

Professionals, practitioners, peripheral product-deliverers: Contested definitions of contingent TAFE teaching

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ABSTRACT

Within Australian vocational education and training, casualisation has resulted from cost-minimisation and recruitment decisions by public authorities. Policy discourses present this trend as a training contribution by part-time industry experts, as the inevitable emergence of core/peripheral structures – in this case, a divide between professional program designers and less-qualified training ‘product’ deliverers – and as a source of organisational flexibility and individual career or lifestyle choice. These constructions are compared with counter-discourses of inequity and insecurity, and with recent models of decent, quality and sustainable work. New empirical evidence tests these alternative ways of framing casualisation and their policy implications.

Introduction

Since the early 1990s, redefinitions of the economic and social functions of training in Australia have resulted in considerable debate over the roles and qualifications of Technical and Further Education (TAFE) teachers. Casual employment has grown dramatically in the sector, and the dominant construction of this phenomenon is based on discourses of organisational and individual flexibility, and choice. Alternative discursive frames, based on notions of disadvantage, inequity and insecurity, however, call for different policy approaches, consonant with the emerging concepts of ‘quality’ or ‘decent’ work, whilst questions of succession and system sustainability are also linked to sustainable work practices. This study tests these competing ways of looking at TAFE casualisation. It begins by assembling available evidence of the extent of casual employment in the sector. It then outlines the dominant view of TAFE casualisation, presented by public authorities as largely uncontroversial, and sets out more critical approaches. New empirical evidence is provided as to how some TAFE teachers have experienced these varying constructions of their employment status, and the conclusion points to the urgency of adopting a stable approach to staffing a sector central to the securing of national skill requirements.

The argument is based partly on new empirical evidence gathered from responses to a survey questionnaire designed by the author. The first phase of survey distribution was undertaken in late 2003 and the first half of 2004, and the second phase was still in progress at the time of writing. In the first survey round, respondents were kindly recruited by senior managers in four TAFE institutes in two states/territories. In two institutes, the questionnaires were mailed to the home addresses of all casual teachers on the payroll. Responses were returned directly to the author: 33 percent of the casual populations of the two Institutes returned valid responses. In the remaining two Institutes, management distributed an intranet message containing a link to a web version of the survey, and responses (at a rate of 20 percent of casual populations) went direct to a database provided to the author by the consultancy firm SurveyChannel. Only 10 percent of respondents to this management-distributed round were union members. The second round of web-based surveying in two further states/territories was based on the recruitment of respondents through union websites or email circular messages: there were 700 responses at the time of writing. In this paper, the 510 responses from the management-recruited round are used to test dominant and alternative policy views of TAFE casualisation. First, however, an attempt is made to quantify the phenomenon.

Quantifying TAFE sector casual employment

In Australia, public sector TAFE is responsible for eighty percent of vocational education and training (VET) provision. Definitions of casual TAFE employment are based on industrial and legal instruments in a variety of state and federal jurisdictions. In NSW, for example, the relevant award defines a 'part time casual teacher' as 'a TAFE teacher engaged by TAFE to teach on an hourly basis' (IRC NSW 2000 s.2.75). In Victoria, the relevant award defines a casual ('sessional') TAFE teacher as 'a person employed to teach 0.4 time fraction or less and paid on an hourly basis' (AIRC 2002). The 0.4 time fraction is commonly translated into 320 contact hours per year: designed as trigger for conversion to non-casual contracts where the TAFE work is substantial, this ceiling tends to be applied by management in a way that limits individual employment duration, and rarely results in conversion. In the TAFE sector, 'paid on an hourly basis' does not have its customary meaning of 'engaged by the hour' – it refers to a pay system, rather than to work organisation. Irregular or emergency engagements are much less common than regularly timetabled engagements to teach an assigned program or class over a period of several months or even a year: a succession of such regular contracts is common.

The extent of this practice of using hourly casual staff to cover ongoing work, is only now becoming clear. Unfortunately, there is an embargo on reproducing recent casualisation figures from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER). Caution is, moreover, required in interpreting available TAFE casual employee figures. Double-counting is an issue in Victoria, because of multiple casual jobholding resulting from the '320 hour ceiling' on hourly employment in any institute, and estimates of casual numbers therefore need to be deflated by around 14 percentage points (Gaulke 2002). A smaller deflator is needed in NSW, because casual hours are not restricted, and casual engagements may be either part-time or full-time. In all states and territories, the question arises as to whether to rely on a headcount of casual employees, as the Australian Bureau of Statistics does in other industries, or whether to convert part-time casual numbers to full-time equivalence.

Whilst it is therefore still hard to assemble a current Australia-wide picture of TAFE casualisation, its incidence is clearly above the Australian workforce average. In Victoria, Shah estimated that hourly-paid sessional staff made up 36 percent of TAFE employees (15 percent in equivalent full-time terms), and short-term contract employment made up another 25 percent (Shah 2003: 203-204). Half the casual workforce and a majority of contract staff were women (Gaulke 2002). Shah argued that variations in sessional employment from 15 to 37 percent across the 23 TAFE Institutes reflected human resource and industrial relations policies, not some inevitable market trend (Shah 2003: 205). A training needs survey of Victorian sessional staff in late 2000, to which almost 1,000 sessionals responded, suggested that 39 percent were 'industry experts' with other full-time jobs, whilst 46 percent defined themselves as 'main-job' TAFE teachers. Sessionals were concentrated in the fields of Adult Community Education, Business Services, Community Services and Health, and to some degree in Hospitality (PETE 2001). Overall 67 percent of TAFE sessionals expected to be still in TAFE in five years' time, but only half felt they were valued by the organisation. Fewer than a third had access to training and development (Marketshare 2001).

In NSW in 2002, there were 15,446 persons employed as casual TAFE teachers, compared with a non-casual teaching workforce estimated at just over 5,000 (Table 1). At least 35 percent appear to have been main-job casuals, spending eight or more hours per week in teaching, coordination/consultancy and paid duties other than teaching. Extra unpaid preparation and marking time must be added to these weekly paid hours, effectively doubling or trebling them. Conceivably, up to eight paid hours could be combined with another full-time paid job, but those paid for over eight hours per week would find this combination difficult. Table 1 suggests that the most casualised fields were also the most feminised, such as Nursing and Adult Basic Education. These were the fields in which TAFE teaching was most likely to be the main employment source.

TABLE 1
TAFE casual
staff - hours
worked per week
by gender, NSW
TAFE 2002

Average hours worked per week	Headcount of People						
	Females		Males		Persons		
	Number	Row %	Number	Row %	Number	Column %	Column % Cumulative
<0 to <2	2,874	54.8%	2,372	45.2%	5,246	34.0%	34.0%
2 to <8	2,523	51.7%	2,354	48.3%	4,877	31.6%	65.6%
8 to <12	927	59.2%	639	40.8%	1,566	10.1%	75.7%
12 to <16	774	65.0%	417	35.0%	1,191	7.7%	83.4%
16 to <20	656	67.3%	319	32.7%	975	6.3%	89.7%
20 or more	886	58.3%	635	41.7%	1,521	9.8%	100.0%
Total	8,680	56.2%	6,766	43.8%	15,446		

Source: G. Dobbs (2003), Attachment 2.

Data from elsewhere in Australia are less current or precise. Tasmanian TAFE figures from 1997, which include both teachers and non-teachers, suggest around 28 percent casual and 19 percent temporary employment, although some conversions to permanency were offered in and after 1998. In Queensland, where there is a lower-paid TAFE 'tutor' category, 1998 full-time equivalent figures showed 64 percent of tutors and 23 percent of teaching staff to be on temporary fixed term contracts (Forward 2003a and b). In the ACT in 1998, 25 percent of TAFE teachers were permanent and 72 percent (about 39 percent in full-time equivalent terms) were hourly casual (Forward 2003a and b) - a situation subsequently addressed through a mechanism for conversion to fractional fixed-term contracts for long-term casualls. In South Australia in 1999, 29 percent of TAFE teachers were thought to have ongoing appointments, 27 percent were on fixed contracts and 44 percent were hourly-paid instructors (Kronemann 2002), but again, a 2003 conversion mechanism for temporary staff has changed these proportions (Gale 2004). The State School Teachers Union of Western Australia is currently working on estimates of 2000 casual staff (70 percent women) in a TAFE workforce of 3,600 (Matussis 2004).

Institutional drivers of TAFE casualisation include a decline in permanent recruitment, perhaps in response to uncertainty over the direction of industry restructuring, and cost-minimisation. Redundancies have outstripped permanent recruitment. Between 1997 and 2000, \$149m. was spent Australia-wide on TAFE redundancies (Kronemann 2002). Already between 1994 and 1998 in NSW, permanent recruitment had declined by 86 percent, from 374 to 50 per year (NSW TAFE Commission Board 1999: 14). A 16 percent growth in student numbers between 1997 and 2000 was accompanied by a decline in employee costs from 68.4 percent of total VET expenditure in 1994 to 64.2 percent in 2000 (NCVER, cited in Kronemann 2002). It therefore appears that casualisation has been a policy decision. The discourses by which this policy has been framed, however, tend to present this development as exogenously-caused.

The policy framing of TAFE casual employment growth

Chappell and Johnston (2003) define 'new VET practitioners' as a subset of a wider group of VET professionals, who include organisational training/development staff. The term 'practitioners' embraces 'full-time TAFE and vocational school teachers, trainers, assessors, and HRD managers, consultants and researchers', together with '...an increase in the number of part-time, casual and contract positions' (p. 8). Chappell (2001) argues that in becoming 'entrepreneurial, quality-focussed, customer-orientated, efficient and flexible' (p. 33), TAFE teachers have been required to change their identities (p. 24). Earlier roles of 'industry practitioners who happen to teach' (p. 27) and of 'adult educators' engaged in the liberal democratic provision of community services (pp. 27-28) have been displaced by those of providers of 'practical knowledge' and workplace 'performativity' (pp. 30-31). They deliver a product: modules based on national standards and assessment 'packages'. Seddon and Angus (1999) argue the need to go beyond the stereotypical debates between 'dinosaur' educationalists and 'entrepreneurs' in responding to this change. Like Down (2000), they argue that greater professional expertise is needed than ever, if the new national training packages are to be turned into learning pathways, and flexible, learner-centred environments.

Cully *et al.* (2003: 6-7) agree that VET teaching job roles are actually widening, even as they are becoming increasingly part-time and casual. Using ABS data, which cover only main-job TAFE staff, these writers show that in 2001, even amongst main-job part-timers, 53 percent were working part-time, and over 90 percent were hourly-paid and designated 'casual' or 'sessional' (Cully *et al.*, 2003: 14). Official accounts of this casual professional workforce present some odd contradictions. In the NSW Department of TAFE, where the head-count casualisation rate among teachers is 78 percent (Cully *et al.*, 2003: 14), this very high figure is justified by conflating the old discourse of 'industry expertise' and the new discourse of 'workplace performativity':

The capacity to respond to rapid changes within and industry and to the needs of new and emerging industries is dependent on an ability to access teachers with very current industry expertise and experience. Industry practitioners supply this expertise by working in TAFE on a part-time casual basis (Dobbs 2003: 10)

This statement begs the questions of the appropriate casual/permanent staff mix. The 'cutting edge expertise' argument sits oddly with Dobbs' evidence that casualisation is highest in adult basic education and nursing, and lowest in technical and trade areas other than IT.

VET sector policy documents on casual employment present themselves as reporting an uncontroversial academic analysis of the inevitable growth of the 'flexible firm', with its low-skilled peripheral labour market. Conflicts between this narrative and that of an increasingly skilled teaching force seem to go unnoticed. For example a 'meta-analysis' conducted for the recently-abolished Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) sees a 'VET context' driven by market forces, efficiency requirements and user choice, as necessitating a downsized '...core of full-time permanent staff and managers and a periphery of part-time, casual and contract staff who may have affiliations with more than one provider' (ANTA 2003). Claiming that 'there is some evidence to suggest that the percentage of full-time TAFE teachers within the system will continue to fall', Chappell and Johnston (2003) see this trend as 'consistent with general employment patterns in many economies worldwide' (p. 9). Describing 'casual, part-time or sessional' work as '...often either less skilled or more narrowly skilled' than the sort of 'non-standard' work that is highly skilled, well-paid and done on a contract/consultancy basis for one employer, they state that casuals are '...employed to deliver specific courses and usually require qualifications at a lower order than their full-time counterparts' (p. 9). Another study for ANTA describes the VET labour market as 'changing dramatically' through work intensification to a 'full-time, permanent core of highly skilled staff ... supported by a larger body of casual, sessional and part-time workers, ... supplemented by outsourcing and labour hire arrangements' (Quay Connection 2003: 7). This study invokes the model of the 'free agent or portfolio worker' pursuing 'employability skills rather than a role in any single organisation'. It presents 'young (and increasing numbers of older people)' as opting for 'quality of life and family responsibilities': they '...will not commit to a career for life, but will work in several careers, and across employers – over time and even simultaneously' (Quay Connection 2003:7). Such 'literature reviews' gloss over both their own internal contradictions, and the highly contested nature of the flexibility debates on which they draw, deploying concepts as if relaying social reality.

Alternative ways of framing TAFE casualisation

In the policy literature, Schön and Fein (1994) distinguish between rhetorical and action frames. The former legitimise official policy and institutional practice. People contesting such policy and practice may invoke an alternative rhetorical frame, and can enhance their influence by finding a 'metacultural' frame allowing contending policies and practices to be resolved through a process of reciprocal translation. We have seen that TAFE casualisation was legitimised by managerialist policy frames of efficiency and performativity, and relied heavily on the core/periphery 'flexible firm' rhetorical frame. One of the main literatures on the growth of temporary and casual employment, by contrast, aligns 'flexibility' with 'precarious employment', seen as manifested in both job insecurity and work intensification (Heery and Salmon 2000; Burchell *et al.*, 2002). The most elaborated insecurity frame is Standing's (1997) widely-used itemisation of insecurity in the labour market (lack of attachment to an employer), in the job (fear of loss of employment), in work (lack of control over job requirements), in income, in skill reproduction (limited access to training and to skill recognition) and in representation (lack of workplace participation and union rights). The 'precarious employment' rhetoric tends to link itself to discourses of 'disadvantage' or 'vulnerability', which are useful if describing social positioning, but easily contestable by

economic individualists as deficit-model stereotyping. Of course the discourse of positional or structural disadvantage does not imply individual deficit, and can be translated into rhetorics of 'equity': teacher unions and, as we shall see, TAFE casuals, use this discourse.

Recently, new rhetorical frames of 'decent work' (Bonnet *et al.*, 2003) and 'quality work' (Pocock *et al.* 2004; Rubery 2004) have been adopted by those wishing to shore up arguments for job security based on equity, justice or fairness. Equity arguments have both legal purchase and mobilising potential, but they have often been trumped on 'economic' grounds. The security discourse has a strong experiential appeal, and is also translatable into the frames of individual, organisational and social risk-avoidance, thereby providing a possible 'metacultural' link to new rhetorics of sustainability. On deciding on the utility of these various frames, let us hear how TAFE teachers articulated their situations, both in response to survey questions designed to test the flexibility, choice, and insecurity frames, and in their own choice of language in responding to open-ended questions asking what they liked and what they most wanted to see changed in their casual jobs.

Framing experience and testing frames

We turn now to the 510 survey responses, rich with annotations and open-ended textual responses. Demographically, women made up 52 percent of the respondents from the four participating TAFE Institutes. The average age of casual respondents was 45, a little younger than that of non-casual TAFE teachers. Just over half (51 percent) had dependent children, and 11 percent were caregivers for frail or disabled relatives. Against these demographic factors, we start by testing claims about casual employment and career choices.

Table 2 suggests that whilst the main reasons for working casually in TAFE were economic, the choice of TAFE work was related to the strong intrinsic attractions of teaching. Comments such as '*Teaching is my passion*' (TAFE sessional, 2004) were common. Fully half the survey respondents were hoping to make the step to a permanent teaching position, although 47 percent agreed that only casual positions had so far been available. When asked to nominate the goal that best defined their career aspirations five years hence, 36 percent indicated that they hoped to have a permanent career in TAFE, 30 percent preferred to continue their current casual working arrangement, and 19 percent intended to pursue a career in an industry not related to education, with the remaining options, teaching in another education sector and leaving the paid workforce, being minority choices. Family commitments were a reason for working casually for 56 percent (Table 3), and the freedom of casual work appealed to 53 percent.

TABLE 2
Possible reasons
for undertaking
casual work
- relevance to
TAFE teachers
in four institutes,
2003-2004

<i>Reason</i>	<i>Relevant</i>	<i>Not at all</i>	<i>Slightly</i>	<i>Moderat.</i>	<i>V. much</i>
The work is an important income source (n=510)	56 11%	98 19%	130 25%	226 44%	
Hopefully this job is a step to a permanent teaching position (n=505)	170 34%	83 16%	88 17%	164 32%	
Casual work is a step back into paid work after a career break (n=487)	352 72%	32 7%	50 10%	53 11%	
I like the freedom that casual work provides (n=493)	136 28%	94 19%	130 26%	133 27%	
The job keeps me in touch with ideas (n=492)	102 21%	89 18%	145 29%	156 32%	
The job lets me make an intellectual/ cultural/ contribution (n=493)	54 11%	52 11%	143 29%	244 49%	
The job fits well with my family commitments (n=493)	132 27%	83 17%	129 26%	149 30%	
As a retiree, I like this work (n=476)	397 83%	7 1%	19 4%	53 11%	
Only casual work has been available (n=485)	229 47%	31 6%	47 10%	178 37%	

Flexibility was an important issue for respondents, with three-quarters considering control over the number and distribution of hours to be important, and 60 percent wanting flexibility to deal with emergencies. Around 70 percent were moderately to fully satisfied with the capacity of the casual job to provide these flexibilities.

Just as a choice of available TAFE teaching work need not imply a preference for its casual conditions, so a desire for flexibility need not imply a preference for the casual employment mode, or even for its associated hours of work. Table 3 indicates that 80 percent of survey respondents wanted the greater security of either permanent work (60 percent) or a fixed-term contract (20 percent).

TABLE 3
Preferred employment mode and hours, casual teachers in four TAFE institutes, 2003/04

<i>Preferred employment mode (n=491)</i>	<i>Number</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Permanent part-time work	192	39%
Permanent full-time work	103	21%
Casual work	97	20%
Part-time contract work	83	17%
Full-time contract work	16	3%
<i>Preferred hours of work (n=498)</i>		
Increased hours	275	55%
Decreased hours	14	3%
No change to present hours	209	42%

Whilst three-quarters of all respondents wanted part-time hours, over half wanted an increase in hours. This phenomenon was strong in Victoria and was linked to way the 0.4 or 320 hour definition was being applied:

I have to juggle two schools the entire year if I want to earn any sort of decent income to cover mortgage costs and the cost of general living. I know this was put in place to force the schools to give out more contract jobs but it hasn't worked and they have effectively shot people like me in the foot. (TAFE sessional, 2004)

This quotation suggests that a mix of labour market, employment and financial insecurity, rather than the free-market career entrepreneurship mentioned by official policy analysts, is likely to underlie multiple jobholding. Table 4 shows the distinction between secure 'industry experts' for whom casual TAFE teaching was a second job, and insecure 'multiple part-time casual jobholders', combining several part-time or insecure jobs. In Table 4, responses to the category 'other' were concentrated in Victoria and signified multiple casual TAFE or VET sector jobholding. The long-term implications of this insecurity were serious

I don't have any annual leave entitlement. I don't get paid when I am ill, for my marking and preparation, for the pastoral care/welfare role that I provide to students. I have no income during term/semester breaks. I have worked a full-time allotment for 11 years, in 2 jobs for the last 3 years, and have little hope of securing any long service leave entitlement! (Sessional TAFE teacher, 2004)

TABLE 4
Incidence and type of multiple job-holding, TAFE casual teachers, four institutions, 2003/4

<i>Other positions held concurrently</i>	<i>Full time</i>	<i>Part time</i>
<i>n=510</i>	<i>No of Respondents</i>	
A permanent or temporary contract VET position	12	28
A permanent or temporary contract position in another education sector	18	47
A permanent position in another industry	88	32
Casual teaching in school of TAFE	33	64
Casual work outside education	29	84
Other	16	51
Not applicable/not answered	80	

Clearly, lengthy employment duration does not automatically bring security with it. Of the 510 survey respondents, 29 percent had been in their present TAFE Institute for less than a year, 31 percent had been working casually with the current employer for between one and three years, and 40 percent had been casuals in the Institute for over three years. For 'main job' TAFE teachers rather than 'industry experts', the discourse of entrepreneurial self-made careers seems quite inappropriate. A number of respondents expressly and resentfully located themselves outside any career stream. They experienced their work as continuous, but taking them nowhere and punctuated by periods of unpaid stand-down: *'The Institute disengaged casual staff over the breaks, especially Christmas, so they did not have to pay them and then reinstated them in the New Year'* (TAFE Casual 2003).

Thus TAFE casuals experienced 'flexibility' in the form of Standing's (1997) external labour market insecurity and internal employment insecurity simultaneously: *'If I could wish for anything it would have to be knowing what hours, days, times and campus I will be teaching next year. At this stage I don't even know if I have a job'* (TAFE sessional, 2004). They also report Standing's 'work' insecurity – a sense of arbitrariness in role definition: *'Knowing what day of the week it will be so as to organise child care'; 'More notice. (Sometimes I've had a day's notice for a ...semester with a class)'* (TAFE sessionals 2004).

Marginalisation, which is an aspect Standing's 'representation insecurity', was a major theme. Casuals experienced a sense of 'disrespect'; of being 'an underclass': *'I would love some desk or storage space rather than having to lug books, papers, etc. around in the boot of my car!'; 'I used the Library and was told that the computers for use of teachers, were for email only!'*. Isolation was frequently mentioned: *'No feedback from the TAFE though and I have never been informed about the success or otherwise of the students in their final year'*. Along with gaining welcome access to sick leave, annual leave and adequate paid planning time, a strong theme emerged that permanent part-time work would mean *'...that I feel part of a team and can participate (in a paid, legitimate way) in staff meetings, decision making and professional development'* (TAFE casuals and sessionals, 2003/04).

The sense that hourly pay was inconsistent with the ongoing professional responsibility undertaken by teachers was perhaps most commonly expressed through discourses of inequity. One concept was that of imbalance between reward and individual effort or outlays: *'The expectation for the hourly rate is, attendance at bi-weekly meetings, preparation, development of materials, assessment and finally...teaching face to face; doesn't quite work out in reality'* (Sessional, 2004). Some claimed to have done administrative and course design work well beyond classroom teaching: *'Have written/developed/presented 5 courses with no recognition or remuneration what so ever, and no help, advice or support from current teaching staff'* (TAFE casual, 2003). One reason cited was: *'My entire section are part-time teachers'* (Sessional, 2004). Unpaid hours were a major theme. Attempts to quantify them included an estimate of four unpaid hours to each paid hour. Others suggested ten unpaid hours per week, fifteen in peak times, or wrote *'By the end of this year I will have completed in excess of 200 hours' unpaid work'* (Casual, 2003). Also mentioned was the non-reimbursement of outlays on course materials, or childcare costs for meeting attendance, and on travel to workplaces or other campuses: *'I would like to be paid a travel allowance – as I travel 180 kilometres once a week to another campus (and have done for 6 ½ years) but receive no allowance – my old Datsun is wearing out!'* (Sessional, 2004). Respondents who factored all their worktime into their hourly rates made statements such as this: *'I was paid in the end on average the equivalent of about \$10 per hour. I would have done better doing cleaning'* (Sessional, 2004).

Relativities to the remuneration of non-casual TAFE teachers and private sector practitioners were also mentioned: *'I am paid \$45.00 an hour and when I have undertaken similar work ...in the private sector I am paid approx. \$80.00 an hour'* (Sessional, 2004). Particularly corrosive was the general sense of being an underclass, relative to non-casual TAFE colleagues: *'Teachers, who at the end of the day have the same qualifications as you, do the same job but are on different salary/award/conditions to you. It makes me very angry. It is grossly unjust. It is economic irrationalism!'* (Sessional, 2004).

Underlying the pay equity issue was the question of skill reproduction and recognition. The irony that this issue has arisen in institutions devoted to national skill development was not lost on respondents. It was experienced as a dissonance between their own skill levels and the limited career paths open to them:

There should be a better process to recognise my skills after three years with TAFE and twenty years in the industry. This would provide some sense of security and stability and also be fair recognition of the work done (Casual, 2003).

Of the survey respondents, a majority were unhappy with their casual conditions. Discontent was greatest amongst those who had chosen a teaching career, and saw themselves as skilled professionals. To summarise: they wanted to be included in decision-making and staff development, but were finding themselves marginalised, insecure and inequitably paid, both in return for their efforts and relative to other workers. In conclusion, let us use the central skill issue, and explore how it might be addressed by the discursive frames of 'decent' or 'quality' part-time work.

Quality, skill and sustainability

The matter of skill recognition and professional development for TAFE casuals relates to the emerging debate over job design in the context of flexible delivery (McNickle and Cameron 2003: 11, 19). At issue is the question of whether TAFE teaching roles should be subjected to an old, Taylorist design/execution divide, currently being framed in discourse through the core/periphery model. We have noted the arguments that training packages actually require higher levels of teaching proficiency than ever. Schofield *et al.* (2001) appropriated the ruling discourse of TAFE 'product value chains' to argue that professional development is a primary value-adding activity, rather than a discretionary cost.

Recognition that the 'packaging' of TAFE curriculum into deliverable 'product' does not obviate professionalism and skill in classroom interaction is thus linked to the 'quality' of teachers' development and careers. The issue finds expression in the debate over whether the Certificate IV Training and Assessment Package is a sufficient qualification for casual TAFE teachers. Palmieri (2003: 23) argues that the widespread substitution of this minimum credential poses succession problems, as retiring staff leave behind '...those with industry skills but with no deep knowledge of teaching and learning processes'. McNickle and Cameron (2003: 20) argue that 'all' TAFE managers recognise that 'succession planning has emerged as a critical issue for the TAFE sector as a whole'.

Thus quality and sustainability appear to be emerging as metacultural frames through which the core/periphery model of casualisation can be debated. The question is whether succession planning will allow career access for the currently marginalised significant minority of TAFE casuals seeking careers in the sector. In a report to the Western Australia Department of Training, David Rumsey and Associates (2003: 53) used the mean TAFE workforce age of about 53 to argue for targeted programs based on clear career pathways and professional development, to allow casual and part-time teachers to become permanent VET practitioner/managers. The Australian Education Union has secured conversion processes in Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania (Gale 2004). In NSW, a ministerial/union agreement has secured a limited program of conversions, restoring the proportion of permanent teaching hours in TAFE from less than half to 55 percent by June 2006. A wider definition of equity has however been hard to achieve: an industrial application for pro-rata entitlements for main-job TAFE casuals is still awaiting resolution after a year. Across the Australian TAFE sector, the fundamental 'decent work' principle, that ongoing work should be staffed by ongoing employees, still awaits resolution. Unless a consensus emerges on how to achieve this goal, a sustainability crisis, of the sort currently destabilising other public sector areas, hangs over a sector vital to securing Australia's future skill needs.

This paper is based on research funded by an ARC SPIRT Grant, covering casualisation in schools (with Barbara Preston and John O'Brien), TAFE, and universities (with Iain Campbell, Jennifer Curtin, Margaret Wallace and the late Harry Oxley). I am grateful for the support of two TAFE Industry Partners and two other TAFE Institutes in three states/territories, the ACTU, the Australian Education Union (AEU) and the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU). The paper has also benefited from time spent in the Political Science Program, Research School of Social Sciences, ANU, during study leave from UNSW. The views expressed in the paper may not reflect those of co-researchers or industry partners.

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