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Sessional university teaching staff: on the academic border or belonging?

Issues of professionalism: a UK perspective

Fran Beaton, University of Kent, UK
Challenges of definition

- ‘Non – standard’?
  - different kinds of sessional staff
  - different employment expectations and patterns
  - different recruitment practices
  - different support needs
  - shifting identities
Changing university curricula

- Degrees incorporating/embodying professional experience e.g. nursing, social work, engineering, business
- Increasing emphasis on student employability
- Professional practitioners as part-time teachers
Expanding universities

- Graduate Teaching Assistants
  - as aspiring academics: teaching as apprenticeship
  - as a flexible and cost-effective solution to larger numbers of undergraduate students

- Experienced professional practitioners undertaking/combining practice and HE teaching

- Sessional/hourly paid staff on multiple contracts
Adjunct Professors’ Payday
Perspectives on belonging

Socialisation/acculturation into HE e.g. Akerlind 2004; Knight & Trowler 1999:24

‘Good mentoring and induction routines…..are most potent within activity systems, such as departments, that constitute professional communities and which are sites of professional learning.’

Individual identity e.g. Lave and Wenger 1998; Clegg 2008; Shreeve 2011:87

‘Where these different aspects of one’s identity are not reconciled, there appears to be less than satisfactory engagement in academia.’

Nature of the academic role
Changing parameters (past, present, future)
Different expectations and understandings
The ‘pracademic’
Common ground

- Part-timers’ semi-detached relationships: the university, full-time and other part-time staff

- Responsibility for teaching students with limited access to space and resources

- May not know about, have access to or time to undertake appropriate professional development
The ‘Precariat’ (Standing, 2014)

Adjunct Professor Seeks Shelter
will work for:
- Improved Job Security
- Improved Wages
- Improved Benefits

Please Help Now

[Signature]
Will Teach for Food
The UK HE environment: Key Information Sets

Universities are required to make publicly available information (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/unikis/) which includes

- Course fees (typically £9,000/€12,000 per year), payback begins once graduated and in work
- Other associated costs e.g. accommodation
- Amount of contact time by course and contact type e.g. seminars, lectures, workshops
- Graduate employment data
And......

- Student satisfaction with the **quality** of teaching; feedback on assessment; study support and resources; personal development (National Student Survey)

- The proportion of staff who are **qualified** to teach e.g. have Higher Education Academy Fellowship

Qualified? UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF)
Implications for professional development

- Potentially helpful, as nationally reported data requires

  - Increased institutional thoroughness to identify all relevant staff
  - Structures and practices to assist integration within (at least) the discipline and programme team

- Nuanced, appropriate, accessible professional development to develop teaching
Furthermore....

- Encourages an institution-wide approach to professional development

- Perceived as affecting individual universities’ prestige in teaching-related league tables

However, may underscore relative prestige of teaching and research; teaching development may be perceived as distracting from other work
To conclude

- System of national recognition/credentials in relation to teaching may assist the visibility, and access to professional development, of part-time teachers

- Integration of part-timers is best practically effected day-to-day at ‘local level’ and more broadly at institutional level

- Professional development as future-proofing, combining disciplinary, current career-stage and career aspirations
Reading and resources

Books
Beaton F and Gilbert A (eds) 2013 *Developing Effective Part-Time Teachers in Higher Education* Routledge

Journal articles

Websites
Higher Education Funding Council (Key Information Sets) [http://www.hefce.ac.uk/Lt/uniks/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/Lt/uniks/)