

Senate Committee: Education and Employment

QUESTION ON NOTICE Supplementary Budget Estimates 2015 - 2016

Outcome: Agency: TEQSA

Department of Education and Training Question No. SQ15-000792

Senator Carr, Kim provided in writing.

TEQSA - Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staffing data

Questions

1) Based on the Full Time Equivalent (FTE) staffing data collected by the Department can you confirm that, for Australian universities:

a) about eight of ten (80%) of academic staff classified as 'teaching only' are employed as casuals?

b) about eight of ten (80%) academic staff classified as 'research only' are employed on a 'limited term' basis.

2) Can you also confirm that that over the last decade, about seven out of ten (70%) of the additional FTE positions created in our universities have been either limited term or casual jobs?

3) Does TEQSA have access to similar data for non-university higher education providers? Is such data available? Can it be provided?

4) Critically, is TEQSA concerned about:

a) how much of the undergraduate teaching at our universities is delivered by casual or limited term contract staff?

b) how much of the research conducted at our universities is undertaken by staff on limited term contracts?

How much of an impact is there on the quality of university teaching and research of this large proportion of staff who are not in ongoing employment?

Answers

The Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) has provided the following response.

1) The Department of Education and Training has confirmed that:

a) In 2013, the total Full Time Equivalence (FTE) for staff classified to a Teaching Only function was 12,596. Teaching Only staff on a casual work contract represented 81.7 per cent (10,287 FTE) of this total. It is also useful to note that in 2013, the total FTE for staff classified to a Teaching and Research function was 27,387 of which casual staff only constituted 1 per cent (265 FTE).

b) In 2013, the total FTE for staff classified to a Research Only function was 16,917. Research Only staff on a limited term appointment represented 80.3 per cent (13,589 FTE) of this total. (Total Research Only FTE (16,917) includes FTE for casual staff (1314) which cannot be disaggregated by appointment term).

- 2) The Department of Education and Training has confirmed that the increase in FTE from 2003 (88,842) to 2013 (120,355) was 31,513 FTE.

Over the same period Casual FTE grew by 6200, accounting for 19.7 per cent of the increase. Over the same period Limited Term FTE grew by 15,671 accounting for 49.7 per cent of the increase.

Over the same period Tenurable Term FTE grew by 9642 accounting for 30.6 per cent of the increase.

- 3) Under the Provider Information Request (PIR), TEQSA collects data that relates to the current term, work contract and function of academic staff members. Consistent with the HEIMS collection, this data can be used to clarify the term of the staff member (i.e. Ongoing, Non-ongoing, Casual) and function (Teaching Only, Teaching and Research, Research Only).

For providers that reported under the PIR:

- a) In 2013, the total FTE for staff classified to a Teaching Only function was 2154. Teaching Only staff on a Casual work contract represented 59.2 per cent (1274 FTE) of this total. It is also useful to note that in 2013, the total FTE for staff classified to a Teaching and Research function was 273 of which casual staff constituted five per cent.
- b) In 2013, the total FTE for staff classified to a Research Only function was 16.9.FTE Research Only staff on a limited term appointment represented 39 per cent (6.6 FTE) of this total. Total Research Only FTE includes 1.7 FTE (10 per cent) for staff employed on a casual work contract.
- 4) A high proportion of casual academic staff is not in itself necessarily a concern to TEQSA.

Casual appointments may be necessary for a number of reasons including the:

- need to employ staff with specialised experience and skills only available from those actively engaged and currently practicing in a field
- need for institutions to have flexibility to accommodate fluctuating/growing student demands and student load (i.e. part time student load).

However, TEQSA considers that there are risks to the quality of learning and teaching presented by a significantly high proportion of casual staff. These staff may not be appropriately supported and resourced to:

- provide a continuity of support to students;
- anchor academic activities
- engage in scholarly activities; and/or
- be active contributing members in a community of scholarship.

Providers are to ensure that casual and fixed term staff have support and access to, for example:

- resourcing for professional development and ongoing scholarship
- the opportunity to integrate into the academic culture of the organisation
- be sufficiently available for students outside of actual teaching time.

TEQSA monitors the extent of each provider's reliance on casual staff at an institutional level via the annual risk assessment process. If the risk assessment presents a high reliance then TEQSA engages with providers during the assessment of their registration or course accreditation to examine the points noted above in relation to support and engagement mechanisms. Further, TEQSA publishes information annually on the extent of casual staffing levels in the 'Statistics Report on TEQSA Registered High Education Providers'.

For new providers TEQSA reviews the workforce planning of all applicants. For existing providers TEQSA examines workforce planning at the points of re-registration and course re-accreditation where risks have been identified. TEQSA also publishes guidance on workforce planning.

In relation to limited term contract staff in research roles, the Threshold Standards do not contain any specific standards for research. TEQSA is not aware of any information that would indicate that the employment conditions of research staff impact on quality or the provider's ability to meet the standards.