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Casual employment, not casual teaching.

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Introduction

Casual or sessional teaching has long been a part of the TAFE experience. Historically, sessional teachers who saw their main vocation in industry were seen as one way of maintaining links with industry and with up-to-date vocational practice.

That rationale, however accurate it may have been in the past, has faded. The explosion of precarious employment in TAFE has more than anything reflected the resource pressures faced by TAFEs around the country. The reality is that a two and three tiered workforce has developed in TAFE. There are those who have permanent or ongoing jobs. There are those who work on fixed term or temporary arrangements or contracts. And there are teachers who work on a casual or sessional basis. Some teachers have faced this level of insecurity for years.

This paper briefly outlines the context of that growth and draws on the AEU national survey of TAFE teachers to consider the circumstances and views of precariously employed teachers.

Resource pressures on TAFE

The last decade has been a period of rapid and intense change for TAFE. A national vocational education and training system has been emerging. A training market has developed and private providers now account for 11.5% of enrolments (NCVER, 2001). User choice has been introduced. TAFE colleges and institutes are increasingly competing with a plethora of other providers and with each other, within a framework that increasingly crosses state and country borders. Restructures have been common.

At the same time, the implementation of competency based training and Training Packages has required a complete review of curriculum and assessment. Within an “industry driven system”, courses and programs have increasingly been customised to meet the needs of industries and enterprises. Flexible delivery has seen the emergence of new delivery models, including on-the-job training and online learning.

Throughout this period of change, the system has been expanding. Since 1994 the number of students has increased by over 600,000 and the number of annual hours have increased by 84.9 million hours. (NCVER, 1994, 2001)

Resources have not, however, kept pace with this expansion, or with the changes.

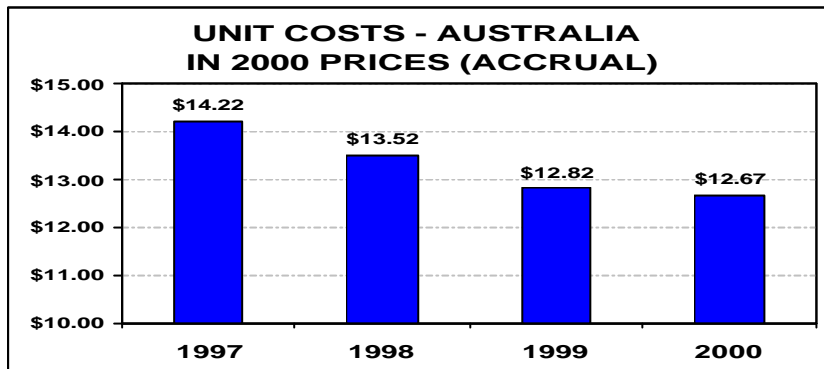
In the second half of the 1990s, this was particularly true in relation to Commonwealth resources. The 1996 and 1997 Commonwealth budgets imposed cost-cutting measures worth \$240m over the forecast period, while at the same time imposing massive cuts to labour market programs, which also affected VET funding. This provided a reduced funding base for the subsequent 1998 ANTA Agreement. (Kronemann, 2001)

Under the 1998-2000 ANTA Agreement, Commonwealth funding for enrolment growth was abolished and the states and territories were required to achieve “growth through efficiencies”.

While the Commonwealth Government in return maintained its funding under the Agreement in real terms, Commonwealth funding for specific purpose programs fell. NCVER data shows that the total Commonwealth contribution to VET operating revenue fell from \$947.2m in 1997 to \$835.0m in 2000. (NCVER, 2001a)

Over the period 1997-2000, public expenditure per adjusted Annual Hour Curriculum (AHC) fell by 10.9% in real terms (2000 prices). Across Australia, unit cost expenditure fell from \$14.22 to \$12.67 (ANTA, 2001).

Figure 1: Average costs per adjusted AHC, 1997 - 2000



ANTA (2001) *Annual National Report 2000*

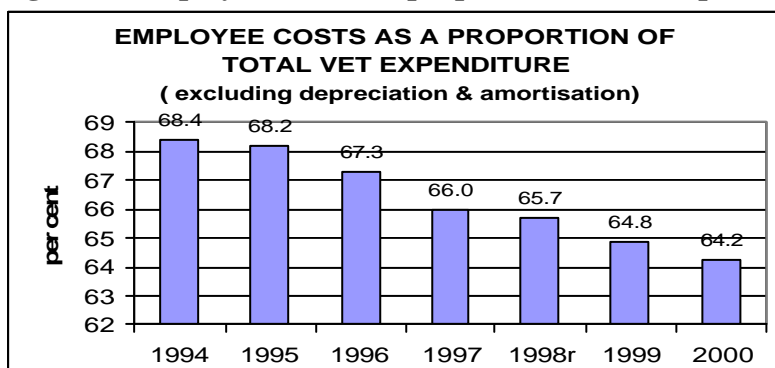
The new 2001-2003 ANTA Agreement, signed after months of tense negotiations and campaigning, will go only a small way towards relieving some of the pressures. Under that new Agreement, the Commonwealth will provide growth funding to a cumulative total of up to \$230m over the three years, in return for the states and territories matching these funds and complying with a number of other conditions. The states and territories had argued that they needed just over \$900m over the three years.

The growth in precarious employment

Despite the growth in enrolments, employee costs have fallen from 68.4% in 1994 to 60.3% in 2000. Since 1997, employee costs have fallen from 62.1% to 60.3%, while the number of TAFE students increased by 179,000, or 15.8% (NCVER, 2001). It is only since 1997 that depreciation and amortisation have been included in the overall expenditure. Even when this factor is excluded, employee costs have fallen from 68.4% in 1994 to 64.2% in 2000. (NCVER, 2001a and earlier years).

Across Australia, \$148.7m has been spent on funding staff redundancies between 1997 and 2000. (NCVER, 2001a)

Figure 2: Employee costs as a proportion of total expenditure



NCVER (2001), *Financial Data, Statistics 2000*, and earlier years.

There has been a growth in the proportion of contract/temporary/fixed term as well as casual/sessional/hourly paid teachers during this period identified as: “contract” and “casual” teachers in the rest of this paper. Sadly, no national data is collected on staffing levels or on the massive expansion of precarious employment.

One of the few available pieces of national data indicates that in 1999-2000, there were 13,600 fulltime and 11,200 part-time teaching staff in VET. Of the total 24,800 teaching staff, 55% were fulltime. (ABS, 2001) This does not, of course, indicate levels of permanency or precarious employment. Data derived from state sources is in different formats, but some examples may give an indication of the current state of play. These trends are apparent across Australia.

In South Australia, 28.9% of TAFE lecturers were ongoing, 26.6% were on contract, and 44.5% were Hourly Paid Instructors (ie casual). (DETE, 1999)

In NSW, the Department of Education and Training employs approximately 13,000 casual TAFE and about 5000 permanent TAFE teachers, meaning that over 70% of the workforce is employed on a casual basis. (Smith, Jones, Burrows, Daly & Woodman, 2001)

In Victoria, fairly detailed data have been made available. The report by the TAFE Staff Development Advisory Committee, (2000) indicates that full-time employment fell by nearly 8% between 1993 and 1998, while part-time employment grew by 43%. By 1998, 37% of Victorian TAFE teachers were ongoing, 27% on contract and 36% were casual. The report indicates that there were cyclical employment patterns in TAFE, reflecting the termination of contracts towards the end of the year, increasing numbers of both contract and casual employments and “associated cost-minimisation employment practices used by TAFE Institutes”. (TAFE Staff Development Advisory Committee, 2000, p. 6). The report notes that this meant that about 25% of the TAFE workforce faced significant breaks in employment and income each year and that this was an increasing trend.

AEU national survey

The AEU national survey of teachers, *TAFE Teachers: Facing the Challenge*, has shown that in general, TAFE teachers are stressed and overworked, and that their personal lives are carrying the costs of their workload and efforts to maintain a quality public education for their students (Kronemann, 2001, 2001a). Within this overall picture, it is those teachers who in addition face the pressures of job insecurity who are faced with the sharpest brunt of the current crisis.

In addition to a random sample of 2000 AEU members across Australia, the questionnaire was distributed via college networks to an additional sub-sample of 600 casual teachers, both members and non-members, to ensure that their particular disadvantages and needs informed the research. The survey had a particular but not exclusive focus on women. In total, 353 of the 940 responses, or 37.6%, came from teachers employed on a contract or casual basis. Within its overall framework, the survey sought to ascertain the circumstances faced by precariously employed teachers, their views and aspirations.

Gender issues

While the proportion of permanent teachers is likely to be overstated, the survey confirms that women are more likely to be on fixed term contracts and/or casual than men and are more likely to work part time.

In part, this is because women are more likely to have been employed in the era in which precarious employment, both contract and casual, has expanded rapidly. About one third of TAFE teachers have worked in TAFE for 20 years or more: 10% of women and 32.7% of men for 21 or more years.

It is also true that women and men tend to be clustered in different areas of teaching. One third of men teach in Engineering, Processing, 28.6% of women teach Social, Educational and Employment skills. Precarious employment is not evenly distributed across discipline groups. For example, 17% of permanent teachers said they taught Social, Educational and Employment skills, while this was true for 38.9% of casual teachers: and 13.7% of permanent teachers said they taught in Engineering/Processing, compared to 2.3% of casual teachers. Roughly twice the proportion of casual teachers is found in both Maths, Computing and Visual, Performing Arts areas as is true for permanent teachers.

The Victorian study also found that casual teachers were concentrated in Health and Community Services, Social and Employment Skills, Science, and Visual and Performing Arts, while they were under-represented in Engineering and Building and Construction teaching (TAFE Staff Development Advisory Committee, 2000).

Career plans

The mode of employment of the vast majority of precariously employed teachers bears no relationship to their aspirations as TAFE teachers.

Three out of four casual teachers (75.1%) see their main career as teaching in TAFE, as do 83.1% of contract teachers included in the survey. Most contract teachers (68.6% of women and 71% of men) want to continue in TAFE teaching, with the majority wanting an ongoing position and/or promotion in the future. Of the teachers currently employed in casual positions, 65.8% of women and 50% of men hope to get a fixed term contract or, much more often, a permanent/ongoing position in TAFE.

The vast majority of teachers who work part time or irregular hours (87.2%) still get their main income from TAFE. At the same time, 53.1% of these teachers also have other jobs to make ends meet: in other TAFEs (22.9% of those with other jobs) or education sectors (15.6%), in industry, in private practice (76.5% of those with other jobs). Clearly some teachers are working across more than one other job.

While there are some casual and part time teachers who see their main career as outside TAFE, or are teaching a few hours a week prior to full retirement, the majority are committed to a career in TAFE and want to attain a more secure employment footing.

In addition, 45% of teachers working part time or irregular hours would like to increase their hours or work full time. For those teachers who rely on TAFE as their sole or main source of income but are unable to attain the extra hours (or security) they seek, things can be pretty tough.

“At the end of each year, employment ceases so all casual part-time teachers suffer the anxiety of not knowing whether there will be a job/income to support the family the following year. This always lasts through most of the Christmas vacation. It also makes it difficult to seek alternative employment – you are left up in the air not knowing whether you'll be re-employed or not. This affects the bulk (approx. 70%) of the staff in my section who are all excellent, committed and very experienced teachers, some of whom are also sole supporting parents. Despite this insecurity, and little prospect of any permanency, all of us continue because we love our work.”
(NSW female, casual)

Workload

Teachers who work part time or irregular hours are doing an average of 7.7 hours unpaid overtime each week. It is difficult to do more than give a rough estimate but when you take into account the range of hours that people might be working, the unpaid work done by teachers who are working less than full time could well be equivalent to something like another 4600 effective full time teachers across Australia. When the unpaid hours worked by all TAFE teachers is considered, they are doing the work of something like an extra 6500 teachers across the country.

Overall, the expanding workload faced by TAFE teachers has affected stress levels, their interactions with students and colleagues, and their capacity to maintain professional standards/provide quality education. For precariously employed teachers, there is the additional pressure that comes from trying to meet the range of demands on their limited time and the insecurity of their position.

[There should be] *“more publicity about the real costs of casualisation – the impact upon quality delivery. If applicants knew how infrequently they could access teachers etc., they might not start a course – particularly mature age students”*. (Victorian female, contract)

“I am always exhausted. I am suffering from stress and depression (both of which are work-related) and have been on medication for 18 months. I feel crushed because I believe my employer has little regard for teachers. This has caused a severe loss of self-esteem. I no longer have a “joy of life” and don’t want to socialise”. (WA female, contract)

There is concern, too, about the lack of formal recognition given to the real requirements of their work.

“Long hours at home marking, preparing and up skilling. My husband says – I can’t believe you can do so many hours work for so little paid work”. (ACT female, casual)

[We should be] *“paid for assessment time (not paid at all for this – only paid for hours taught)”*. (WA female, casual)

Precariously employed teachers often find themselves doing more and more in order to ensure that their work does not dry up, or that their contract is renewed. Far too many feel, rightly, that they are being grossly exploited.

“As a casual teacher I constantly feel “blackmailed” to produce 200% to prove I should be given teaching hours next semester. Also I feel I cannot take time off because I am ill as I feel I have to prove myself reliable and often feel pressured to fill in for other teachers when they are sick or in staff development”. (NSW female, casual)

“Work makes high demands which I keep meeting in order to keep working at the expense of my family and even after nine years no one will offer job security or support it – always depends on budget. Staff and students should come first. Money is thrown away on ridiculous things and not put where it is needed. Too many chiefs.” (Queensland female, casual)

One of the additional pressures faced by some casual teachers is a lack of access to the most basic of resources: a desk, college email, access to computers and to educational resources and support. Apart from meaning that casual teachers have to ‘make do’ or provide their own resources and facilities, for many it would be likely to increase feelings of unconnectedness and isolation.

“...No provision of facilities (storage/working space/computer) at TAFE so home space is used for work office purposes”. (NSW male, casual)

Professionalism

“Casual teaching does not mean casual attitude to work. The work is wonderful and rewarding, the conditions are appalling”. (ACT female, casual)

Professional/Staff Development

Most TAFE teachers undertook professional/staff development in the previous semester. Nearly two thirds of both permanent/ongoing (72.1%) and contract teachers (72.4%) reported that they had undertaken such professional/staff development. A lower proportion of casual teachers (56.5%) reported that they had undertaken professional/staff development, but it was still the majority of this group of teachers too.

The AEU survey found that, while 29.6% of permanent teachers undertook this professional/staff development entirely in their own time, this was true for 37.3% of contract teachers and for 79.4% of casual teachers. Yet over half of the casual respondents reported that they had undertaken professional/staff development in the last semester, notwithstanding the fact that only one in five were granted any time release or work hours towards this effort. Small wonder that the desire of casual teachers to be able to undertake professional/staff development during paid hours is a recurring theme.

This is consistent with the findings of Smith et al, (2001), who reported on their literature review that sessional teachers are less likely to participate in formal in-house training and that employees with a larger proportion of part-time or casual workers invested less in training activities.

Formal Study

In addition to professional/staff development activities, more than a quarter of all TAFE teachers (28.6%) reported that they were engaged in formal study. While 25.1% of permanent and 24.3% of casual teachers indicated they were studying, this was true for 45.2% of contract teachers. This greater tendency for contract teachers to be engaged in formal study was also reflected in the outcomes reported by Simons and Harris (2001).

Most teachers engaged in formal study were enrolled in a postgraduate degree (34.6%) or a certificate/diploma course (31.8%). Contract teachers were more likely to be enrolled in a postgraduate course (45.1%) than were permanent (31%) or casual teachers (28.3%). They were less likely to be enrolled in a certificate/diploma course (24.4%) than were permanent (34.2%) or casual teachers (37%). Of all the 940 respondents, some 10.5% reported that they were engaged in postgraduate study at the time of the survey.

Contract teachers were more likely to be enrolled in courses leading to teacher/training qualifications (50%) than were permanent (40.3%) or casual teachers (44.7%). Permanent teachers were more likely to be enrolled in courses related to content/vocational qualifications (38.8%) than were casual (34.2%) or contract teachers (28.9%)

Qualifications

The vast majority of TAFE teachers reported having a degree or postgraduate qualification as their highest teacher/training qualification, irrespective of their current mode of employment. Permanent/ongoing teachers (75.7%) were somewhat more likely than contract teachers (69.5%) and casual teachers (64.4%) to have a teacher /training degree or postgraduate qualification.

Both contract (15.6%) and casual teachers (11.7%) were somewhat more likely to have the Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training as their highest teacher/training qualification than were permanent teachers (3.4%). The overall numbers of teachers holding less than a Certificate IV were very small, with only 7.2% of casual teachers in this group.

In relation to vocational qualifications, casual teachers (57.2%) were more likely to have a degree or postgraduate qualification as their highest industry/trade qualification than were contract (51%) or permanent teachers (50.1%). Casual teachers were also more likely to report that industry/trade qualifications were not relevant to their work. A higher proportion of permanent teachers (41.6%) reported an AQF qualification as their highest relevant industry/trade qualification than did either contract (36.3%) or casual teachers (24%). It is presumed that these differences reflect growth in, for example, non-trade effort in TAFE.

Priorities for the union

Restoring a viable quality TAFE system was in the top five priorities identified by three out of four TAFE teachers, and this was true across all modes of employment.

While still almost as high a priority as for permanent teachers, for both contract and casual teachers this priority was slightly outranked by what is clearly the number one issue for precariously employed teachers: security of employment. While the fact that 73.6% of casual teachers listed employment security in their top priorities is hardly surprising, it was also true for 43.1% of permanent teachers.

Better conditions were also seen as a priority by the majority of teachers in all employment categories, with casual teachers mentioning it somewhat more often (59.1%) than permanent (51.5%) and contract teachers (50.6%).

The need to address the conditions of casual teachers features in responses from both permanent teachers and, more particularly, casual teachers. Teachers want the trend towards precarious employment reversed. At the same time, improved conditions for casual and part-time workers are a matter of urgency. Provision of pro rata leave and related benefits and being compensated for the actual hours worked, including preparation time, assessment time, meetings and other requirements were key issues of concern in relation to casual teachers' conditions. Access to professional/staff development is also a significant concern for casual teachers.

In general, teachers want their workloads reduced and their working conditions improved. There is a recognition that the nature of teachers' work is changing and that this must be monitored and staffing arrangements developed which address the increasing complexity of teachers' work. They want to be valued as professionals, and included in decision-making structures.

System issues

The reality is that the priorities that teachers see for the union are also the ones that they see for the system as a whole. The continued under-resourcing of TAFE is one of the key challenges facing decision makers and underpins the capacity to address many of the other problems.

The AEU survey has shown that across the system, many TAFE teachers are on the edge. They are stressed and overworked. Many say they love their work, but far too many feel overwhelmed by the pressures. Morale is dangerously low.

Nearly half of all male and 28% of all female TAFE teachers are 51 or older. This is a large proportion of teachers who will be eligible to take retirement in the next few years and may well do so, unless something is done to make staying more attractive than it currently is for so many.

Between 35% and 40% of permanent teachers tell us that they are considering other options or are unsure about their future plans.

“At our workplace we are starting to find difficulty in getting replacement teachers and short term contract teachers. Many of my friends will retire in four to five years. An incentive needs to be offered to keep experienced teachers in the system or we are going to have a huge problem and the added stress will force others to retire. I think there should be a financial incentive to complete further study. I think also that the pay scales should be extended to reward classroom teachers in some way, especially those who are really good classroom teachers. At the moment there are no incentives for improvement”. (Victorian female, ongoing).

Meantime, the majority of the precariously employed teachers who comprise a large proportion of the workforce say that they want to make their future in TAFE. But they too are feeling the stress, the pressure, the workload, and the insecurity that has sometimes been part of their working life for years. They are, in general, highly skilled professionals and they will have other options, particularly in the light of the growing teacher shortage being experienced in other education sectors. While there are recent efforts to increase access to permanency in a number of systems, only relatively small numbers of precariously employed teachers have had their employment insecurity addressed to date.

Succession planning is an urgent issue in itself. But so too is the need to address the conditions that are persuading too many TAFE teachers that it is easier to leave.

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