

## **Realising the potential of sessional staff as educational scholars**

Jane Southall  
*Department of Management  
Kingston University, London, UK*  
[j.southall@kingston.ac.uk](mailto:j.southall@kingston.ac.uk)

### **Abstract**

Larger and more diverse groups of students are now entering university (Prichard, 2006). To accommodate this, free up staff for research and to save money, most HEIs use sessional lecturers to teach (Bryson, 2013; Crimmins, 2016). Literature that considers this group of staff, who may have come from another career path, focusses on the need to develop them as pedagogues (for example, Sutherland & Gilbert, 2013; Byers & Tani, 2014) and this seems valid given the need to develop teaching excellence, however it is defined. The literature discusses the need to provide training opportunities that can be accessed at convenient times, and to provide mentors and support from full time staff. This paper argues that while there may be some sessional staff for whom this training is needed, there is also a group of qualified, sessional lecturers who have chosen to be professional teachers. Should they be able to become fully involved in teaching focussed research, conducted collaboratively with full time academics, this group could develop teaching excellence, develop their careers and become valuable resources for their employers, committed to improving the student learning experience. The paper presents a case study of two such sessional staff, working as part of a small research group, to illustrate how communities of practice can help such staff develop an academic identity (Webb, Wong and Hubbell, 2013; Seemiller & Priest, 2015), advance in their chosen career and thereby improve student learning, develop teaching excellence and increase staff motivation and engagement levels.

**Keywords:** sessional staff, academic identity, scholarship of teaching and learning, communities of practice.

## Introduction

The “massification” of Higher Education (Johnston, 2010) and the subsequent “wide-ification” of it (Morgan, 2012), means that more students are choosing to study at university. With costs steadily rising, and the increased focus on improving the student experience for this new generation of “consumer” students, there is a need for all those involved in teaching to be the best educators they can be. In the UK, the introduction of the UK Professional Standards Framework (Higher Education Academy, 2011) is putting teaching and learning in the spotlight as future funding may be based not only on research, but also on teaching excellence.

In order to be able to teach larger numbers of students and be able to react quickly and cost effectively to their changing needs and demands, in universities across the globe, the majority of teaching is carried out by non-permanent, hourly paid staff (Bryson, 2013; Crimmins, 2016); they are referred to here as sessional lecturers. While some are students themselves, many are qualified educators, fully committed to improving the student experience and to delivering excellent teaching. Their career path is, however, often restricted due to not being research active. Because of this, they have little opportunity to develop an academic profile (Hamilton, Fox & McEwan, 2013) and are often marginalised from full time colleagues due to having heavy teaching loads with little time for networking and participating in other scholarly activities (Crimmins, 2016, Ryan & Bhattacharyya, 2012; Webb, Wong & Hubball, 2013). In the UK, this separation from traditional academic teams can also restrict the professional development of sessional staff: the UK Professional Standards Framework (2011) states that in order to reach Senior Fellow level, individuals are likely to “lead or be members of established academic teams”. Bryson (2013) suggests that the lowest level of Associate Fellow is intended for this group.

This paper argues that in treating these staff simply as cost effective and flexible resources, restricted to working on a narrow range of roles and unable to develop professionally, universities are missing an opportunity to develop excellent teaching; to benefit and learn from a wealth of experience; and to create insightful and evidence based scholarly outputs from those who often spend the most time with students, and therefore may know them best. In contrast to other papers that consider this group, the

present one is written from within the field of experience of a sessional lecturer and aims to draw attention to the challenges faced by them and the potential that is not being fully developed. Furthermore, the paper illustrates a possible pathway that Higher Education institutions employing such staff, the permanent staff working with them and sessional lecturers themselves can follow, to develop more meaningful and higher quality relationships and to ensure better outcomes for all.

The paper reviews recent, international literature which defines sessional staff, considers their use, the challenges they face and those they present to the universities employing them. There is also a brief overview of current thinking around the definition of an academic and academic identity. Developing the approach used by Ennals, Fortune, Williams and D’Cruz (2016), elements of action research were used to inform an autoethnographic study. The frameworks created by Kern, Mettatal, Dixson and Morgan (2015) and Seemiller and Priest (2015) have been applied to further understand how practioners can become scholars.

## **Literature review**

The term “sessional staff” is not used consistantly across Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) as they are refered to by different names in different locations. In an effort to reduce potential confusion it is necessary to define the term here. Most frequently called Adjunct Faculty in North America, Hourly Paid Lecturers in the UK and Contingent, Casual or Sessional lecturers in Australia and New Zealand, what all the various names have in common is the lack of a permanent or tenured position, meaning many endure periods of no income between teaching blocks (Brown, Goodman & Yasukawa, 2010; Crimmins, 2016). Working on an hourly paid basis and often having fixed term contracts (Bryson, 2013), they provide a range of activities from presenting or assisting with lectures, delivering tutorials, workshops or laboratory sessions to supervising dissertations or longer projects (Sutherland & Gilbert, 2013). In addition, most sessional staff “are not paid to develop and maintain their knowledge-base, despite being expected to deploy it in the teaching process” (Brown, Goodman & Yasukawa, 2010, p.172).

In Australia, many new academics start their careers in this way (Harvey, 2013), in order to build their competence and demonstrate their commitment, before being offered permanent positions. In other settings, sessional staff have a range of backgrounds and work as such for a wide variety of reasons. Sessional staff are often students themselves, undertaking post-graduate and doctoral level study and teaching alongside their studies (Byers & Tani, 2014). Others define them as field practitioners working within HEIs to share their knowledge (Webb, Wong & Hubball, 2013) and to give something back to future professionals (Sutherland & Gilbert, 2013). In his 2013 paper, Bryson cites his earlier (2006) work in the field and identifies a wider range of sessional staff, including post graduate students, Graduate Teaching Assistants, early career researchers, former practitioners, portfolio workers, semi retired former academics, and those for whom their sole employment is as a sessional teacher. Some work this way due their own need for flexibility around working hours and holidays; the need to remain in touch with academic developments in their field; or to supplement other work (Sutherland & Gilbert, 2013).

The number of staff employed in this way is hard to calculate. In the UK statistics gathered by the Higher Education Statistics Agency do not differentiate between the types of contracts under which staff are working. However, in 2011 they suggested that some 56,000 staff were employed on a sessional basis, (HESA, 2011). Crimmins (2016) suggests that 61% of academics in Australia are employed on casual contracts which backs up claims made by Harvey (2013), who suggested that most of the teaching in Australian HEIs is carried out by sessional staff. These figures are supported by Byers & Tani (2014) and Hamilton, Fox & McEwan (2013) who also point out that the actual number is hard to define as many do not work full time and numbers are calculated using full time equivalents. In the USA and Canada the position is unclear but it is suggested that demand for such staff will rise as the number of students increases and the number of permanent academic posts decreases (Harvey, 2013; Webb, Wong & Hubball, 2013).

The reasons for using such a broad range of sessional staff to run a wide variety of classroom based teaching interventions are equally diverse. For some universities, who were previously not seen as research intensive institutions, the amount of research activity now required for funding purposes is increasing; sessional staff are called upon

to teach students in order to release full time academic colleagues to undertake it (Bryson, 2013; Lee & Boud, 2003; Webb, Wong & Hubball, 2013). Most agree that sessional staff are used to increase flexibility and responsiveness as they allow HEIs to respond to change quickly and cost effectively. As more students are enrolling in higher level study, more staff are required in classroom based roles and employing them in a temporary and sessional capacity allows for fluctuations in demand to be addressed quickly (Bryson, 2013; Moser and Ream, 2015). Brown, Young and Yaskawa (2010) sum up these views when they suggest that the growing numbers of sessional staff are the result of "neoliberal flexibilization and managerial rationalization" (p. 170).

One of the main challenges facing both those that employ sessional staff and sessional staff themselves, is marginalisation. Working in relative isolation, sessional staff tend to sit outside of academic communities of practice and feel that they have no real voice (Brown, Goodman & Yasukawa, 2010; Bryson, 2013; Crimmins, 2016). Often used to plug gaps and relieve full time colleagues of the burden of teaching, sessional staff are frequently assigned specific course based teaching duties and are not invited to attend course and programme-wide events and planning sessions. This means there is little opportunity for them to share experiences or investigate contemporary practice with other colleagues (Hamilton, 2013; Webb, Wong & Hubball, 2013). This marginalisation can have an important effect on their levels of engagement which is highly correlated with team and organisational performance. Bryers and Tani (2014) state that sessional staff in Australia report receiving little by way of management, guidance, training and mentoring. These findings are supported by Bryson in the UK (2013). Both go on to say that there is an assumption in many HEIs that the basic goodwill of sessional staff, coupled with teaching skills and adequate course specific knowledge, is sufficient to result in good outcomes .

Within those HEIs that do develop their sessional colleagues, it would appear that most effort is put into improving them as pedagogues, as their teaching is seen by many as less effective than that of their permanent colleagues (Brown, Goodman & Yasukawa, 2010, Umbach, 2007). Indeed, much of the literature suggests that using them is a risk to tertiary education and a risk to the student learning experience. They are therefore widely seen as a problem (Crimmins, 2016). In their paper based on the professional development of sessional staff in a research intensive institution in Australia, Webb,

Wong and Hubball (2013) comment that many such staff teach in traditional, teacher focussed ways and do not focus on the development of critical thinking as they have not fully understood the need to develop career-ready, independent thinkers. Harvey (2013) adds to the argument that teaching skills need to be developed by recommending the use of mentors and supervisors to monitor and to advise. This argument is developed by Byers and Tani (2014) who document the use of weekly coaching meetings between sessional staff and their managers.

The need to develop of communities of practice which include sessional staff is often mentioned. Bringing people together creates cohesion, teamwork and a sense of shared understanding and allows the exploration of effective teaching methods. Percy and Beaumont (2008) suggest that collegiate group learning events should take place at a micro level, in departments and faculties, rather than being centralised. For them, teaching teams that incorporate sessional staff are the ideal place for such learning activities to occur. Webb, Wong and Hubball (2013) go on to point out that these communities of practice need to be flexible so that those with heavy teaching loads can take part. Indeed, the lack of flexibility around training provision is highlighted as one of the main problems facing institutions working with sessional staff. There are academic development programmes offered but these are frequently generic, centrally delivered, pre-emptive in that they are only available at the start of the teaching block, and do not recognise that sessional staff are diverse and that support is needed in *ad hoc* and often unpredictable ways (Hamilton, Fox & McEwan, 2013).

There appears to be little discussion in the literature focussing on the development of research and scholarship skills in sessional staff. Indeed, full time academics often come to research first and teaching second and so it appears that the need to develop research skills in all staff is generally overlooked (Lee & Boud, 2003). At the same time, there is increasing debate about the importance of the scholarship of teaching and learning and the role that it has to play in driving up teaching standards and the student experience. For Brew (2010), scholarship is defined not only as an activity, but as a quality, encompassing meticulousness and rigour. She argues that such scholarship enables academics to develop the ability to cope with continual change and to develop the capacity for critical reflection, a key skill required in order to progress within a teaching career. Boyer (1990, cited by Moser & Ream, 2015 and by Kern et al., 2015),

was instrumental in suggesting that scholarship needed to be redefined and expanded to cover the full range of academic work and moved away from the narrow conceptualisation of it as purely discipline based. For Boyer, teaching is, in itself, a form of scholarship. As such, it would appear sensible for those that do most of the teaching in HEIs, sessional staff, to be fully engaged with it. Percy and Beaumont (2008), while still seeing sessional lecturers as a problem, are unusual in that they at least ask how such staff can be supported and developed as members of teams engaged in scholarly and reflective practice.

It is widely accepted that the term 'academic' is hard to define (see for example; Brew, Boud, & Namgung, 2011; Land, 2008) and yet for many, the notion of it revolves around being qualified to Masters level, engaging in the activity of autonomous research and making this research public (Feather, 2010). It is of note that much of the literature around sessional staff working in higher education does not use the term "academic" when describing them, even when they may hold relevant level qualifications, and this need for a research focus may be the reason why. Communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), which people form as they pursue shared enterprises over time, are seen as having an important impact on the formation of academic identity. This is supported by Fitzmaurice (2013) who argues that while it is often developed through shared practices, academic identity can change over time: that we have, in effect, multiple identities. The concept of academic tribes and territories, outlined by Becher and Trowler in 2001 is also an interesting one when considered alongside the notion that sessional staff are often portrayed as isolated and marginalised. It then follows that in order to be recognised, seen and understood as a valued member of an academic team, membership of a larger group is vital.

### **Conclusions from the literature**

While Bryson (2013) has identified nine categories of sessional staff including retired academics and professional experts, most other authors tend to assume that sessional staff are all early-career researchers, graduate teaching assistants or students themselves and that all would prefer to be in a permanent role. Current literature which looks at the need to develop sessional staff tends to focus on the need to develop

robust teaching skills that will ensure the development of independent thinkers who are ready for employment. It recommends regular management of such staff in order to support and encourage them to feel more involved and less marginalised. Professional educators may choose to work on a sessional basis for logistical or other reasons. There appears to be a gap, however, when it comes to considering how to enable them to develop a robust and valid academic identity, participate more fully in the range of activities undertaken by their tenured, academic colleagues and to be seen less as “part time ‘gypsy scholars’ piecing together an academic livelihood” (Becher & Trowler, 2001, p.16) and more as members of a respected academic tribe.

It would appear that the scholarship of teaching and learning, which has been considered a valid form since the 1990s, would be an ideal vehicle with which to develop these staff who spend most of their time in the classroom working with students. If we accept Brew’s ideas (2010) that scholarship, with its focus on meticulousness and rigour, enables the development of reflection, and if there are different levels of such reflection in the realm of teaching and learning moving from the content and process to the premise level (Mezirow, 1991, cited by Kreber & Cranton, 2000), then it would appear that being engaged in such activities would not only ensure that teaching is useful, informed, innovative and potentially excellent, it would also engage students, motivate sessional staff and enable them to play a more fulfilling role within the HEI in which they work. As progression through the UK’s Professional Standards Framework (2011) depends on membership of “established academic teams” and requires advanced skills in personal critical reflection, such involvement would also enhance the career development opportunities of British sessional staff.

Even those in full time positions who identify as academics are currently struggling to understand their role in a post-industrial HE setting (Becher & Trowler, 2001; Feather, 2016), and need membership of a community of practice in order to make sense of it. Therefore, for those working as sessional lecturers, often isolated and disconnected from their permanent colleagues, it would seem that such membership is vital if they are to develop in this way.

It has also been noted that most, if not all, of the literature that exists around the role and experiences of sessional lecturers, has been created by permanent staff, often



carrying out large scale surveys, who do not fully inhabit the world about which they write (for example, Ryan & Bhattacharyya, 2012). Crimmins (2016) attempts to improve on this by creating verbatim drama from merging the narratives of sessional staff. Yet this approach still requires her interpretation and re-presentation of their experiences. In developing the case study presented below, I seek to address this shortfall by presenting the story of a colleague and myself in narrative format. I present a description of our lived experience as sessional lecturers and in doing so, do not have to validate the capture of it or substantiate the interpretation of it. I do not take a detached and disinterested perspective, rather I relate it as it has happened to us in all its “messiness” (Etherington, 2004).

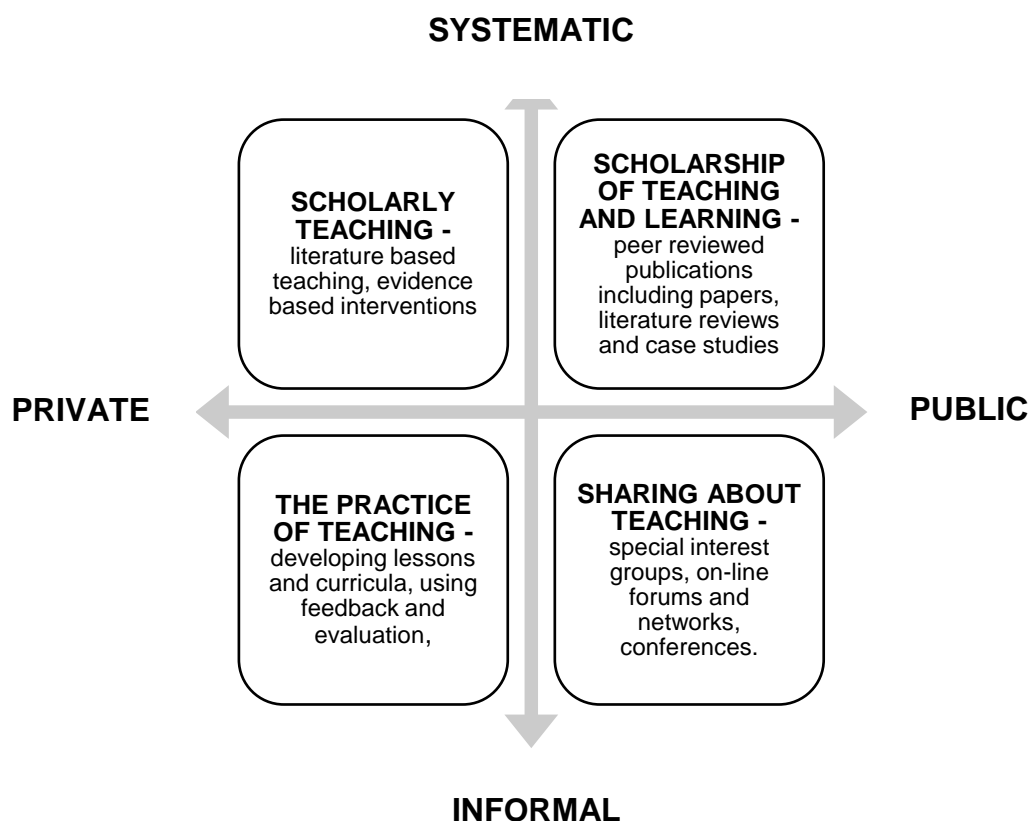
### **Case study – a tale of two sessional lecturers**

A colleague and I teach within the same faculty of a post-1992 institution in the UK. Proud of its practical and vocational approach to teaching business, marketing and law students, a number of sessional staff with in-depth industrial and practitioner experience are employed to work with all levels of undergraduate and some post-graduate students. I describe our transition from practitioners to educators through the dual lens of both the Dimensions of Activities Related to Teaching developed by Kern et al. (2015) and the conceptualisation of identity development proposed by Seemiller and Priest (2015). I then summarise it as a framework that can be applied either by others looking to involve sessional staff in research or by those individuals who wish to become involved and so develop their own academic identity. The ultimate aim is to ensure a stream of potential excellence is not overlooked.

Kern et al. (2015), in revisiting the seminal work of Boyer (1990), provide four useful, contrasting definitions which make up the Dimensions of Activities Related to Teaching (DART): the Practice of Teaching; Scholarly Teaching; Sharing about Teaching; and the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. Our progress appears to be best illustrated by using this model (see figure 1). The definitions revolve around whether an activity is informal or systematic, private or public and our progress has seen us move from private practitioners of the Practice of Teaching to scholars of teaching and learning, as our activities have become more systematic and public.

Seemilller and Priest (2015) conceptualise the development of identity as the movement forward and backwards through four identity spaces: exploration, experimentation, validation and confirmation. This model can also be applied to us and the range of experiences they propose at each stage of the model, replicate our situation.

**Figure 1.** The Dimensions of Activities Related to Teaching.  
Based on Kern et al. 2015)



As industry practitioners with significant experience of developing staff, either as specialist trainers or as part of our wider management responsibilities, we both entered Higher Education as sessional staff in order to maintain flexibility around our timetables, largely to deal with the pressures of being parents. Having had senior roles in industry prior to working in HE, neither of us had pursued an academic career. Once established and fully engaged in the practice of teaching, we developed our own teaching materials to stand alone and to support the work done by module leaders in lectures, designed and ran tutorial sessions, and developed assessments and innovative classroom based activities. Seeking out feedback on our teaching and making changes as a result of it was a natural activity for us and one that we took very

seriously. Post Graduate teaching qualifications were undertaken and we were both professionally recognised by the HEA. Clearly teaching such as this can be excellent in so far as it achieves its objectives and it is often very effective, but it is always an informal private act witnessed only by students. We were fortunate in that students commented positively about our teaching in a variety of forums so colleagues were made aware of our practice via internal and national award systems. However, it still remained largely a private exercise, confined to the classroom.

According to Kern et al. (2015), the next stage in their model, Scholarly Teaching, is based in the sources and resources appropriate to the discipline being taught but it is still private. We became involved quite naturally in this when we started to look for case studies and academic papers that reported on practical teaching interventions that could be implemented to develop our classroom practice. Using Seemiller and Priest's framework (2015), this can be defined as the moment our identity started to shift from that of being teachers or educators towards that of being academics as we had entered the exploration and the experimentation phases and were considering whether such an identity would "fit". We found a range of ideas reported in practitioner focussed journals and in academic papers, replicated some and adapted others. Our students enjoyed the experience and commented enthusiastically about what we had done when completing evaluation questionnaires and talking to other staff. The jump from these private activities to undertaking those operating in the public arena was, however, more difficult. As demonstrated in the literature, it is usual for sessional staff to have little line management input into career development and no close supervision of daily teaching activities. Often not invited to departmental and faculty-wide meetings and discussions about research activity, we were operating in an information vacuum as to what permanent colleagues were doing and how we might become involved.

It was at this point that joining an informal community of practice (Wenger, 1998) had a huge impact on our journey towards scholarship and on the development of our academic identity as we sought to find validation and were asking ourselves whether others felt that this shift was appropriate (Seemiller & Priest, 2015). Faced with an upcoming faculty-wide accreditation process, we were told that we needed to become involved in the traditional academic activities of research and scholarship and ideally, to have some output published, if we wished to continue teaching. Having not been

involved in these areas previously, this demand seemed daunting at best and impossible at worst, and our emotions fluctuated between alarm and bewilderment as to how we might achieve this objective within a year. Help came in the form of research group working in the higher education arena which had been established by a small group of full time, permanent academic staff with the aim of providing support and practical help to each other as they too worked towards developing research skills and producing work of publishable quality. Employed across different departments within the faculty, this was a group of like-minded individuals who had realised the need for support, the advantages to be had by working collegiately, and the power of sharing ideas.

The benefit of being invited to join such a group and of being mentored by its more experienced members, was that it allowed us to fully recognise what constitutes valid research and it demystified the process. Our initial reaction to being told what we needed to do was one of panic. We had assumed that any research conducted would need to be discipline specific and, even though we had had many contacts in industry and a lot of personal experience to draw on, we had now been teaching for several years and so networks had weakened. We realised we would be approaching organisations as hourly paid, casual staff and not as fully fledged academics with the backing of a university, funding and an established research history behind us. Recognising that continuing to explore teaching and learning in a more systematic and public way would be valid, useful and acceptable, was a major turning point. We became firm advocates of the beliefs of Boyer (1990, cited by Moser & Ream, 2015 and by Kern et al. 2015) and started to systemise our approach to developing innovative teaching and assessment interventions.

It was now possible to progress to the next level of The Dimensions of Teaching model defined by Kern et al. (2015) and to start to share what was being done in public. At first, this sharing was with the other members of the research group but, with their support and because membership of the group allowed the exploration of and access to small sources of funding (hitherto everything had been completed in our own time), we joined various national teaching and student engagement networks and became involved in on-line forums, both providing and asking for ideas and feedback. This led to joining and meeting with special interest groups. The most natural next step was to

submit abstracts and posters for inclusion at annual conferences. These were accepted and when our presentations of innovative practice were well received, we understood that we were on our way to becoming scholars of teaching and learning. Our work was being validated by others who were already established in the field.

Scholarship of Teaching and Learning is different to all the previous stages in the DART model, as it is carried out systematically and investigates questions related to student learning. It is also shared publically at conferences and with the publication of papers, articles and case studies so that practice is improved outside of one's own classroom. It is methodical, and credible results can be gained which means it shares many of the characteristics of discipline-based research. For us, the transition to this stage took place when we started conducting systematic and critical literature reviews into areas of interest and synthesised our findings, revealing gaps for further exploration and frameworks which could be used to develop and evaluate interventions. Understanding that such literature reviews can be of interest to others and are therefore publishable was another source of encouragement. From the point of having such a paper accepted for publication, confirmation was achieved and we felt that we had succeeded in our objective in being able to describe ourselves as full participants in the field of HE research. This view was validated when our institution defined us as "Scholarly Practitioners" in the accreditation process carried out by the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business, and when we were asked to act as peer reviewers for a number of academic journals.

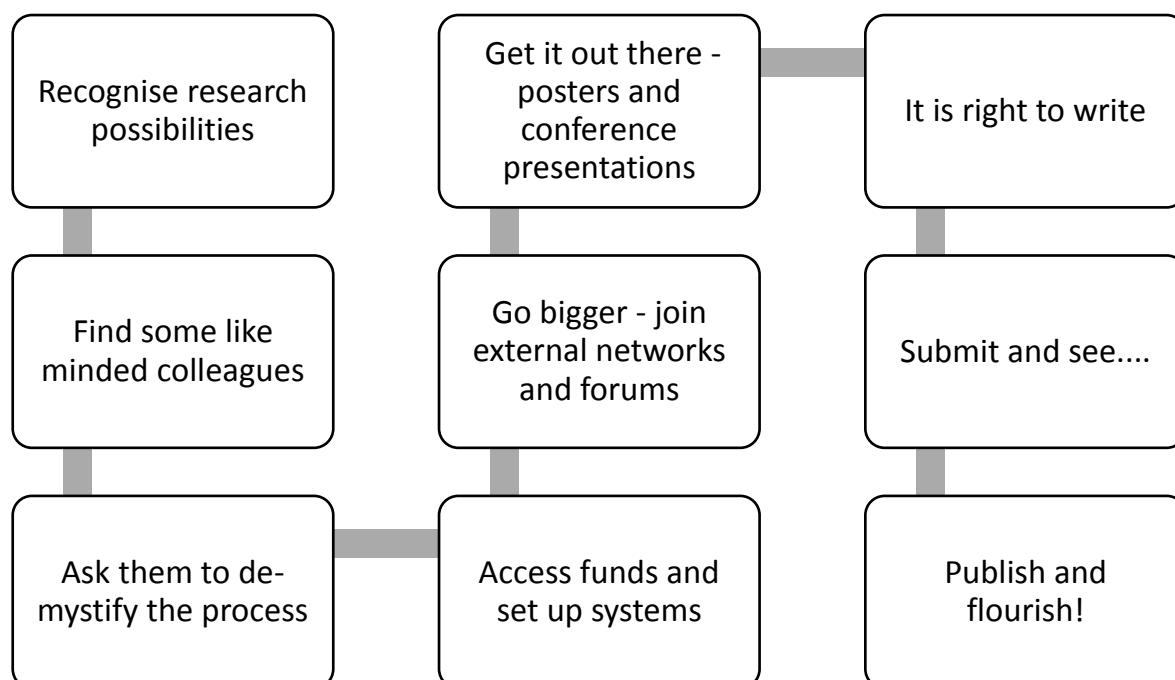
## **Discussion**

This case study shows that with the correct support in place, and with access to funding and guidance, it is possible for staff employed on a sessional basis to develop a robust and valid academic identity which is on a par with their full time colleagues. They can do this if they are able to share practice with others (Fitzmaurice, 2013); this is of benefit to all. Our membership of the faculty research group was fundamental in developing in our academic identity, strengthening our commitment to innovative and effective teaching and learning strategies and increasing our engagement with our institution by deepening our sense of belonging. This very positive impact mirrors that reported by participants in Faculty Learning Communities (FLCs) discussed by Cox (2013). In this

study, early-career academics stated that due to their involvement in FLCs, their interest in the teaching process was enhanced; their perspective of teaching and learning beyond that of their own discipline had been broadened; and their comfort level as a member of the university community was significantly increased.

According to Becher and Trowler (2001), many studies that consider the motivation of academic researchers cite the desire “to develop a reputation in a field and contribute significantly to it” (p. 75). Many sessional lecturers are no different. If they can become involved in the research of teaching and learning, the HEIs employing them profit from the development of innovative and engaging teaching interventions and assessment regimes. Furthermore, sessional staff feel valued as full members of academic teams, and communication between permanent academic researchers and teaching focussed sessional lecturers is enhanced. Students benefit from all of the above and from being taught by engaged, engaging and innovative pedagogues who employ evidence based approaches. Using the DART framework devised by Kern *et al.* (2015) to plan and achieve this change, and the concept of identity development proposed by Seemiller and Priest (2015) to understand it, means that the journey is less daunting and that relevant activities can be planned for and developed at each stage.

Our narrative, while not generalisable, corroborates and expands upon earlier studies which have highlighted the themes of isolation; feelings of being on the periphery of academia; the lack of voice and power to influence; and the precarious nature of such an existence. We have summarised our journey (see Figure 2 below) in order to show HEIs, those involved in managing and developing sessional staff and sessional staff themselves, what can be done to move towards being seen as a valued and valid member of an established academic team rather than a flexible, cost effective and temporary gap filler, and how to make this change in status a reality.

**Figure 2.** Our journey summarised -

It must, however, be recognised that there are many variables that need to be considered if this model is to work. The sessional staff involved need to have high levels of motivation to start with. It would have been possible for us, when told of the need to become research active, to consider our options elsewhere, and join another institution where teaching focussed staff are not required to diversify. It appears that the support of like-minded colleagues is also a necessary component. In this case, the research group were open minded and accepting of sessional staff joining their community of practice. They were willing to act as mentors, explain concepts, and provide guidance and much appreciated feedback. In some institutions, the cultural gap between two such sets of staff, with different levels of academic backgrounds, working methods and approaches, may make this acceptance harder to achieve. To overcome this resistance, it may be necessary for some institutions to formally create FLCs as described by Cox (2013) and ensure that alongside early-career academics, sessional staff are invited and encouraged to attend. Viskovic (2006) suggests that educational development units should change their focus away from supporting individuals and towards supporting groups. This shift would help sessional staff who are often key members of teaching teams, but may not be well known as individuals outside of them

and across their institutions. Beckett and Hager (2002) note that apprenticeship is generally ignored in the literature as a mode of adult learning. Yet for many sessional staff who are, or who have been, practising specialists, it is exactly what they need when it comes to developing research and scholarship skills and developing a new, academic, identity.

It is also vital that funding is made available to allow sessional staff to be paid for the time they put into research activities. Most sessional staff are paid only for the contact hours they provide and there is no system to pay them for additional work where the hours are hard to estimate and measure. This funding can be provided in a variety of ways: allowing for an agreed number of contracted number of hours to be claimed for or providing a bursary subject to outputs. Either case requires a relationship of trust and support.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, for sessional staff to realise their full potential as valued and valuable members of HE communities, there needs to be a change in culture within many HEIs. From seeing them purely as flexible and cost effective gap fillers, HEIs need to realise that many sessional staff have worked in industry and can provide much needed input into developing students' employability skills as they have experience of what is required. Many are committed and professionally recognised educators who have chosen to teach and many can, with the right help, support and encouragement, develop robust academic identities which in turn, will allow them to fully participate in the life of a department and faculty. By focussing their research on the scholarship of teaching and learning, thereby developing essential critical reflection skills, as well as allowing them to feel they belong and are valued by their community, they can progress in their career, remain motivated and inspire and engage students through their use of evidence based teaching approaches.



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