Introductory Guide for Recruiting and Inducting Casual Staff

College of Science, Engineering and Health
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Publisher:
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First Edition 2011
Second Edition (revised) 2015

Acknowledgement:
RMIT- College of Science, Engineering and Health colleagues who provided their expertise in reviewing this guide

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Photographer: © RMIT University 2011 (Marchiori G.)
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Introduction

Each school has their own approach and procedures to recruiting casual staff. This guide, along with the other College resources are only intended as a set of suggestions and ideas to support administrative and academic staff currently responsible for recruiting and inducting new casual staff.

Casual teaching staff play a very important role in schools. Formalising the process of recruitment and providing a timely induction will not only make new staff feel welcome to the school’s learning and teaching community but also enable them to start teaching in a prepared and confident manner.

Providing initial support and ongoing professional development opportunities will both improve each individual staff member’s teaching ability as well as contribute to the overall quality of teaching across the school.

Recruitment

A common challenge for schools is to know the exact number of staff required for each semester. It is often not until very close to the commencement of semester that schools know how many staff they need to recruit, induct and train. Some ideas to help with the recruitment of casual staff include;

- Nominate one or two staff members at the school/discipline level to be responsible for the overall coordination of the recruitment, induction and ongoing professional development of casual staff.

- Create on the school homepage a dedicated webpage for ‘Casual Staff’ housing all links, information and resources in one place. This allows for updates and changes to be made as they arise. The following is an example from the School of Computer Science & IT Sessional Employment.

- Build an ongoing cycle of recruitment within the school where each semester there is a call for Expressions of Interest for casual staff, appointment and induction. This could be particularly helpful for large first year and core courses where large numbers of teachers are needed.

- Develop a database/spreadsheet of casual staff which will assist when extra staff are needed to be recruited with short notice.
Stages in the Recruitment Cycle

You can call for Expressions of Interest in a number of different ways including on a dedicated school ‘Casual Staff’ webpage, place posters around laboratories, classrooms and the school reception area, as well as promote by word-of-mouth. Below are some steps to consider:

- Write a clear advertisement encouraging applicants to respond to a list of criteria and provide references. The application process needs to be brief and semi-formal (see Expression of Interest on page 4).

- Check candidate’s application, references and any additional information requested.

- Make a time for a brief meeting (15 minute maximum) with each new candidate to check their communication skills, as well as the opportunity to ask more detailed questions about course and discipline expertise (see Interview Guide on page 5).

- Contact all applicants who were successful providing them with course details, timetable, name and contact details of their course coordinator, as well as directing them to all RMIT employment forms. (see Coordinator Checklist on page 10).

- Register and brief the new casual staff about the importance of attending the school Induction Session/s (see Ideas for Induction Sessions on page 6).

- Contact all unsuccessful candidates advising them how they can strengthen future applications and link them to ongoing support through Work and careers.

- Develop a school casual staff database/spreadsheet and ask candidates if they are interested in being placed on this to be contacted if extra positions become available.
Expression of Interest

The following is a set of key points to consider when advertising for new casual staff. *If a dedicated webpage for casual staff on the school home page can be set-up then the call for Expressions of Interest, applications and support can be provided online.

Course Details
- Course name, course guide and teaching position (lecturer, tutor, demonstrator or technician).
- Commencement dates, timetable and any additional hours expected e.g. extra marking duties.

Personal details
- Title, family and given name, email and mobile, student/staff number.

Qualifications
- Name of current or completed degrees, awarding institution, year of graduation, language of instruction.

Work experience
- Include part-time work for current students and professional work experience for graduates and industry guest lecturers/tutors.

Eligibility
- Clearly demonstrate to a high level knowledge and skills in the course material.
- Clearly demonstrate to a high level written and verbal communication skills.
- Employment either as an Australian citizen or work visa if an international student.
- Ideally, only employ students after having completed at least one semester of study.
Interview Guide

Below is a guide with suggestions for schools who wish to include a meeting/interview phase in the recruitment of casual staff.

Overview

A brief 15 minute meeting with potential new casual staff is important to assess each candidate’s communication skills and teaching readiness. It is preferable to meet face-to-face, however, if this is not possible a phone interview is a valuable alternative. Below is a selection of possible interview questions.

Part 1: Communication Skills (5 minutes)

The aim is to relax the applicant and make some initial evaluation of their English language and communication skills. The interviewer can ask a number of questions and listen to assess how clearly they form and communicate their responses. Some questions that could be asked include:

- Can you tell me why you chose to enrol in your current program of study and what do you hope to do once you have successfully graduated?
- Why did you choose to apply to teach this particular course/s?
- Do you have any prior teaching/work experience? If so, please tell me a little about this? Can you tell me a particular rewarding and challenging time when teaching/working?

Part 2: Teaching Skills (5 minutes)

The aim is to have the applicant teach you something in 5 minutes. The applicant will have been advised of this prior to the meeting and invited to bring in any materials or prompts. The purpose is to see if there is any understanding about the distinction between just describing content as opposed to explaining concepts or demonstrating a procedure, in teaching terms a didactic as opposed to a constructed approach to teaching.

The interviewer could in a role-play scenario take-on the role of a student and:

- Ask for certain points to be clarified.
- See how they manage when being interrupted.
- Request for them to state and explain the same thing in different ways.

Part 3: Feedback (5 minutes)

Provide some initial feedback to each applicant. Advice unsuccessful applicants of the areas they need to improve for future applications and refer them to the Work and careers for further assistance.

Successful applicants need to be informed of;

- Administrative requirements.
- Details for the school/discipline Induction Session.
- College SEH and university teaching support resources.
Ideas for Induction Sessions

Below is a range of ideas which could be included when planning and conducting Induction Sessions for new casual staff either school-based generic sessions or discipline-specific sessions.

Inviting new casual staff to participate in an Induction Session will reduce some of their concerns. Having a number of more experienced casual staff members and permanent staff attend, will not only assist in answering questions but also be a good start to welcoming them and making them feel a part of the school learning and teaching community.

Some disciplines may only require an Induction Session lasting a few hours where others may need half to a whole day, or even a series of sessions scheduled throughout the semester.

Where possible, it is best to locate the Induction Session in a space similar to the room where the casual staff will be teaching. Providing a morning tea or lunch as a part of the program can add an informal and social context and encourage the start of building collegiate support with other new casual staff as well as more experienced casual and permanent staff members.

Essential information that must be covered includes; (a) Occupational, Health and Safety, and Emergency and Evacuation procedures and (b) administrative forms such as instruments of appointment, pay schedules, and tax forms etc. Providing an introduction to key learning and teaching strategies will assist new staff, (see College resources).

A. Welcome to the day

Welcome the participants to the school/discipline Induction Session. Introduce the presenters and other school teaching staff participating in the Induction Session. Outline the schedule for the session including house-keeping issues.

B. Getting to know one another

Use some ‘ice-breakers’ as a way for casual staff to get to know one another, as well as demonstrate how they can be used on their first-day in their own classes.

Go around the group and ask each person to introduce themselves by saying:

- Their name.
- What program they are currently studying and in which year.
- What they hope to do when they finish their program.
- Current place of part-time work and future career goals.
- Previous teaching and/or industry work experience.

Go around the group and ask each person to introduce the person to their left. To do this they first need to gather information such as:

- The person’s name.
- Their favourite food
- Their favourite holiday destination.

Go around the group and ask each person to complete the following sentence:

- The reason I want to teach this semester is .................
C. Introduction to Teaching

Depending upon the number of new casual staff participating work either in pairs, small groups or as one group and invite the participants to reflect on:

- What was one of their most positive learning experiences as a student?

- List the elements of being a good teacher from their student perspective and ‘soon to be teacher’ perspective.

- In small groups explore the list generated from the above activity and make a new consolidated list of the common elements.

- Bring the group together to rank the elements listed (this could be done with clickers).

Next they need to understand how they can achieve ‘best practice’ teaching attributes. Axelrod in Baik (2008, 14) reports that from students’ perspective characteristics of good teachers include, “accessibility, fairness, open-mindedness, mastery and delivery of academic material, enthusiasm, and knowledge and inspiration conveyed”.

Knowing what makes a good teacher is only the first step and the goal of this session is to help unpack, demonstrate and practice some of the above listed qualities.

- In small groups generate a list of strategies that can help staff become good teachers. Put these on the board. Invariably issues of organisation will be raised and issues such as planning lessons, time management, dealing with difficult students need to be discussed and addressed.

- Similarly, fears and concerns about teaching need to be discussed. Invite the participants to write anonymously on cards what they anticipate might be difficult and then have a general and open discussion with some of the experienced school staff members who are attending the Induction Session sharing how they have learned to manage such situations.

Finally, practice makes perfect. Each participant is given the opportunity to role play their first day of teaching by introducing themselves, setting class ground rules and introducing a topic they may teach. Some ‘what if’ scenarios could be role-played starting with:

What would you do if ….?

- You keep asking questions of the class but nobody responds.

- Every time there is a class discussion the same couple of students respond.

- One of the students is quite disruptive and you feel that it’s creating tension in the class.

- You notice one student seems quite withdrawn and isolated from the other students.
D. College of SEH Introductory Teaching Guides Series

Direct the new casual staff to the College resources and/or provide hard-copies and work through these with participants. These are not designed to just be distributed to new staff, rather to be used in conjunction with their experienced course coordinators. On the day you could:

- Break into small groups and have an experienced staff member facilitate each group to work through and discuss the ideas and activities suggested.

- Allow time during the Induction Session for the participants to go through and read, practice and ask questions around the various activities and recommendation.

E. Role and Skills of Casual Staff

Casual staff play a vital role in the university and an important part in the quality of the programs and services delivered to students.

- Emphasise the important role casual teaching staff play across the school. Since they often have large amount of contact with students they are an important link between the students and the school/discipline.

- Encourage all casual staff to seek out support if they feel they are not managing their classroom teaching, students, and assessment deadlines or struggling to balance their teaching with their own study/work commitments.

- Highlight the importance of well-developed time management and organisational skills, the ability to manage small and large groups, and the importance of referring student pastoral care concerns onto their course coordinators.

F. Value of Casual Teaching Staff

Teaching as a casual tutor, laboratory demonstrator, clinical supervisor or lecturer is valuable for future career development and progression into academia and/or industry. It provides the opportunity for ongoing professional development and builds competency and confidence in:

- Team work.
- Time management.
- Administrative skills.
- Problem-solving skills.
- Working with diverse groups.
- Organisational and project management skills.

G. Administrative Issues

Before the end of the day, it is important that all new casual staff have received and/or know where to access:

- Teaching timetable.
- Academic calendar.
- Emergency contact details.
- Class list (student information).
- Room numbers, keys (if necessary) and photocopier codes.
- ITS requirements such as email address, logins for Blackboard, ESS etc.
- Completed all administrative forms and know how to access, complete and submit pay sheets.
H. Staff links

It is important that administrative staff and coordinators responsible for recruiting casual staff are familiar with a range of university policies and procedures and direct newly employed staff to links such as those listed below:

- Work and careers
- DevelopMe
- Health and Safety

I. Questions and Answers

As well as encouraging questions throughout the Induction Session ensure that before ending there is the opportunity for the participants to ask questions, as well as providing a link to their course coordinator for ongoing queries. Questions will often be around:

- Pay details – ESS, employee number, rates of pay, pay dates.
- Administration – computer accounts, photocopy codes, stationery.
- Course information – timetables, course guides, marking, plagiarism detection.
- Survival – staff room, toilets, locked rooms & clashes, emergencies.

J. Conclusion

An Induction Session needs to cover administrative and teaching matters but it is equally important that the new teaching staff should be welcomed into the school and feel that their professional contributions will make a positive difference to student learning outcomes and the school learning community.

At the end of the day it is important that they have:

- Worked through copies of the see College resources.
- Met or made contact with their course coordinator.
- Made one or two contacts with other new casual teachers.
## Coordinator Checklist for New Casual Staff

### Contact Details

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family Name</th>
<th>Given Name</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>____________________</td>
<td>____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Email</td>
<td>Mobile #</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____________________</td>
<td>____________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Start/Competition Date</td>
<td>Coordinator Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>____________________</td>
<td>____________________</td>
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### Prior to Arrival

- Finalise your list of casual staff and advise the HR/Finance/School Manager.
- Inform school colleagues with whom new casual staff members will be working of their commencement date and encourage them to welcome and offer support.
- Contact the newly appointed casual staff member to confirm (a) commencement date (b) course to be taught & teaching materials (c) who to report to on their first day.
- Organise the casual staff member’s shared workstation (if applicable) and access to systems including (a) desk, chair, computer, stationery, (b) Novell access if required and (c) keys (if applicable).

### First Day

- Introduce the casual staff member to other teaching team members and school colleagues.
- Provide a tour of the local office area including tea room, toilets, photocopiers, fax, and printers and demonstrate how to use them.
- Show the casual staff member where they will be working and check their workstation (if applicable) and if they experience difficulties setting-up their Employee Self Service (ESS) offer assistance.
- Provide a phone list of key staff contacts and discuss semester dates and the teaching timetable.
- Explain OH&S responsibilities, hazard and emergency evacuation procedures (including assembly points) and first aid procedures for the area including identification of first aiders and floor wardens and the local Health and Safety Representative.
- Explain to casual staff members their responsibilities to students if an emergency occurs.
- Before any practical classes explain all procedures and safety issues including protective clothing to be worn relating to practical class.
- Make sure you inform new casual staff members about the school procedures in the event they are unwell or unable to attend their scheduled day of teaching.
Resources

Administrative Support for Employing Casual Staff
It is important that administrative staff and coordinators responsible for recruiting casual staff are familiar with a range of university policies and procedures that need to be followed.

- Recruitment & employment of casual staff policy
- Recruitment & employment of casual staff procedure
- Employment of casual staff instructions
- Information for casual staff on employment
- Recruitment and employment of casual staff policy
- School of Computer Science & IT Sessional Employment

Teaching Support for Casual Staff

- College resources
- Teaching Resources – Principles for Inclusive Teaching
- Study and Learning Centre
- Academic integrity and plagiarism procedure
- SEH teaching tips and FAQs for sessional staff
- Teaching practices - Practical guide to teaching

Professional Development for Casual Staff

- DevelopMe
- Professional development- Health and safety workshops
- Health and Safety Induction Online Modules
Acknowledgements/References


“We need to put commitment, effort and resources into training, supporting and integrating this teaching cohort into the institutional mainstream.”

Kift, Sally, 2003