The Growth in Part-time Teaching in Higher Education: the imperative for research in the Irish context

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Abstract

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the structure of the tertiary academic workforce in Ireland has changed dramatically over recent decades. There is growing awareness in the sector of the extent of the use of part-time teaching. With increasing emphasis on the student learning experience, concerns have been articulated in many countries about the implications of the growing casualisation of the academic workforce for the quality of teaching and learning in higher education. This article presents the findings of a literature review on the subject, arguing for appropriate further research as a precursor to action in this much neglected area. The review forms part of a collaborative project between EDIN[1] and HECA[2] that has as its aim the identification of the professional development needs of part-time academic staff in higher education institutions in Ireland. The project was funded by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning[3].

Keywords: Part-time teaching, part-time academic staff, casualisation, Ireland; quality; equality, risk management, student learning experience.

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[1]EDIN is the Educational Developers in Ireland Network, representing academic developers working with staff teaching across the third level sector.

[2]HECA is the Higher Education Colleges Association representing 15 private colleges.

[3]The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning in Higher Education was established by the Minister for Education and Skills in order to enhance the quality of the learning experience for all students at third level, be they full-time, part-time or flexible learners.

1 Introduction

Despite a lack of formal data, there is ample anecdotal evidence to suggest increasing numbers of part-time teaching staff[1] in higher education institutions in Ireland in recent decades. As elsewhere, the higher education landscape here has undergone enormous change in this period. Debates abound about the purposes of universities for individuals, for societies and for economies. A re-examination of the role of the academic has been prompted by a number of factors: an increased focus on the quality of the student experience; austerity and the associated funding implications for higher education; greater student diversity; and the growth of education development as a discipline. The changing nature of academic careers has led to an increasingly diverse and differentiated range of academic staff, an increasing proportion of whom are employed on a part-time basis. This part-time cohort has become an intrinsic part of the way higher education is delivered in Ireland. Yet, they remain largely invisible. Working in an increasingly complex operational environment, this segment of the academic workforce is characterised by a broad spectrum of experience and local circumstance. From a teaching and learning perspective, the increasing casualisation of the academic workforce prompts the following question: How do we ensure the quality of teaching, and by extension the quality of the student learning experience, in the context of these changes?

The literature review that follows forms part of a collaborative research project[2] that had this question as its principal concern. In the context of the enhancement of teaching and learning and against the backdrop of the increasing casualisation of the academic workforce, this modest exploratory project set out to identify the professional development needs of part-time academic teaching staff in higher education institutions in Ireland. Essentially, it was to be a needs analysis informed by the literature in the field. It soon emerged however that not only is there very little known about this academic staff cohort in Ireland, but that there are also difficulties in identifying and consequently targeting this group. A review of the international literature therefore assumed greater importance in order to gain some understanding of this sector of academic staff and to determine efforts and possible approaches to meeting their development and support needs. What follows is a summary of the main themes to emerge from this review, together with a call for appropriate further research on which to base action that might address the challenges identified.

2   The expansion of part-time teaching in higher education

The unbundling of traditional academic practices, as evidenced in the separation of teaching and research, is a phenomenon Marginson (2000:32) describes as 'tendencies to the deconstruction of the academic profession'. Increasing casualisation of the academic workforce is one outcome, as greater numbers of part-time staff are being hired for teaching-only roles. In recent decades, there has been greater growth in numbers of full-time administrative and support staff categories than there has been in the full-time academic staff category, despite increases in student numbers (May *et al.*, 2011). While many other sectors of the workforce are also experiencing increasing casualisation, the literature suggests that academia is different. For example, Gilbert (2013:16), drawing on the work of Juror, states that '[c]asualisation of the academic workplace, estimated at around 40%, is higher than in many other areas of work....'. Furthermore, the higher education sector could be distinguished from the majority of these other low paid, low skilled sectors in that academic staff are relatively highly qualified.

Charting the expansion of part-time teaching in higher education is problematic. The dearth of statistics and data about the part-time staff cohort is a constant theme throughout the literature. The complexities and definitional difficulties in trying to identify and determine the numbers of part-time academic staff are highlighted by e.g. Tomkinson, 2013; Percy *et al.*, 2008; May *et al.*, 2011; Gilbert, 2013; Woodall and Geissler, 2009; and others. In many higher education institutions there is no central recording of the numbers of part-time academic staff employed. The hiring and recording of part-time staff is often managed on a department by department basis, with each department operating within its own set of rules. In some circumstances, there may be no official records of part-time staff.

OECD statistics suggest that percentages of part-time academic staff vary from as little as 2% in France to around 60% in Japan (Gilbert, 2013:9). In the UK context, Pearson (2002:7), referencing the Bett Report of 1999, states that 'in some universities up to 38% of academic staff are paid by the hour'. Bryson & Blackwell (2006) estimate that over half the academic staff employed in the UK are on temporary contracts. Locke (2014:8), also referring to the UK context, reports the following:

Nearly 34% of academics worked part-time and nearly 36% were on fixed-term contracts in 2012-13. Of those academics on full-time contracts, 25% were fixed term. Among part-time academics, this proportion rises to nearly 56%.

Locke also identifies the predominance of teaching-only contracts among part-time academics.

Cervini (2013), writing about the Australian situation states that '[a]ccording to federal government data, the number of casual academics has more than doubled since 1996.' Hamilton *et al.* (2013) state that approximately half of Australian university teaching is now performed by sessional (i.e. part-time) academics. May *et al.* (2011:188) agree, reporting the following:

Recent estimates suggest that over half of all undergraduate teaching in Australian universities is performed by casual teaching staff (Percy *et al.,* 2008), and, on a head-count basis, these staff comprise over 60 per cent of all academic staff (May 2011). In the period since 1990, the growth in employment of casual academic teaching staff has significantly outpaced that of ongoing academic staff, giving rise to what has been described as 'a tenured core and the tenuous periphery' (Kimber, 2003:44).

In relation to this 'tenured core and tenuous periphery' they go on to write that growth in numbers of the latter, on a full-time equivalent basis, grew by 180%, compared to a 41% growth rate in the former, between 1990 and 2008. The significance of the shift in the composition of the academic workforce in Australia prompted Percy *et al.* (2008:7) to conclude, in a report commissioned by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council, that 'the full-time, permanent, centrally-located teaching/research academic is no longer the norm around which policy and practice can be formed'.

Sutherland and Gilbert (2013), writing in the New Zealand context, state that well over 40% of those teaching in New Zealand higher education are sessional staff.

In the United States context, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) (2010:3) report that:

 .....almost three-quarters of the people employed today to teach undergraduate courses in the nation's colleges and universities are not full-time permanent professors but, rather, are instructors employed on limited term contracts to teach anything from one course to a full course load. These instructors, most of whom work on a parttime/adjunct basis, now teach the majority of undergraduate courses in U.S. public colleges and universities. Altogether, part-time/adjunct faculty members account for 47 percent of all faculty, not including graduate employees.

In Ireland, the Higher Education Authority (HEA, 2014a) compiles information on a quarterly basis on the numbers of academic staff who undertake core teaching activities in publicly-funded[3] institutions, broken down between full-time and part-time staff. However, they do not use a specific definition for what constitutes 'part-time', leaving it up to individual institutions. A comparison of December figures for the last three years shows the proportion of part-time staff at 10% for 2013 and 11% for each of the two preceding years. Without definitions and more detail on methodologies used by individual institutions, it

is difficult to comment further. There is no information available on the numbers of part-time teachers in the private sector.

While all of these statistics are illuminating (and alarming) to a certain degree, they raise more questions than they answer. With so many different types of part-time positions and methods of measurement, reliable calculations and comparisons are virtually impossible. Percy *et al.* (2008) pointed out that the full-time equivalent (FTE) calculation significantly understates the real size of the part-time academic workforce. In the Australian context, they determined that at one university 62 casual academics equated to 2.64 FTE, and at another, 198 casual academics equated to 16 FTE. They concluded that a calculation of the teaching load of part-time academic staff may be a more useful statistic to collect. (In this regard, as stated earlier, they estimated that part-time academics were responsible for half the teaching load across the university sector in Australia.)

This inability to accurately determine the size of the part-time sector poses obvious problems for the planning and provision of specific supports for part-time academic staff. At the very least we need to know how many there are and where they are, so that we can invite their participation in surveys and other data collection methods.

3   On the periphery: invisible and marginalised

This second theme is related to the first and equally pervasive. Tony Brand (2013) conjures images of J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan when he describes part-time academic staff as 'the lost (or invisible) tribe'. Knight *et al.* (2007:432) confirm Findlay-Brook's and Bryson's view that 'part-time teachers have been, and continue to be, a marginalised and neglected group within higher education'. McCormack and Kelly (2013:94) cite a number of sources to back up the proposition that the marginal and peripheral position of part-time academic staff is common across the developed world.

4 Identifying and categorising part-time teaching staff

The difficulties around locating and determining the size of the part-time teaching staff cohort are matched by difficulties around defining and categorising the group's constituents. In the first instance, arriving at a clear definition for a part-time academic teacher is troublesome. For example, it could be a postgraduate student who is asked to cover for her supervisor for a week and is paid by the hour; or a postdoc who is teaching for a semester and hoping to be made full-time; or a well-known artist on an

Artist in Residence programme; or a former full-time academic who has chosen to work part-time due to family commitments. It is clear from these few examples that there are varied roles and levels of responsibility, as well as diverse qualifications and levels of experience.

Terminology further muddies the waters (see e.g. Holland, 2004; Gilbert, 2013; Bryson, 2013). A broad range of terms are used e.g. casual, occasional, sessional (Australia), adjunct (US), contingent (US), tutor, visiting lecturer, (graduate) teaching assistant or, simply, part-time lecturer or part-time teacher. Often, these terms are not comparable internationally, nationally or within institutions. For example, a tutor may be a postgraduate student who supports student learning, or a permanent academic who meets with small groups of students for a specific purpose. Holland (2004) highlights the significance of terminology for part-time staff, emphasising that many of the terms used may not inspire the respect of either students or full-time colleagues. As part of her study in the UK (*ibid*.:11), she coordinated an e-mail discussion group on part-time issues and reports the following in relation to the terminology issue:

A lively debate on the English Subject Centre's email discussion list among former part-time tutors highlighted the importance of this issue. Contributors suggested that 'visiting lecturer' is the most helpful term because it implies that the tutor has the same status as full-time colleagues and has been invited to teach in the department on the basis of expertise.

Further highlighting the complexity and diversity of views on terminology, Bryson (2013:1), on the subject, states that in the UK, part-time staff are 'most frequently called "part-time teachers" - which does not distinguish them from lecturers on part-time contracts - a rather unhelpful confusion ...'.

In order to attempt a categorisation of part-time academic staff, it is necessary to understand why greater numbers of academics are working part-time today than did in the past, and whether they are doing so by choice or out of necessity. Many people choose to work part-time because the flexibility afforded suits their life circumstances. For others there is a reciprocal relationship between their teaching and their other professions. An architect who teaches part-time, for example, can draw on his/her connection with education to help inform architectural practice. Finally, for yet others, part-time teaching is a stepping stone to a full-time career, be that within or outside academia.

A number of attempts have been made to categorise part-time teaching staff based on various criteria e.g. roles performed as part-time teachers, reasons/motivations for working part-time and/or orientations to teaching (e.g. Bryson, 2013; May *et al.*, 2011; Tomkinson, 2013; Beaton and Gilbert, 2013; and others). The following is a composite, though not exhaustive, list of categories identified:

- Postgraduate student (full-time or part-time) with academic orientation.

- Postgraduate student (full-time or part-time) with industry orientation.

- Early career researcher or contract researcher engaging in part-time teaching.

- Solely employed as part-time academic, by choice.

- Solely employed as part-time academic, aspiring to full-time status.

- Industry expert/practitioner/professional with orientation outside academic world.

- Industry expert/practitioner/professional with academic orientation.

- Work-life balancer/downshifter (to suit life circumstances; pursue life interests; etc.).

- Portfolio worker (e.g. multiple teaching roles/multiple employers; teaching and other roles; freelance/consultancy).

- Those carrying out other main roles in the university (e.g. research, technical, administrative, library/information systems, etc.).

- Academic on sabbatical/career break.

- Semi-retired former academic.

- Semi-retired former industry expert/practitioner/professional.

It is a difficult task to develop a set of exclusive categories. It is clear that overlap can occur between the above categories. A work-life balancer may aspire to be a full-time academic (albeit in a year or two). A portfolio worker employed on a part-time contract may, or may not, aspire to a full-time academic contract. A part-time postgraduate student may also be a work-life balancer. It may be that an industry expert is a portfolio worker with a number of roles.

Broadly speaking, each category has its own unique set of experiences and challenges. For example, postgraduate students who teach have the advantage of being privy to institutional knowledge and policies, something that may not easily be available to other categories of part-time staff. However, their dual status can often affect the ways students view them. Holland (2004:5) quotes D'Andrea in this regard, in the context of GTAs (Graduate Teaching Assistants) in the USA.

Students felt like they were being short-changed by not having a full-time member of staff as the lecturer. They also knew that the GTA was just a few years older than they were and therefore assumed that the GTA was less likely to know the material being taught or know much about how to teach.

The category of practitioners who teach alongside their practice may not have any knowledge of institutional practice and policy. However, they bring a wealth of practical, professional experience. Yet they may lack the requisite knowledge of academic culture and appropriate pedagogical processes.

Within these two categories (postgraduates and practitioners) there are multiple diverse possibilities. For example, postgraduate tutors across an institution may have different levels of experience, a variety of teaching roles and diverse career intentions. Similarly, within the category of industry experts or professionals there may be very different prior experience, roles and orientations towards teaching.

In summary, when variables such as qualifications, experience, current role and career stage/intention are combined with discipline, length of contract and local circumstance (e.g. the academic life of a department), the difficulties in differentiating between clear, circumscribed 'categories' of part-time teaching staff become apparent. The voluntary or involuntary aspect to part-time work may also be pertinent. While no staff grouping can be said to be homogeneous, the part-time staff cohort is especially diverse. This broad diversity presents considerable challenges for institutions in terms of supporting and developing part-time staff.

If the aim is to engage, support and develop this staff cohort, then it is essential to understand their needs. In order to do this, knowledge is needed about who they are, where they are, how many there are, their roles, their levels of experience and qualification, their reasons for working part-time, their orientations towards teaching and their hopes and aspirations. Needs will vary considerably according to these variables. Anecdotal evidence points to ever increasing numbers and a broad range of diverse experience and circumstance. Getting to grips with this diversity is essential.

5 Issues and challenges for part-time teaching staff

While many part-time teaching staff report satisfaction with their roles and experiences, for others there are significant issues and challenges. Because of the heterogeneity of part-time staff there is a diverse range of possible issues, as shown by e.g. Percy *et al.* (2008); Beaton and Gilbert (2013); May *et al.* (2011); Bryson (2004); and many others. The following is an overview of the key issues identified.

•   The contribution of part-time teaching staff may be undervalued, as evidenced by inequality in pay and conditions. (For example, in the US, extreme pay inequities have been highlighted by the Delphi Project, where part-time faculty are paid as much as 60% less than full-time faculty.) In order to fulfil their roles, part-time staff often find it necessary to do unpaid work outside of paid contract hours. In short, they may not be paid pro-rata to their full-time salaried colleagues. Similarly, they may have fewer relative employment rights and benefits and less opportunity for progression or promotion (in the absence of scales or grades).

- Insecurity, unpredictability and uncertainty in relation to work can cause all kinds of problems for individuals from the practical (e.g. difficulty in getting finance) to the personal (e.g. low self-esteem, inability to plan forward, etc.).

- Part-time academic staff make a significant, though largely unacknowledged, contribution to higher education.

- Related to the above point, there are often no systems to recognise and reward excellence for part-time staff. For example, Grove (2012), in an article on part-time academic staff, quotes Beaton, as follows:

  > I have lost count of the amount of times people told me they felt they could not go for their university's teaching awards because they were … part-time.

- In the context of changing academic structures, many qualified academics (e.g. PhD graduates, or former full-time academics) who viewed their part-time teaching positions as temporary, or as stepping stones to full-time academic careers (research and teaching), have become trapped in teaching-only roles. As part-time staff they are excluded from accessing research funding and so instead of increasing their chances of an academic career, they find out later, as Locke (2014:22) points out, drawing on the work of Akerlind and McAlpine, that 'these positions did not offer the opportunities for research and publication that were essential for traditional advancement'.

- Part-time teaching staff, coming from outside the academic department, can experience varying levels of isolation and exclusion, especially if not integrated into the teaching environment. Many may not be included in subject debates, programme design or policy implementation. Consequently, many part-time staff may be under-employed and feel frustrated that their potential and ability are not being maximised. A part-time contract may not allow for attendance at conferences or important team meetings (e.g. on marking standards, curriculum design and development, etc.).

- Related to the above point, a lack of voice in the organisation may be further compounded by the absence of formal communication channels, or mechanisms to provide feedback (e.g. on course design and delivery issues). It may be that part-time staff do not have an institutional e-mail address and/or are not on various departmental/institutional e-mail lists.

- Facilities are often poor for part-time staff in terms of e.g. space and administrative support. A lack of designated 'office' space compromises ability to advise students and/or address issues and problems, particularly if confidential in nature. It also limits the possibility to interact and brainstorm

with colleagues about teaching and learning practices. There may be problems with access to resources e.g. the library, technology, etc. Furthermore, there may be no orientation to facilities and resources at the beginning of the period of employment.

- Part-time staff are often hired at the last minute with little time to plan or prepare adequately, particularly if the contract relates to a module not taught previously.

- There may be a lack of opportunity for appropriate professional development for their teaching roles. Because they may be invisible to human resources and/or central staff development departments, part-time staff may not have opportunities to engage in professional development activities such as induction, mentoring, feedback on performance or attendance at courses, seminars and conferences on teaching and learning. While they may be implicitly included in certain institutional professional development provision, such activities may not always be accessible or timely. This, together with a possible lack of direction in relation to their roles, can erode self-confidence.

- Terminology (as in 'naming') was highlighted as a possible issue earlier. The terms used to describe part-time staff may not inspire the respect of students or full-time colleagues. This, together with varying levels of inequality, isolation and exclusion, as outlined above, can lead to what Bryson (2013) described as a sense of being a 'second-class citizen'.

- A key attraction of an academic career is academic autonomy, but this is being slowly eroded as academic structures unravel. As Locke (2014:23) points out:

> One of the core attractions of academic work is academic autonomy, and yet this has traditionally been associated with research, increasingly so with senior management roles and decreasingly with teaching. The more teaching in higher education is controlled and constrained and its status undermined, the less attractive it will become as a career for creative, intelligent people, even as part of a broader role, let alone as the sole focus of their professional activity.

- Finally, as greater percentages of the academic workforce become part-time, there are implications for academic freedom. As casualisation increases, academic freedom is being eroded (Courtois and O'Keefe, 2013). Without security of employment, it is questionable whether true academic freedom can exist at all.

The range of issues and challenges presented point to the need for a holistic approach to engaging, supporting and developing part-time academic teaching staff. A lack of certain support systems may have as negative an impact on teaching quality as, for example, a lack of professional development opportunities. Therefore, in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning, it is not possible to disentangle development needs from the broader support needs of part-time academic staff (e.g. resources and facilities, team integration, adequate remuneration, security, etc.).

6 The rationale for employing part-time staff

Some of the reasons for working part-time were outlined above. In order to further understand the expansion of part-time teaching, the reasons why higher education institutions are employing greater numbers of part-time academic staff must also be considered. From an examination of the literature (e.g. Gilbert, 2013; Tomkinson, 2013; and others) the main reasons institutions might employ part-time staff are identified below.

- The flexibility suits higher education institutions. One reason is that such contracts are easily adaptable to fluctuations in student numbers and to the demands of ever-increasing student diversity. Another reason relating to flexibility is given by von Prondzynski (2010):

  .... because much more of a university's portfolio of activities is now project-based (particularly in research) with a limited life span. Universities need to have the capacity to be much more flexible than they used to be.

- Frequently the reason is one of economic pragmatism in the context of significant reductions in funding, budgetary constraints and cost pressures.

- Part-time staff are often used to cover absences such as maternity leave, long-term illness, etc.

· Another reason may be to forge/strengthen links with professional bodies and industry, thereby enhancing and enriching students' higher education experiences and employment prospects. Institutions have the flexibility to bring practitioners in as part-time teachers on professional courses. This is particularly true for the more vocational subjects (Bryson, 2013).

- Employing part-time staff enables institutions to build the next generation of academics.

- Institutions need to cater to the growing numbers of employees who prefer flexible working arrangements.

- The desirability to offer employment opportunities to postgraduate students, or permanent staff on sabbatical leave, is facilitated by the ability to offer part-time work.

- It may suit departments to employ part-time teaching staff in order to allow full-time staff to undertake research and scholarship (Woodall and Geissler, 2009).

- Related to the above point: in the University sector, where competition in terms of research excellence can be relentless, part-time teaching staff are often hired under the radar. As Tomkinson (2013) points out, 'hidden' staff do not then appear in full-time staff statistics or on the roll for such exercises as the UK's Research Excellence Framework, for example.

1.1.1

1.1.2 7 Issues and challenges for institutions and the implications for higher education

The literature highlights a number of possible challenges and implications for higher education (and higher education institutions) as growth in the numbers of part-time academic staff continues upwards and often outpaces that of full-time staff. These concerns are outlined hereunder.

7.1 The implications for the quality of the student learning experience

By far the most cited concern centres on the implications for the quality of the student learning experience. A quote from Percy *et al.* (2008:3) sums up the student perspective succinctly:

Students want a seamless education. They do not want to know that their tutor or lecturer is sessional or permanent. They want high quality teaching and high quality subjects.

The principal question is whether institutions can continue to offer high quality teaching alongside research if numbers of part-time teachers continue to rise. Some of the research into the impact of rising numbers of part-time teaching staff on the quality of the student learning experience is alarming. A number of studies have linked poor support and management of part-time academic staff with risks to quality assurance (see e.g. Percy *et al.*, 2008). There is also a growing body of literature emerging (from the USA and Australia) that suggests a correlation between the rising numbers of part-time academic staff in higher education and negative impacts on both student learning and student retention at undergraduate level. For example, Rhoades (2013) lists a number of studies that offer 'ample empirical evidence' for the link between key aspects of the working conditions of part-time faculty and compromised student outcomes. Kezar and Maxey (2013), refer to a number of research studies (in the US context) that further back up this assertion. The research

found that non-tenure-track faculty tend to make less use of effective teaching practices associated with better student-learning outcomes, such as service learning, undergraduate research, active and collaborative learning, problem-based learning, and student-centered or multicultural approaches to teaching. There are various explanations for this, ranging from fears that experimenting with innovative strategies will negatively affect teaching evaluations from their students to a lack of professional development limiting instructors' exposure to high-impact practices and pedagogies.

Umbach (2007) conducted a large survey of academic staff across 130 institutions in the US and found that part-time academic staff were 'less effective' than tenured staff in all the areas critical to student engagement. In particular, they spent less time preparing, less time with students and had lower expectations.

May *et al.* (2013:5), point to findings that suggest a correlation between higher reliance on part-time staff and both higher undergraduate drop-out rates and lower graduation rates. Quoting from the work of Ehrenberg (in the US context), they write that 'this was possibly due to the insecure nature of the employment of teaching staff'. They (*ibid.*:6) go on to say that:

Many of these staff worked across multiple campuses to make a living ... and had no time for meeting with students or keeping up to date with curriculum and discipline developments.

In the Australian context, Lefoe *et al.* (2013) list a number of studies to back up the contention that the growing casualisation of the academic workforce is identified as a significant risk in the quality of teaching and learning in higher education.

Negative impacts on the student learning experience can be better understood by considering the particular challenges posed for the quality of teaching by the rise in part-time practice (see e.g. May *et al.*, 2011; Beaton and Gilbert, 2013; Percy *et al.*, 2008), as outlined hereunder:

- The preparation and planning of academic programmes is extremely difficult in a climate of uncertainty around the availability of academic staff from year to year. There may be no guarantees that current part-time teaching staff, with experience on campus and knowledge of students and the department, will be re-hired. This is particularly problematic in programmes that run over multiple years where there is a need for continuous co-ordination, collaboration and communication between all programme staff (and, some contend, all stakeholders, to include students, graduates and employers' representatives) at all levels in order to ensure a meaningful, coherent, properly integrated, logically sequenced, phased

and aligned programme.

- Because part-time staff are not always invited, or in a position, to attend team meetings they may have little opportunity to participate in professional dialogue. The absence of a shared dialogue about courses and the curriculum creates the opportunity for course instruction and teaching materials to be misaligned with curricular objectives and academic policies that are set by the department, faculty or institution.

- Related to the above point, a lack of access to professional development could impact on the adoption and use of the pedagogical approaches and teaching strategies that inform the development of student learning outcomes.

- The lack of performance management for part-time teachers is a high risk factor for institutions. There may be no measures in place to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching.

- Arbitrary approaches to assessment and marking could compromise academic standards. Furthermore, a lack of training opportunities in new, innovative formats to assess student competences could negatively impact on student learning outcomes.

- There may be part-time staff who are simply not interested or willing to engage or participate in departmental or institutional processes. For example, Bryson (2004:11), referring to an earlier study on part-time teachers (PTT) that he was involved in (with others), reports that they

   ...found that managers frequently expressed the view that PTT offered less flexibility than salaried staff and there were major issues about lack of integration, commitment and participation in essential processes.

Bryson (*ibid.*) goes on to say that:

   This notion that the blame may not lie entirely with management is supported by evidence that even if support is made available to PTT, few PTT staff may avail themselves of it (Allen, 2001).

(It is not clear, however, whether part-time contracts allowed for attendance or participation in terms of time and/or funding in the above cases, or whether scheduling suited the PTT in question.)

·   Related to the above point, the possible variation in levels of interest for aspects of the organisation beyond the part-time staff member's immediate role, could further impact negatively on a seamless, holistic experience for the student.

7.2 The implications for full-time staff

A second consequence of rising numbers of part-time staff is the implication for the workload of their full-time colleagues. Percy *et al.* (2008), and others, noted that though a high percentage of teaching in higher education was being delivered by part-time teachers, this disguised a large supervisory load on permanent staff. Responsibility for convening and administering courses, as well as frequently managing part-time teachers, falls to the full-time academic staff cohort. Furthermore, the workload is disguised by the full-time equivalent calculation for part-time staff. Coates *et al.* (2009) highlight this as one of several reasons for increasing dissatisfaction with academia as a career amongst the permanent, and particularly younger, staff cohort.

7.3 The challenges posed by non-academic teachers

One of the reasons for hiring part-time staff, as outlined earlier**,** is to strengthen links with professional bodies and industry by bringing practitioners in as part-time teachers on professional courses. This is not without challenges, however, as this group may lack experience with academic culture and institutional practices and may not have a sufficient understanding of appropriate and effective pedagogical processes. Furthermore, training and support of industry professionals can be fraught with a whole new set of challenges unique to this type of teacher.

7.4 Gender implications

The gender implications of increasing part-time staff numbers are not well-known, in the absence of accurate data. However, Sutherland and Gilbert (2013) refer to a number of studies that show that women are overrepresented at the lower levels in academia. Higher education institutions need to be aware of possible equality implications of part-time staffing.

7.4 The implications for future workforce planning

The changing ratios between full-time and part-time staff present challenges for future workforce planning in the context of the renewal, recruitment and retention of high quality academic staff. May *et al.* (2011: 196) quote Bradley, who sees this as 'the single biggest issue confronting the sector over the next decade'.

Coates *et al.* (2009) agree. They regard the increasing disillusion amongst younger academics (referred to earlier), coupled with the fact that 50% of senior academics will be retiring in the next decade, as a serious threat to the academic profession as a whole. As senior academics retire, who will have the institutional knowledge and experience to fill vacant positions? Part-time academic staff are unlikely to have had the opportunity to gain experience in administrative procedures, serve on university committees, etc. A wealth of tacit knowledge, not easily available to part-time staff, is in danger of being lost.

7.5 The challenges of engaging, managing and supporting part-time academic teachers

All of the challenges highlighted heretofore culminate in this challenge. Developing policies, strategies and structures for the management and support of a diverse and dispersed part-time staff cohort presents complex logistical and organisational challenges for institutions. If the rationale for hiring part-time staff in the first place was based on economic pragmatism, the financial implications of establishing institutional structures and strategies to support and manage part-time staff may outweigh any such cost benefits gained. However, failure to do so could impact negatively on teaching and have serious implications for both the quality of the student learning experience and for student retention.

8 The Irish context

As outlined earlier there are no reliable statistics or formal data on part-time teaching in Irish higher education institutions. It would appear that there has been little systematic research, discussion, leadership or policymaking related to this subject. There is, however, plenty of anecdotal evidence to suggest that numbers of part-time teaching staff have been increasing in recent years across the sector. The anecdotal evidence also suggests that many of the issues and challenges outlined in this literature review could well exist in the Irish context.

As elsewhere, the structure of the academic profession is changing rapidly in Ireland, not least because of the funding implications of the economic downturn. Von Prondzynski (2010) explains:

...right now in a number of countries the funding crisis affecting higher education is forcing institutions to alter their staffing structures fundamentally, not necessarily by design but nevertheless in an emphatic manner. The financial liability created by a permanent full-time appointment is often now unmanageable in terms of organisational risk assessment. In addition in Ireland, the 'employment control framework' imposed on higher education by the government is actually at least for now prohibiting universities from

making any permanent appointments at all; if you add to that the requirement to cut jobs and the availability of funded early retirement, the entire structure of the academic profession is being changed, and not even in a long term process. It is almost instant, and within one academic generation universities will be quite different places unless there is a fundamental shift.

There are no specific measures relating to part-time staff in the HEA report *Higher education system performance: final report 2014-2016* (HEA, 2014b), though the issue was raised as part of the Haddington Road Agreement (LRC, 2014) in response to concerns raised by unions such as IFUT (Irish Federation of University Teachers). It was agreed that an Expert Group would be established to consider and report on the issues. There are some informal networks too that have organised around pay issues and parity of conditions for part-time staff, e.g. Third Level Workplace Watch. Courtois and O'Keefe (2013) describe the network on the website as follows:

Third Level Workplace Watch are a collective of precarious workers who share information on workplace struggles in universities and colleges in Ireland and beyond. We are organising to defend our rights to fair wages and working conditions.

The National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching & Learning in Higher Education is establishing a framework for continuing professional development for third level educators in Ireland. While there is no specific mention of a part-time staff element to the strand, the fact that this project is being funded by the Forum suggests due consideration.

Finally, in the European context, the High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education (2013) produced a report on 'Improving the quality of teaching and learning in European higher education institutions'. The report made a number of recommendations that are being followed up by Member States. There is no explicit acknowledgement of the increasing numbers of part-time academic staff in higher education institutions in the report. The only reference thereto is in the context of the widening reputation gap between teaching and research, as follows (*ibid:* 32):

Under the pressure of growing student numbers and often dwindling public funding, some higher education institutions opt for the solution of offloading at least part of their teaching obligations to external lecturers. External lecturers who while they can, on the one hand, bring variety, may be less costly, and may create the opportunity for fine-tuned specialism, may also, on the other, be subjected to even less scrutiny with regard to their teaching skills (and their development). In institutions with strong research cultures the creation of a group of 'teaching only' staff may further widen the reputation gap between research and teaching.

While the paragraph acknowledges some of the advantages and disadvantages of employing part-time staff and is included under the section heading: *Barriers to quality teaching and learning: what can be done about them?,* there are no recommended solutions. If, as anecdotal evidence suggests, a large proportion of teaching is being undertaken by part-time staff in Ireland, as elsewhere, then, unless given due consideration, this 'barrier' may well hinder the implementation of many of the report's recommendations.

9. Policy and practice: what works?

In light of this research, what can institutions do to better meet the support and development needs of part-time staff? Unfortunately, there are no easy solutions, and certainly no 'one size fits all', to be gleaned from the literature reviewed, that might address the questions and challenges presented in this paper. The consensus in the literature is that systemic sustainable policy and practice across the sector, or institution-wide, is rare (see e.g. Beaton and Gilbert, 2013; Percy *et al.*, 2008; Bryson, 2004; 2013; and others). While there are many interesting studies in the literature, each one, for the most part, focuses on a separate group of part-time staff, with definitions and conditions varying between studies. Furthermore, most of the research studies are situated within a single department/unit.

While these studies offer abundant and valuable advice and recommendations, they yield very little by way of examples of good practices adopted. Most studies report on empirical research with part-time staff, but there are few that have progressed to the implementation or policy stages. The sustainability of any such effort is in question unless embedded in institution-wide frameworks (Percy *et al.*, 2008).

In the UK for example, where over half of academic staff are employed on temporary contracts, Bryson (2013) reports, with disappointment, that there has been very little real progress with regard to part-time teaching issues. He reviews a range of teaching and learning initiatives and projects undertaken over the past decade with similar aims: to support and develop part-time teachers. Nothing remains from most initiatives apart from project reports, albeit with useful recommendations. While the Higher Education Academy in the UK has developed a professional standards framework (HEA, 2011), there is no explicit path outlined for part-time staff.

In the US, a distinction is made between tenured/tenure track positions and non-tenure track positions. Staff in the latter category are typically referred to as 'adjunct' or 'contingent' faculty. Within the non-tenure track cohort there are both full-time and part-time staff. There are now more non-tenured faculty

than tenured faculty which explains the label 'the new majority' (see e.g. Kezar and Sam, 2011; New Faculty Majority).

May *et al.* (2011:191) paint a bleak picture of the situation for academic staff in universities in the USA, as follows:

In the USA approximately half of all faculty work parttime and the majority of academic staff are not on 'tenure track' (Curtis and Jacobe 2006; Slaughter and Rhoades 2004). The trend in the USA has been described by Schuster and Finkelstein (2006:5) as 'the ongoing transformation of the profession into a majority of contingent [temporary] employees', leading Bosquet (2008:23) to describe the holder of the doctorate as the 'waste product of graduate education'. He charts how, despite a 1990s forecast shortage of academic labour, tenured academic appointments are increasingly scarce in the US. Instead of secure positions being created in the face of predicted shortages, graduate students are churned through contingent positions and disposed of when they are qualified. Bosquet (2008:21) concludes that 'for many graduate employees the receipt of the PhD signifies the end and not the beginning of a long teaching career'.

Professional organisations like the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) and the Association of Governing Boards of Universities and Colleges (AGB) are conducting surveys and writing reports that are expressing concern about both the economic straits of part-time staff and the effect they may be having on the quality of higher education. (See e.g. AFT, 2010). The University of Southern California established The Delphi Project in 2011 to study the effect of adjunct professors on the academy. They held their first convening of higher education stakeholders the following year (Maxey, 2015). According to the website:

The Delphi Project on the Changing Faculty and Student Success (Delphi project) was initiated to support a better understanding of the factors that have led to a majority of faculty being hired off the tenure track and the impact of these current circumstances on teaching and learning.

The aims of the project are to address the void in leadership and policy by

engaging stakeholders across the higher education enterprise in the U.S (academic leaders, unions, disciplinary societies, accreditors and policymakers) in a thoughtful discussion about the imperative for change.

It remains to be seen whether the Delphi project will achieve its aims.

We can learn most from experiences in Australia, where, in the past year, the cumulative effects of initiatives there to date have resulted in the development of national benchmarking standards. May *et al.* (2011) argue that casualisation in Australia has led to a fundamental change in the structure of the academic labour market and the nature of academic work. Issues relating to part-time teaching and the implications for the sector have been highlighted in two major publications on sessional (i.e. part-time) teaching in Australian higher education: the Australian Learning and Teaching Council publication, *The RED Report* (Percy *et al.*, 2008) and *Training, Support and Management of Sessional Teaching Staff*, produced by the Australian Universities Teaching Committee (AUTC, 2003). These and other publications and projects have laid the foundations for a national policy.

The most recent initiative in Australian higher education is the BLASST (Benchmarking Leadership and Advancement of Standards for Sessional Teaching) project, funded by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. This project has resulted in the development of evidence-based national standards for enhancing quality learning and teaching with part-time staff. The project was informed by the outcomes and recommendations of foundational projects, which included the two major publications referred to above, and others (e.g. the CLASS project: Lefoe et al., 2013). The BLASST project published its Sessional Staff Standards Framework in 2013. Harvey (2013:14) describes the framework, stating that it

...positions the Institution's approach to sessional staff within the institutional policy framework, while allowing enough flexibility to include and support Individual sessional staff members; as well as Department (Unit Convenor/ Coordinator/ Subject Coordinator / Subject Leader); and Faculty (School / Division) -level responses to sessional staff issues.

In her paper, Harvey outlines the genesis of the standards and shows how the framework criteria were aligned with the RED report recommendations. (The influential RED report, referred to above, set out its recommendations under the headings: [R]ecognition, [E]nhancement and [D]evelopment.) The BLASST project has also released an accompanying online interactive tool in the form of a generic spreadsheet. This provides an accessible audit instrument for universities to examine their casual teaching staff practices, benchmarked against the Framework at four levels: individual, department, faculty and institution.

In summary, while much of the literature reviewed offers recommendations for deepening and enriching practice at departmental level, efforts in Australia come closest to addressing issues at institutional and sectoral levels in a systemic and sustainable way. Because the BLASST framework addresses a broad

range of the challenges and issues highlighted in the literature, as outlined in this paper, and because it encompasses so much learning to date, including the recommendations from the RED report, it warrants deeper investigation.

10. Discussion

This paper has presented an overview of some of the key themes from the international literature on the expansion of part-time teaching in the higher education sector. The body of literature, though small, is growing in tandem with concerns about the increasing casualisation of the academic workforce: quality concerns, equity concerns and legal and risk management concerns. While the peripheral position of part-time staff is widely acknowledged, there are some studies too that attest to their growing prominence in recent years in policy debates. For example, Holland (2004:3), in the UK context, quoting Blackwell, sums up:

Part-time teaching and teachers have assumed an increasing profile in policy circles. The sheer amount of part-time teaching, the extension of the legal rights of part-time teachers, campaigns against casualisation by Trades Unions and concerns about 'quality' have mobilized a range of stakeholder interests.

It is true, of course, that part-time teaching has always been part of academic life. The arrangement can suit both individuals and institutions and can work well in certain circumstances. However, the unprecedented growth in numbers of part-time staff in recent decades gives cause for alarm. To what extent can it continue? As von Prondzynski (2010) notes:

... the complete casualisation of the academic profession would have deadly consequences for both the student experience and the capacity of universities to have longer term strategic aims – quite apart from the fact that there will be, and there already is, a flight from the profession on the part of qualified younger people. Universities are not hubs of convenience that people can drift in and out of without much formality; there is no academy in that model.

The evidence emerging from the USA and Australia, on the negative impacts of the rise in part-time teaching on both student learning and student retention, presents a stark warning. It prompts comment on the assertion at the outset of this paper (Section 2) that casualisation of the academic workplace, at 40%, is higher than in many other areas of work. Based on the issues and challenges highlighted in this paper, the sector would appear to be *less* suited, than many other sectors, to part-time work. The very

nature of an academic teaching role, encompassing such a broad range of inter-related tasks (materials, methodology, technology, assessment, exams, course structure and pace, feedback, student support, etc.) and requiring continuous communication and team collaboration throughout the programme design, monitoring and evaluation stages, apart whatsoever from keeping up with discipline and pedagogical developments, suggests that extensive part-time teaching is not a good fit at all for the sector.

While part-time staff may be less costly, bring real-world professional experience and be the loci of positivity, innovation and good practice (through being separate from departmental politics, dysfunction, resistance to change, etc.), this very detachment from communities of practice militates against having coherent teams and has the potential to affect the integrity of what departments do. Part-time staff are potentially unaware of departmental ethos, modes of working, best practice, etc. They may not be subject to evaluation or have opportunities for appropriate professional development.

However, the literature shows that the practice of part-time teaching is well entrenched. While not detracting from the need to challenge continuing casualisation, recognising existing circumstances will enable a commitment to focusing on how best to address the issues presented by this new reality. It is important to (re)emphasise that negative impacts are caused principally by the cumulative effects of working conditions, that is, inadequate management and support structures.

Therefore, a commitment to quality teaching and learning implies a commitment to appropriate support and development for all teaching staff, including part-time staff. In order to build and maintain a sustainable learning culture with quality outcomes, higher education institutions must invest in the student learning experience.

11 Conclusion: the research imperative

Little is known about the part-time teaching landscape in higher education institutions in Ireland. The assumption is that there is a sizeable cohort of part-time teachers. Anecdotal evidence suggests that many of the issues and challenges highlighted in this paper are pertinent to the Irish situation. However, a lack of data and knowledge about the sector poses problems for the planning and provision of appropriate support and development. Therefore, in order to begin engaging, supporting and developing part-time teachers in a systemic and sustainable way at sectoral, institutional, faculty and departmental levels it is imperative to begin collecting data about this staff cohort. The following recommendations are made:

(i) The instigation of a programme of systematic data collection and research

<u>In the longer term</u>, there needs to be a thorough analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, at institutional, departmental, and individual levels, to provide a clearer picture of the part-time teaching landscape in higher education institutions in Ireland. This could be an important site for ongoing scholarly research. (Note: Because, as shown in this paper, the increasing casualisation of the academic workforce affects the quality of teaching, this recommendation is in alignment with the High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education's call (2013:67) on the European Union to support the implementation of its recommendations through promoting a number of measures, one of which is 'systematic and regular data collection on issues affecting the quality of teaching'.)

<u>In the shorter term</u>, data collection systems and related accountability mechanisms need to be established, with agreed definitions and categories across the sector. To begin a process of enquiry, a national mapping exercise should be undertaken to establish how many part-time staff there are and where they are.

1.1.3   (ii) An in-depth needs analysis

An in-depth and rigorous needs analysis should form the starting point for any policy and action on part-time teaching. This analysis, against clear evidence-based definitions of what constitutes good practice, should be undertaken across higher education institutions in Ireland. It is important that this is considered from at least three perspectives: strategy and policy (the views of senior management); practicality (the views of academic development staff, faculty and department staff e.g. subject coordinators, module coordinators, teaching team coordinators, etc.); and engagement (the views of the part-time teachers themselves).

(iii) Develop a part-time academic staff standards framework

A part-time academic staff standards framework should be developed in conjunction with the work of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, as part of their national professional development framework for the higher education sector. Learning from elsewhere suggests that prescriptive and inflexible standards will not work with such a diverse group. Perhaps a first step might be to evaluate the Australian part-time academic staff standards framework. The UK Professional Standards Framework (HEA, 2011) may also provide insights (though this does not specifically address part-time staff issues). This would lead to a set of guidelines that could inform the framework.

13. Closing comments

It is hoped that this exploratory literature review will start a conversation in how best to systematically and sustainably address the development and support needs of part-time academic staff in higher education institutions in Ireland. One thing is sure: if we continue to ignore the support and development needs of this growing cohort of teaching staff, we are jeopardising the quality of the student learning environment. This paper ends on an optimistic note, drawing on the keynote address delivered by Bryson (2013:13) at the inaugural BLASST (Benchmarking, Leadership and Advancement of Standards for Sessional Teaching) summit in Australia. He draws a parallel between the progress achieved on student engagement issues to date and the possibility for advancement of part-time academic staff issues:

We have moved a long way on the student-experience agenda, as we have recognised that it is their whole experience that matters to maintain and enhance their engagement and success. We have made great strides in embracing diversity and being inclusive with students – so is that possible with sessional staff? The key to the movement on the student agenda has been changing the attitudes of staff at both the local (practice) and senior (strategic) levels and creating an infrastructure to support student engagement. Applying such a positive model to sessional staff would avoid the pitfall of transactional, risk-management approaches. Instead it would foster a context where staff are valued and seek to build relational cultures and a sense of belonging and community.

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[1] Part-time teaching staff are understood to include all those who teach in higher education institutions who are not full-time.

[2] This collaborative project was led by EDIN (see footnote 1) and HECA (see footnote 2) and funded by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (see footnote 3). The project was under the direction of a steering group, the members of which were: Dr. Martin Fitzgerald, Chair of EDIN Committee, Dr. Claire McAvinia, Secretary of EDIN Committee, Dr. Brett Becker, member of EDIN Committee and Ms Anne Mangan, EDIN member and HECA representative on the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. The research was undertaken by Dr. Ann Coughlan, Independent Researcher and Academic Developer.

[3] The following are publicly-funded higher education institutions: the 7 Universities, the 14 Institutes of Technology and, in addition: Mary Immaculate College, Mater Dei Institute, National College of Art and Design, St. Angela's Sligo and St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra.

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