies for the next cycle of action. PAR is effective for achieving and furthering learning and teaching innovation.

The strategic invitation of respected national and international leaders in quality learning and teaching with sessional staff as members of the fellowship's reference group was a critical key to success.

In a distributed leadership approach, each reference group member was active in supporting the fellowship activities. This support ranged from promoting BLASST workshops to helping with event publicity and management, from making dissemination and networking opportunities available to providing expert advice.

Building on past OLT projects and coordinating with current projects enhances impact.

One simple but creative activity that formed part of the BLASST fellowship workshops was the use of the cartoon art that had been produced as reflection-in-action at the first BLASST National Summit in 2013. These [BLASST cartoons](#) were again effectively used as a reflective prompt to open and stimulate discussion on sessional staff learning and teaching issues, allowing institutional contexts to be examined and judged. Added impact and dissemination were achieved via the 2015 National awards for good practice with sessional staff, celebrated at the 2015 BLASST National Summit (Appendix C). Some participants in the BLASST fellowship benchmarking workshops went on to develop their action plans from the benchmarking activity into projects that achieved national recognition as good practice at the 2015 BLASST National Summit. Many collaborations have been established with current fellowships and projects; for example, fellows and project leaders are currently exploring the alignment between peer recognition, evidence, benchmarking and the online peer-review tool (for example, the OLT national fellowship on professional recognition by Beth Beckmann, the OLT project on peer review of assessment networks by Sara Booth and the OLT national senior fellowship on recognising and rewarding teaching by Denise Chalmers). A larger project has begun to be scoped on sessional staff that has garnered international interest (for example, from Nottingham Trent University, the University of Barcelona and the University of London) but has been put on hold as the fellow currently does not have a host institution.

Research, evaluation and dissemination must be built in from the start.

The collection of research and evaluative data at each action research cycle of the fellowship ensured that the external evaluator had access to a range of data. The data had

the advantage, given human ethics approval, of also being able to be used for research investigation and publications.

4.2 Key outcomes

The BLASST website (BLASST.edu.au)
The BLASST website functions as a repository of resources about good practice for quality learning and teaching with sessional staff. The B-BiT has proven to be a robust tool that has been used by diverse workshop participants, and the BLASST standards framework has been easily transferable nationally and internationally. The fellowship activities relied heavily on fora, workshop, seminar and conference participants engaging with B-BiT and, as a result, these activities were able to disseminate the key feature of the BLASST website. The provision of the user friendly, online tool (B-BiT) also appeared to add gravitas to the BLASST fellowship as participants appreciated this accessible resource.

BLASST benchmarking fora
Table 1, over the page, summarises the workshops facilitated as fellowship activities. An outcome for participants was engagement with and experiential learning of the BLASST standards using the online B-Bit, the generation of a summary benchmarking report and the development of an action plan.

Table 1 List of BLASST fellowship benchmarking fora

Date	State and/or Institution	Number of Participants
22 October 2014	Queensland workshop	13
29 October 2014	Western Australia workshop	16
17 November 2014	Faculty of Science, Macquarie University	12
20 November 2014	ACT workshop	20
02 December 2014	Victoria workshop	8
13 February 2015	Faculty of Business and Economics, Macquarie University	23
7 July 2015	SEDA and Newcastle University, UK	7
13 July 2015	SEDA at Woburn House, London	12
11 August 2015	Leaders of Learning and Teaching University of Canberra	12
11 August 2015	Open session University of Canberra	21
20 August 2015	Leaders of Learning and Teaching Monash University	23
21 August 2015	School of Biomedical Sciences Monash University	24
27 October 2015	ISSOTL BLASST workshop	6
16 March 2016	Victoria University City Campus Sydney	30
TOTAL		227

Engagement of multiple organisations and disciplines with the BLASST standards
The BLASST benchmarking fora engaged participants from a range of organisations and disciplines (Table 2). The participating institutions used the BLASST standards to benchmark at department, faculty or institutional levels. A fellowship outcome is that participants both generated a benchmarking report and then developed an action plan (for their institution's internal use) addressing an area that was identified as needing development.

Table 2 Organisations and disciplines that participated in the BLASST fellowship workshops

List of participating organisations	List of disciplines represented
Australian Catholic University	Academic/Educational Development
Australian National University	Accounting and Corporate Governance
Buckinghamshire New University	Applied Finance and Actuarial Studies
Curtin University of Technology	Art
Deakin University	Biological Sciences
James Cook University	Business
Keele University	Chiropractic
Macquarie University	Communication
Macquarie City Campus	Computing
Manchester Metropolitan University	Creative Industries
Monash University	Dental Science
Open University	Economics
Perth Institute of Business Technology	Education
QUT	Engineering
Ravensbourne	Learning/Digital Design
Robert Gordon University	Marketing and Management
RMIT University	Maths
Sheffield Hallam University	Nutrition
University College London	Physics and Astronomy
The University of Adelaide	Quality and Compliance
University of Barcelona	Science Education
University of Canberra	Sessional Academic Staff Unit/ Advisors
University of Edinburgh	
University of Greenwich	
University of Kent	
The University of Newcastle	
University of Roehampton	
University of Southern Queensland	
University of Sunderland	
University of the Sunshine Coast	
University of Westminster	
University of Worcester	
The University of Western Australia	
Victoria University (city campus Sydney)	

Dissemination of knowledge

The BLASST fellowship has worked to consistently disseminate information about systematising national standards for quality learning and teaching with sessional staff. The avenues for this have included:

Invited formal presentations: for example, to CADAD (24 October, 2014), COPHE (31 March 2015) and Informa Future of Learning in Higher Education conference (17 February, 2015); there was also a poster presentation at the OLT 2016 Learning and Teaching 2013 conference (28 April, 2016).

Publications

Harvey, M. & Fredericks, V. (Eds). (2015). *Quality learning and teaching with sessional staff*. HERDSA Guide. Milperra: HERDSA. Figure 5 shows the finished guide.

Harvey, M. (2015). Ensuring quality standards for learning and teaching with sessional staff. In S. Brown (Ed). *Learning, teaching and assessment in higher education: global perspectives*. London: Palgrave, 189-191.

Harvey, M. & Fredericks, V. (2017). CoPs: Enhancing quality learning and teaching with sessional staff, Chapter 37. In J. McDonald and A. Cater-Steel (Eds). *Communities of Practice – Facilitating social learning in higher education.* Singapore: Springer, pp.505-523. DOI: 10.1007/978-981-10-2879-3

As a guest editor for **a special issue** of the International Journal for Academic Development (2017) I was able to provide an editorial:

Harvey, M (2017). Editorial. Quality learning and teaching with sessional staff: systematising good practice for academic development. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 22, (1) 1-6.

The special issue also featured authors who had been active in the BLASST fellowship and extension grant, namely:

Crimmins, G. (2017). Feedback from the coal-face: how the lived experience of women casual academics can inform human resources and academic development policy and practice. *International Journal for Academic Development, 22*, (1) 7-18.

Dr Crimmins was a keynote at the 2015 BLASST national summit.

Beaton, F. (2017). Just in time and future-proofing? Policy, challenges and opportunities in the professional development of part-time teachers*. International Journal for Academic Development, 22*, (1) 19-30

Fran Beaton was a panel member on the symposium 'Sessional university teaching staff on the academic border of belonging: a sector perspective' *at the* 2016 University of Barcelona conference Go Between, In Between: borders of belonging conference.

Matthews, K.E., Dick, J.M. & Bartle, E. (2017). Sustaining institution-wide induction for sessional staff in a research-intensive university: the strength of shared ownership. *International Journal for Academic Development, 22*, (1) 43-55.

The three authors were finalists at the 2015 BLASST Good Practice Awards.

Lekkas, D. & Winning, T.A. (2017). Using quality enhancement processes to achieve sustainable development and support for sessional staff. *International Journal for Academic Development, 22,* (1) 70-83.

The lead author was a finalist at both the 2013 and the 2015 BLASST Good Practice Awards.

Fredericks, V. & Bosanquet, A. (2017). 'An essential right': reflections on evaluating a professional development program for tutors*. International Journal for Academic Development, 22*, (1) 84-89.

The lead author was a project manager for the BLASST fellowship activities.

BLASST monthly newsletter: sent out to an email list of over 340 readers. An example can be viewed at the [BLASST website](#).

Figure 5 Dr Vanessa Fredericks at the launch of the HERDSA guide, July 2015

5. BLASST fellowship impact and evaluation

Dissemination is the planned process of understanding and engaging with potential adopters, and facilitating commitment to change throughout the life of the project (Hinton, Gannaway, Berry & Moore, 2011). Three key dissemination strands of Assess Climate, Engage and Transfer (Hinton, et.al, 2011), compatible with the original Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) dissemination framework (2008), shaped the progress of this project's dissemination. Assessing climate (or evaluating systems, Wadsworth, 2011) was enacted at the state-wide fora as the fellowship developed a richer understanding of current sessional staff standards nationally through benchmarking with the B-BiT. Participants, as leaders of quality learning and teaching, engaged with the fellowship through this activity, and more deeply through the action research projects. Both the fora and the action research projects were strategies for transferring the application of the standards across the sector.

Profile-building was aligned with each stage of the dissemination strategy, building on the brand established by the earlier BLASST project. Fellowship activities and outcomes are "findable" (Hinton, et al., 2011) via the website, which has extended the BLASST.edu.au site and the electronic monthly newsletter/blog (adapted from the model developed by SaMnet (Sharma et al. 2014).

Impact

A summary of the impact achieved by the BLASST national teaching fellowship is presented as structured by the Impact Management Planning and Evaluation Ladder (IMPEL) Model (Hinton, 2014)

1. Fellow

The impact for the fellow was that of increasing knowledge about systematising good practice with sessional staff, with a growing recognition of the fellow as the national expert on sessional staff issues for learning and teaching (e.g. by Professor Nicholas Klomp, Deputy Vice Chancellor (Education), University of Canberra, personal communication, 17th August 2015). One insightful observation has been that many university executives are unaware of sessional issues and facts. The next priority for the fellow will be to directly work with the Deputy Vice-Chancellors (Academic) to effect a more systematic approach to good practice with sessional staff.

2. Immediate students

The fellow and reference group members were all proactive in leading change to enhance quality learning and teaching with sessional staff, and therefore to benefit students immediately, if indirectly. One example is of Professor Sandra Jones (RMIT) who supported a BLASST workshop participant (Kelly-Ann Guerts) with her action research project; the project was awarded as a finalist in the 2015 BLASST national good practice awards and went on to be presented at the ISSOTL conference.

3. Spreading the word

The "growth or spread of disseminated ideas" was a key focus of the BLASST fellowship in systematising national standards. This was achieved across Australia, and in the United Kingdom and Spain, through the benchmarking fora (Section 4.2). Integrating interactive technology activities (such as quizzes and online polling using Socrative) enhanced the participants' engagement.

Contributions to new knowledge in the field were also achieved through the workshop activities, but also directly through publications and newsletters; for example, the writing up of a HERDSA guide brought together the original BLASST project team members as authors. Another strategy was calling on BLASST workshop participants (from Australia and the United Kingdom) to act as peer reviewers for the papers submitted for the special issue of the *Internal Journal for Academic Development*, thereby "spreading the word" about the good practice strategies and new research.

4. Narrow opportunistic adoption

"Changes by opportunistic adopters" were evident across the course of the fellowship. Organisations such as Adjunctfinder (http://www.adjunctfinder.com/) initiated meetings (15 September, 2014) to learn about the BLASST Sessional Teaching Standards Framework with the intention of promoting them with their national and international clients. The standards were also promoted by the fellowship's reference group to associations such as the Chair of Academic Board Forum (9 April, 2015).

5. Narrow systemic adoption

Systemic changes at participating institutions were strategically structured as a concluding, but forward-planning, activity for BLASST workshop participants. All participants used the benchmarking report they generated to develop action plans that they implemented (Section 3.2 gives some examples), and it is anticipated that these will lead to positive changes for students.

6. Broad opportunistic adoption

Several examples of broad opportunistic adoption can be provided. Following the lack of success of being able to work with the HEA for BLASST workshops in the UK, an opportunistic adoption by SEDA to actively support and co-host the BLASST workshops resulted in this professional body gaining a familiarity with Australia's national standards, and in many institutions across the UK engaging in BLASST benchmarking activities. The BLASST standards have now been internationally recognised as one "positive approach" (Brown, 2015, p.189) to ensure standards for quality learning and teaching with sessional staff. This international recognition affords greater professional legitimacy of the standards, important for their ongoing adoption and systemisation across the Australian sector.

Another opportunistic and international adoption of the BLASST standards was the promotion through the final report by the Educational Developers in Ireland Network and Higher Education Colleges Association (EDIN & HECA, 2015).

7. Broad systemic adoption

The BLASST fellowship has begun a process of broad systemic adoption. The fellowship brought useful attention to the 2015 National BLASST Summit and national awards for good practice with sessional staff (Appendix C). The increasing number and quality of examples of good practice (including as recognised through the BLASST good practice awards) are testament to this adoption. Likewise, my role as guest editor for a special issue of the International Journal for Academic Development in 2017 revealed that the expertise on enhancing quality learning and teaching with sessional staff is centred in Australia, which has become the international leader on sessional staff standards.

Evaluation

A key criterion in developing the fellowship's evaluation framework was the need for it to align with and enhance both the Distributed Approach to Leadership and the Participatory Action Research method. This method encompasses a process of MERI (monitoring, evaluation, research and improvement) (Wadsworth, 2011). The framework was shaped by the work of Wadsworth to ensure that every activity would be "building in research and evaluation" (Wadsworth, 2010) that is both formative and summative in measuring fellowship outcomes. To support formative evaluation, an interactive or participatory evaluation approach (Owen, 2006) supported the fellowship's activities and methodology, and an "integrated monitoring with impact" approach (Owen, 2006) was considered most efficacious for the summative function of the evaluation.

While the evaluation was originally planned around Chesterton and Cummings' (2011) model, a significant change was made when the fellow attended the OLT's 2014 fellowship orientation day. During this day a process-logic model was introduced. After much consideration and discussion with the external evaluator, the fellow decided to move toward using a process-logic model. Ongoing evaluation (embedded in the PAR approach), acted as a monitoring mechanism to continually review and recalibrate strategies to ensure the achievement of both planned and emergent fellowship outcomes.

The full external evaluation report is attached as Appendix D. The evaluation reported on the fellowship to the end of July 2015.

In summary, the evaluation reported that the BLASST fora were successful in raising national awareness around: the BLASST standards, benchmarking with the B-BiT, and sessional staff issues and research. The networking offered by the fora was appreciated by participants as an opportunity for sharing and learning from good practice across institutions. The evaluator posited a set of concluding recommendations to guide future BLASST initiatives including: to have greater participation from senior leaders (such as Deputy Vice-Chancellors); to develop a business case on the need to address sessional staff issues; and to work towards different ways to engage the private sector.

It should be noted that the fellowship continued up to April 2016 and so was able to benefit from the evaluators July 2015 guidance. In response to the evaluator's concluding recommendations, the fellow: engaged in discussion with Universities Australia's Deputy

Vice-Chancellors (Academic) executive member, Professor Martin Carroll, about dissemination of the BLASST standards; collected expressions of interest from national and internal colleagues about a new project focusing on the business case, or bottom line, of sessional staff issues, and has moved from promoting the use of benchmarking with the private sector, towards individual conversations and consultations.

The generous support for the fellowship by Macquarie University provided opportunity for some fellowship funds to be used for additional activities, supported by the OLT. The activities included increasing national engagement with the BLASST Sessional Staff Standards; supporting distributed leadership capacity in higher education and other dissemination of good practice and scholarship around quality learning and teaching with sessional staff.

Appendix A: Certification by Deputy Vice-Chancellor

I certify that all parts of the final report for this fellowship provide an accurate representation of the implementation, impact and findings of the project, and that the report is of publishable quality.

Name: ……… Professor John Simons ....Date: ……11 May 2016....................……

Appendix B: References

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Appendix C: Recognising and rewarding good learning and teaching practice with sessional staff

BLASST extension project
This project extended the outcomes of the Benchmarking Leadership and Advancement of Standards for Sessional Teaching (BLASST) project (Harvey, 2014) by recognising and disseminating good practice and scholarship about quality higher education learning and teaching with sessional staff.

It established foundations for the Australian higher education system for sessional staff standards for quality learning and teaching.

This extension project supported the following BLASST activities:

2015 BLASST National Summit (Sydney)
A 2015 national leadership summit on quality learning and teaching with sessional staff (or 2015 BLASST National Summit) was held in Sydney. This was the second such summit, the first was held 22 February 2013 as part of the BLASST project (Harvey, 2014). The 2013 BLASST summit engaged participants from 40 institutions, representing 29 disciplines.

This extension project achieved similar representation at the second summit, with the range of higher education participants including sessional staff, Deputy Vice-Chancellors (learning and teaching) and academic and professional staff working with sessional teachers. Representatives from TEQSA also participated.

National awards for good practice with sessional staff, 2015
In 2014, nominations for good practice with sessional staff were invited from Australian higher education institutions. Good practice was determined by assessment against the national standards for sessional staff, articulated by the BLASST Sessional Staff Standards Framework (Harvey, 2014). Details about the assessment process may be found at the BLASST website.

Ten BLASST Good Practice Award finalists were selected to present at the BLASST National Summit held in Sydney on 10 April 2015. The summit provided an occasion to celebrate the significant work of QUT's *The Sessional Teaching and Reflection Showcase* and *Sessional Career Advancement Development;* it also recognised good practice at 7 other higher education institutions.

Information about the awards and details about the recipients and nominated teams can be found at the BLASST website.

Note. This project was implemented concurrently by Dr Marina Harvey with her BLASST 2014 National Teaching Fellowship. This approached supported useful synergies – for example invitations for the national good practice awards were extended through fellowship activities. Also assisted in this way was dissemination of the good practice identified through the 2015 and earlier awards.

Appendix D: External evaluator report

OLT NATIONAL TEACHING FELLOWSHIP:

QUALITY LEARNING AND TEACHING WITH SESSIONAL STAFF: SYSTEMATISING NATIONAL STANDARDS

EXTERNAL EVALUATION FINAL REPORT

Prepared by Dr Dominique Parrish,
Associate Dean (Education) Faculty of Science, Medicine and Health, University of Wollongong

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Fellowship External Evaluation Report

BLASSTFELLOWSHIP

BACKGROUND TO THE FELLOWSHIP

The majority of teaching in Australian universities is undertaken by sessional staff yet these staff have been at the periphery of learning and teaching plans. This fellowship addressed the issue of systematising good practice for learning and teaching with sessional staff through the implementation and embedding of national standards. It aimed to build upon and extend the outcomes of an OLT project, Benchmarking Leadership and Advancement of Standards for Sessional Teaching (Harvey, 2014). The diverse program of activities aimed to stimulate strategic change in higher education institutions and included: state benchmarking fora; inter---institutional benchmarking; pilots with private providers; action research projects; and scholarly dissemination of research, innovation and good practice case studies. The intention was for fellowship activities be used as a conduit to build national and international partnerships.

TABLE 1. BLASST FELLOWSHIP TEAM

FELLOWSHIP MEMBERS	AFFILIATION
Dr Marina Harvey *Leading Fellow*	Senior Lecturer, Learning and Teaching Centre, Macquarie University
Dr Vanessa Fredericks *Program Research and Development Officer*	Macquarie University, Critical & Cultural Studies, Graduate Student, Macquarie University
FELLOWSHIP REFERENCE GROUP	**AFFILIATION**
Dr George Brown	Group Academic Director, Study Group
Colin Bryson	Director of the Combined Honours Centre, Newcastle University, UK
W/Prof Denise Chalmers	Winthrop Professor and Director, Centre for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning (CATL), University of Western Australia
Prof Jillian Hamilton	Director, Student Success and Retention, Queensland University of Technology (QUT)
Prof Sandra Jones	Professor of Employment Relations, and the Director of the Centre for Business Education Research, Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT)
Paula Kelly	Regulation and Review Group, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA)
Dr Kathryn Sutherland	Associate Dean, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand
Dr Dominique Parrish *External Evaluator*	Associate Dean (Education) Faculty of Science, Medicine and Health, University of Wollongong

FELLOWSHIP OUTCOMES

The intended outcomes, which were to be achieved through the key fellowship activities, included:

1. Change across the higher education sector as the sessional staff standards, and good practice, are systematised by providers through the use of benchmarking and other activities,

2. Sustainable leadership capability development for quality learning and teaching with sessional staff across the sector, and

3. Recognition and dissemination of sector good practice and scholarship around quality learning and teaching with sessional staff.

FELLOWSHIP ACTIVITIES

The fellowship activities were strategically developed to embed the outcomes. Overtly, these strategies included:

- 'Organising events' such as the community of practice (CoP) fora and institutional benchmarking;

- 'Develop institutional strategies' such as the action plans resulting from using the B‑‑‑BiT;

- 'Audit' policies and practices with 'reviews', one role of benchmarking with the B‑‑‑BiT;

- 'Ensure' that sessional staff quality issues are central to induction, professional learning, recruitment and promotion – all criteria that make up the framework for the standards,

- 'Develop robust quality assurance and enhancement mechanisms' at multi‑‑‑levels, one of the roles of engaging with the framework.

EVALUATION APPROACH

A key criterion in developing the fellowship's evaluation framework was the need for it to align with and enhance both the Distributed Approach to Leadership and the Participatory Action Research method, encompassing a process of MERI (monitoring, evaluation, research and improvement) (Wadsworth, 2011). The framework was shaped by the work of Wadsworth (2010) to ensure that every activity would be 'building in research and evaluation' (Wadsworth, 2010) that was both formative and summative in measuring fellowship outcomes. To support formative evaluation, an

interactive or participatory evaluation (Owen, 2006) approach was adopted to support the fellowship's activities and methodology and for the summative function of the evaluation an integrated monitoring with impact approach (Owen, 2006) was identified as the most efficacious.

Evaluation data was both informal (through administrative data that included attendance records at fora and anecdotal observation data collected across the fellowship activities) and formal (through evaluative survey instruments). Table 2 outlines the data that was gathered and analysed to provide an evaluative assessment of the implemented fellowship activities.

TABLE 2: BLASST FELLOWSHIP EVALUATION DATA THAT WAS GATHERED AND ANALYSED

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE & BENCHMARKING FORA	ACTION RESEARCH PROJECTS	SCHOLARLY DISSEMINATION AND NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL PARTNERSHIPS
Administrative data (e.g. attendance/participation records, meetings agendas and minutes)		
CoP & benchmarking participant survey feedback	Action research plans and reports	Inventory of eNewsletters, presentations and publications
Unobtrusive data (e.g. Records of meetings, Email correspondence, informal observations)		

FINDINGS

The outcomes that this BLASST fellowship sought to achieve were significant and the activities it endeavoured to implement were substantial. While the enthusiasm and energy of the Australian Learning and Teaching Fellow, Dr Marina Harvey, is recognised and commended, the climate of readiness that was essential for the fellowship outcomes to be fully attained and the activities entirely realized (Southwell, Gannaway, Orrell, Chalmers, & Abraham, 2005), was not totally favourable. There was convincing evidence in the formal data that was collected that there is little transpiring across the national sector to address the recognised and recurring challenges associated with managing sessional staff and limited examples of good practice. Consequently, a number of the desired outcomes and planned activities that Dr Harvey intended to execute could not be fully achieved because the participating institutions were simply not 'ready'. The development of action plans to enhance institutions' practices around sessional staff and the facilitation of benchmarking activities did not fully transpire. All fora and workshop participants developed action plans however; only a small number of these developed plans were enacted. An initial assessment of the climate of readiness, of those institutions engaging in the BLASST fellowship activities, suggested that many of the participating institutions are at an early stage of awareness of sessional staff issues and still have much work to undertake in establishing and then systematising good practice, to support quality learning and

teaching with sessional staff. Notably however, some of the action plans --- Dimitra Lekkas & Tracey Winning (University of Adelaide) http://blasst.edu.au/awards_2015.html#lek and Kellyann Geurts (RMIT University) http://blasst.edu.au/awards_2015.html#gue were successfully implemented and subsequently acknowledged at the 2015 BLASST Summit

The activities in this fellowship that were successfully undertaken included the broad facilitation of CoP fora and expansion of both national and international collaborations and networks. Both of these activities were effective in regard to sharing research, innovation and good practice in leading and managing sessional staff. The detailed evaluation of these activities follows.

COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE FORA

Activity 1: A series of up to four collaborative, inter disciplinary and multi---level, Communities of Practice (CoPs) fora to provide a space for discussion of sessional staff and quality learning and teaching.

Achieved

The BLASST fellowship facilitated in total six Australian CoP fora, which were held at Macquarie University (MQ), Curtin University, the Australian National University (ANU), University of Canberra (UC), RMIT University (RMIT) and Queensland University of Technology (QUT). Additionally, a BLASST session was delivered at a Council of Private Higher Education (COPHE), Quality Improvement Workshop in Sydney; two BLASST workshops were each delivered to a Monash and University of Canberra teaching and learning Associate Dean group and another to general faculty and professional staff. Consultations were also undertaken with Group Colleges Australia, Victoria University and Nottingham Trent University. Evaluative data was only collected from participants at four of these BLASST fellowship events as indicated in Table 3, which provides participant attendance and the percentage of survey respondents at some of the facilitated events.

TABLE 3: BLASST FELLOWSHIP PARTICIPANT ATTENDANCE AND SURVEY RESPONDENTS

MQ		CURTIN		ANU		UC		RMIT		QUT		COPHE		MONASH	
PA	SR	PA	SR	PA	SR	PA	SR	PA	SR	PA	SR	PA	SR	PA	SR
14	100%	16	88%	20	40%	16	0%	8	0%	13	85%	35	0%	18	0%

Key PA = Participant Attendance; SR = % Survey Respondents

The CoP fora sought to generate discussion on sessional staff learning and teaching issues, allowing institutional contexts to be examined and judged. The potential of the BLASST standards framework was explored and participants were supported to experientially learn about the B---BIT (BLASST Benchmarking Interactive Tool) through engagement in a small benchmarking activity. The CoP fora concluded with participants identifying follow---up actions they intended to implement in their institution.

Formal evaluative data collected prior to and post the CoP fora indicated a significant increase, as a consequence of participating in the fora, in participants' awareness of *sessional staff issues across the Australian higher education sector* (+15%), and how their *institution supports sessional staff* (+17%). There was also a moderate increase in participants' awareness of how their institution *assures and enhances the quality of learning and teaching for sessional staff* (+8%).

Participants were extremely satisfied in the opportunity that the fora presented for them to engage with the B---BIT and reflect upon the challenges and opportunities faced by sessional staff in the higher education sector. Further, participants acknowledged the structure and presentation of the CoP fora noting that there was adequate time for discussion and exchange, it was logically sequenced and it supported the achievement of the intended outcomes. CoP fora participants were also extremely complimentary of the B---BIT's ease of use and the summary report it produced. Table 4 presents the collated feedback from participants of CoP fora pertaining to the B---BIT and the structure and presentation of the CoP fora.

TABLE 4: BLASST FELLOWSHIP COP FORA EVALUATION DATA

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNSURE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
The B---BIT was easy to use	53%	40%	2%	5%	0%
I was able to perform the benchmarking task (using the B---BIT) at a reasonable pace	44%	47%	7%	2%	0%
I was able to correct any mistakes (using the B---BIT) with ease	37%	35%	23%	5%	0%
The summary report (produced by the B---BIT) is a useful outcome/evidence	47%	47%	6%	0%	0%
Overall, I enjoyed the experiential activity (using the B---BIT)	44%	44%	10%	2%	0%
The benchmarking workshop enabled me to engage with the B---BIT	59%	33%	8%	0%	0%
The benchmarking workshop offered a potential framework for enhancing quality learning and teaching by sessional staff	42%	42%	13%	0%	3%
The benchmarking workshop provided a summary report outlining an applicable position against the national standards	45%	40%	10%	5%	0%
The benchmarking workshop provided an opportunity to reflect upon the challenges and opportunities faced by sessional staff	63%	30%	5%	2%	0%

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	UNSURE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
The benchmarking workshop provided an opportunity to identify strategies to enrich the work of and support sessional staff	30%	55%	10%	5%	0%
The benchmarking workshop provided an opportunity to identify good practice strategies that will enable leadership for sessional staff issues	35%	50%	13%	0%	2%
The benchmarking workshop provided adequate time for discussion and exchange	65%	33%	0%	0%	2%
The benchmarking workshop was logically structured	58%	40%	0%	0%	2%
The benchmarking workshop facilitation supported the achievement of the intended outcomes	63%	30%	5%	2%	0%

An individual /departmental /faculty /institutional (whichever applicable) position

As a result of engagement in the CoP fora, participants were enthused about progressing and supporting quality learning and teaching for sessional staff and identified specific strategies to avail this intention, including but not limited to:

DISCUSS [RESULTS] WITH HEAD OF SCHOOL AND FEED INTO PLANNING FOR 2015. (WA BLASST FORA PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK)

I AM GOING TO TALK TO MY COLLEAGUES ABOUT HOW WE CAN WELCOME AND ENSURE CLEARER EXPECTATIONS FOR SESSIONALS. (ACT BLASST FORA PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK)

ATTEND SESSIONAL MEETINGS ORGANISED BY THE UNIVERSITY TO IMPROVE OUTCOMES FOR ALL STAFF. (QUEENSLAND BLASST FORA PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK)

ENGAGE SESSIONAL STAFF WITH STAFF DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS. (NSW BLASST FORA PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK)

SCHOLARLY DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH, INNOVATION AND GOOD PRACTICE

Activity 2: Expansion of both national and international collaborations and networks for sharing research, innovation and good practice with sessional staff.

Achieved

This BLASST fellowship successfully shared good practice in quality learning and teaching with sessional staff at both national and international events and facilitated discussions that explored new network opportunities. Dr Marina Harvey was an invited speaker at national events, as detailed in table 5.

TABLE 5: BLASST INVITED SPEAKER EVENTS

EVENT	DATE & VENUE	SESSION DETAILS
INFORMA, Future of Learning in Higher Education Summit: Leading change in teaching and learning	Tuesday 17th February 2015 UNSW CBD Campus, Sydney	**Quality learning and teaching with sessional staff** — Sessional staff provide the majority of teaching in Australian universities, but are at the periphery of T&L planning — Reliance on sessional staff as a quality risk — The BLASST framework: good practices to enhance quality learning and teaching with sessional staff
Council of Australian Directors of Academic Development (CADAD) Meeting	Friday 24 October 2014 The University of Sydney, Sydney	A one hour presentation titled: Quality learning and teaching with sessional staff: systemising national standards

Additionally, Dr Harvey facilitated two BLASST full---day workshops (see appendix 1 of this external evaluation report for an overview of the workshop program) through SEDA (Staff and Educational Development Association) in the UK. The first workshop was at Newcastle University (7th July) and the second was at London (13th July). Many of the Australian issues about quality learning and teaching with sessional staff resonated with the participants at these events. Overall, the B---BIT was easily used and transferred into the UK context. Interest was expressed in benchmarking with the framework and also in establishing a special interest group. Multiple times, participants noted that Australia (and BLASST) is leading the world in this area.

On the 15th July, 2015, Dr Harvey, on the invitation of the Vice---Provost Anthony Smith, met with the director and team at the University College London's Centre for the Advancement of Learning and Teaching (CALT). BLASST was the focus of discussions and most of the issues about quality learning and teaching with sessional staff were acknowledged as common across both countries.

A special issue of the International Journal for Academic Development has been accepted, which will focus on the BLASST fellowship outcomes. This special issue, which is planned for 2017 will call for papers promoting quality learning and teaching with sessional/adjunct/casual teachers: systematizing good practice for academic development.

The BLASST HERDSA guide --- Quality Learning and Teaching with Sessional Staff, edited by Dr Marina Harvey and Vanessa Fredericks was launched at the HERDSA conference in Melbourne on Tuesday 7 July. This Guide was developed to support the BLASST fellowship goal of systematising good practice for learning and teaching with sessional staff across all institutional levels. This HERDSA Guide targeted six institutional levels: managers and administrators, subject convenor, department, faculty, institution, and individual sessional staff members.

Dr Harvey has been invited to present at the Go Between, In Between: Borders of Belonging conference to be held at Barcelona University, Spain, from 18th---22nd January 2016. This conference is an invitation only conference and there is no call for papers. This means that those invited, have work that is of interest to the conference and its delegates. Only single sessions are scheduled so that all delegates can go to the one presentation and participate in useful discussions.

The BLASST fellowship newsletter was launched on 29 August, 2014 and there were 10 monthly editions disseminated between August 2014 and 30 July 2015. Table 6 provides an overview of the contents of these newsletters

TABLE 6: OVERVIEW OF BLASST NEWSLETTERS

DATE RELEASED	NEWSLETTER CONTENTS	
29 August, 2014	**About BLASST** **Cartoon of the Month** **Meet the Team**	**How Do I Become Involved**? – Statewide fora, action research projects **BLASST Reference Group**
31 October, 2014	**October Fora Wrap Up**: Brisbane & Perth **Showcasing Good Practice:** Gail Crimmins, University of the Sunshine Coast; YouTube Videos: The Lived Experience of Women Casual Academics	**State Fora --- How do you measure up**? What/why are we doing it? What's in it for me? Where & when are we doing it? How to register? **Cartoon of the Month**
27 November, 2014	**National Summit --- Save the Date** **BLASST Community of Practice Webinar** **Cartoon of the Month**	**Showcasing Action Research**: Esther Elly Matemba, Curtin University, Project title: Tutors' Participation Enhancement Proposal
22 December, 2014	**2014 Wrap Up** **BLASST National Summit 2015** **Cartoon of the Month**	**Showcasing Action Research**: Dr Nicholas Tse, Macquarie University, Tutor Profiling and Curation for Teaching Quality Assurances
27 February, 2015	**Extreme Practice**: Good practice nominations **Remember to Register**: BLASST National Summit **National Adjunct Walkout Day #NAWD**	**Showcasing Good Practice**: Dr Sandra Walls, Box Hill Institute, Support for Sessional Academic Staff **Guy Standing Public Lecture Series** **Cartoon & Fact of the Month**
27 March, 2015	**Final Countdown**: BLASST Summit **The precariat and higher education or "is university a lottery ticket?"** **Adjunct Professor Survey & Special Issue** **Cartoon & Fact of the Month**	**Showcasing Good Practice**: Sessional Staff – Ensuring our Institutional Ambassadors Protect our Brand in the Classroom, Carolyn J Barker AM – Endeavour College of Natural Health
28 April, 2015	**BLASST National Summit** **Showcasing National Good Practice Winners:** Michelle Fox – Queensland University of Technology, Kathy Bain – Queensland University of Technology	**Good Practice Award Winners & Finalists** **Sessional Staff Reflections:** Danica Draskoic, Macquarie University, Catherine Hoad, Macquarie University, Sarah Yu, University of Canberra
29 May, 2015	**Changes to the OLT** **BLASST Heads to the UK** **The Precariat is Rising** **Cartoon and Fact of the Month**	**Showcasing National Good Practice**: Gordon Brooks and Linda Carlaw, Macquarie University
25 June, 2015	**HERDSA Guide Launch Competition** **Showcasing National Good Practice**: Owen Shemansky, RMIT **Cartoon and Fact of the Month**	**Call for Proposals IJAD Special Issue**: Quality learning and teaching with sessional/adjunct/casual teachers: Systematising good practice for academic development
30 July, 2015	**Launch of the BLASST HERDSA Guide** **Reflections on BLASST in England** **Cartoon and Fact of the Month**	**Showcasing National Good Practice**: Dimitra Lekkas and Tracey Winning, The University of Adelaide

The numerous dissemination activities that have been implemented throughout the BLASST fellowship have clearly expanded both national and international collaborations and networks, and disseminated research, innovation and good practice in quality learning and teaching with sessional staff. There is a strong suggestion that the expansion of collaborations and networks and dissemination of research, innovation and good practice will continue beyond the tenure of the fellowship.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The intended outcomes of the BLASST fellowship were positively realised, most significantly this was as a result of the CoP fora that were facilitated in the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Western Australia, Queensland and Victoria as well as in the UK. It was clearly evident, from evaluative feedback that the passion and enthusiasm of the fellow Dr Marina Harvey was integral to the success of this Australian National Teaching Fellowship.

The most valued aspect of the fora, as noted in the evaluative feedback, was the opportunity for participants to engage in discussions with staff from other universities. Sharing and learning of the experiences and challenges as well as some of the solutions being employed by institutions was seen to be both affirming and supportive of the endeavor, to address current sessional staff issues. These discussions also facilitated informal benchmarking and dissemination of successful practices being employed in some institutions. The presentations that were delivered and sessions that were facilitated as part of the CoP fora were acknowledged as highly valuable in raising awareness about sessional staff issues and current research, the BLASST initiative and the B‐‐‐BIT. Additionally, the opportunity to engage with the B‐‐‐BIT was also acknowledged as a strength of the fora.

Most significantly, the suggestions for improving the fora related to those attending. Participants recognized the imperative for more senior staff, with institutional influence and capacity to reform practices in leading sessional staff, to attend the fora. It is a recommendation that future BLASST activities focus on targeting and engaging senior leaders who have the greatest potential to address current sessional staff issues in their institution. In order to engage senior leaders such as Deputy Vice‐‐‐Chancellors, a business case for the importance of addressing sessional staff issues must be made. A critical component of this business case is to ascertain the 'real' cost of sessional staff to institutions. There was also an array of specific session, pre and post fora recommendations provided in the feedback.

Notably, the engagement of private tertiary education providers in the BLASST fellowship was minimal. A BLASST session was delivered at a Quality Improvement Workshop facilitated for members of the Council of Private Higher Education (COPHE). While delegates at this event expressed keen interest in the BLASST initiative, their climate of readiness to progress the sessional

staff agenda was less tenable than that of their non---private counterparts. As such, it would be a recommendation that future BLASST initiatives seek to engage private higher education providers on a more grassroots level and focus on awareness raising in relation to sessional staff issues as well as introducing the B---BIT rather than seeking to engage these stakeholders in benchmarking, as was the intention in this fellowship.

The following are the concluding recommendations from this external evaluation that are posited as a guide for future work and investment in subsequent BLASST initiatives:

RECOMMENDATION 1: TARGET AND ENGAGE SENIOR LEADERS WHO HAVE THE GREATEST POTENTIAL TO ADDRESS CURRENT SESSIONAL STAFF ISSUES IN THEIR INSTITUTION.

RECOMMENDATION 2: INVESTIGATE THE 'REAL' COST OF SESSIONAL STAFF TO UNIVERSITIES, INCLUDING THE EXTRA WORKLOAD THAT CASUALISATION GENERATES FOR PERMANENT STAFF.

RECOMMENDATION 3: IDENTIFY AND IMPLEMENT STRATEGIES TO RAISE AWARENESS, OF ISSUES AND CHALLENGES ASSOCIATED WITH SESSIONAL STAFF, ACROSS PRIVATE TERTIARY EDUCATION PROVIDERS.

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APPENDIX 1

Sess·ion·al Staff /sessional stǽf/ *noun. Any teachers in higher education employed on a casual, short–term contract, or sessional basis. This may include lecturers, tutors, unit, program and subject convenors, demonstrators, and markers* (BLASST.edu.au)

Have a BLASST workshop: Leading SOTL with standards for quality sessional teaching

PROGRAM

10.30	**Welcome**
	What does the research tell us about sessional staff?
	Introduction to the Sessional Staff Standards Framework (SSSF)
	Introduction to the BLASST Benchmarking Interactive Tool (B---BIT)
	Benchmarking using the SSSF

Theoretical approaches underpinning BLASST

- Distributed Leadership
- Action Research
- Reflective Practice

Think Aloud **exercise**

Starting off with the *Institutional standards*

Group activity

1.00	*Lunch*
1.45	**Continue Group activity**

Whole---of---group discussion: Reflecting on areas of strength and areas for further

development around Sessional Staff issues that been identified for your institution

4.00	**Close**

Universities across the world rely on sessional staff to provide teaching. This reliance on sessional staff has been increasing and this significant trend has resulted in sessional staff being integral to student learning across higher education organisations. The increase in sessional staff has not been accompanied by an increase in systematic approaches to quality enhancement and assurance of learning and teaching with sessional staff.

The BLASST workshop opens with a general overview of international trends around sessional staff and provides a forum for discussion about the learning and teaching issues associated with this trend.

Participants are then introduced to the Sessional Staff Standards Framework, developed over 10 years of research in Australian universities to provide a systematic approach to quality. The Framework is designed to stimulate reflection and action, and to enable institutions, faculties, departments and individuals to work towards consistency in good practice with regard to sessional staff. It is an evidenced---based foundation for reflective decision---making, and can be used to inform practices and priorities, primarily through benchmarking.

The BLASST Sessional Staff Standards Framework establishes criteria and standards by which we may evaluate current practice in quality learning and teaching, and in management and administrative policy, procedures and systems affecting Sessional Staff. The Framework is also available online as the BLASST Benchmarking Interactive Tool (B---BIT). Workshop participants are introduced to the B---BiT through a 'thinking aloud' exercise.

After this introduction each participant will engage with the B---BiT in an experiential benchmarking exercise, assessing their own educational context against these national standards. At the end of the online benchmarking exercise, participants will be able to generate their personalised colour---coded summary report and action plan.

Outline of session content

Participants of the BLASST workshop will

- engage with an online poll to learn about recent research on learning and scholarship of sessional staff
- listen to a short introduction to the BLASST framework
- observe a couple of participants practice using the BLASST framework through a "thinking aloud" exercise
- benchmark their department/faculty or organisation by working through the BLASST framework --- using an online tool so it is easy and efficient
- reflect on the evidence provided by their colour coded summary report
- discuss the results of this benchmarking experiment
- act on the results, by planning an action/method/experiment to work towards improving good practice with sessional staff.