

# **ACTA BACKGROUND PAPER N0.5**

## **Casualisation of the ESL workforce in Australia**

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### **Introduction**

Anxiety over the direction of change in the workplace has become commonplace these days, with a range of trends attracting debates and concern. Such trends are often interrelated, as in the trend towards 'downsizing' (widespread retrenchments) in organisations, accompanied by lost job security and increased use of flexible employment contracts. Another widely observed trend – the tendency for hours of work to diverge markedly, with many people working shorter hours while others work long hours – is generally related to the experience of reduced job security in the workplace. Such workplace trends have a profound effect on people's incomes and the way they structure their lives. They also affect the nature of service delivery to consumers at large, in a range of obvious and less intentional ways.

'Casual' is one of those terms used to denote a trend that many find alarming. It suggests the number of people employed as casual or temporary employees is increasing. For some, casualisation also refers to the use of other non-standard employment practices, such as contracting, consulting, agency work and fixed term employment.

Of all these categories, casual employment is by far the most insecure. In a labour market that appears to have made most jobs insecure, casual workers enjoy the least job security, protection and employment rights.

This paper focuses on casual and temporary employment in the ESL (English as a Second Language) profession. It investigates the implications for the quality, range and accessibility of services when a significant proportion of teachers are employed under casual or temporary contracts.

### **Background**

Like most industries, the education sector has seen marked changes in the way that employment is organised and managed. One key change since the early 1990s has been the increasing use of casual, temporary and non-standard employment (Australian Centre for Industrial Relations Research and Training [ACIRRT] 1999, P. 138). Employers, in their quest for cost cutting and greater flexibility at work, are turning away from full-time, permanent employment to make increasing use of non-standard, including casual, work. This is eroding the notion of a 38 or 40-hour working week and a standard contract for ongoing or indefinite employment.

By its nature, casual work provides no job security or employment rights, such as paid leave or professional development, and is usually short in duration. Employees are generally hired as the need arises (Brosnan & Walsh, 1998, p29) or for a specified period, whereas permanent work generally carries an expectation that work will be for an unspecified duration (Romeyn, 1993 as cited in Chockalingham, 1994, p. 1). Nevertheless, it is not uncommon for some casual employees to be continually re-employed and so become, de facto, long-term workers without rights (Weller et al., 1999, p. 20).

In 1994, it was estimated that a quarter of Australian employees were casual (ACIRRT, 1999, p. 139). The growth of temporary employment in Australia has outstripped that of all OECD countries, from 16% of all jobs in 1983 to 24% in 1994 (ACCRRT, 1999, P 140). While growth is not in casual jobs (some are temporary or fixed term) these figures indicate how dramatically the casualisation trend has progressed. Recent Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) figures suggest that the total proportion of casual jobs, at 18% is less than previously estimated. However, other figures in the same survey indicate an even higher incidence of income and job uncertainty than previously thought. For example, 34% of those surveyed had variable monthly earnings and 41% had no leave entitlements (Workforce, 2000, p. 2)

The causes of this trend are both political and economic. Changes in legislation, such as the deregulation of employment protection (for example, the stripping down or abolition of awards) and the weakening of institutions (such as trade unions and arbitration tribunals) have given employers the scope to offer less secure and protected forms of work. Employers have also sought to reduce their costs by offering short-term and/or part-time employment contracts. At the same time high unemployment has forced many people to accept such jobs.

Romeyn (1993 in Chockalingham, 1994) identifies some of the reasons for the growth of part-time and casual employment. They include: (a) for workers to combine paid work with family responsibilities; (b) for individuals to combine paid work with study; (c) for employers to allow employees nearing retirement to ease out of the workforce gradually; and (d) to provide employment for those whose health, age or disability precludes full-time employment (Chockalingham, 1994, p. 2). However, survey data has indicated that a majority of employees would prefer full-time, permanent work, suggesting that the causes lie more with employer strategy and the supply of work than demand

factors coming from individuals (Chockalingham, 1994, p.2). Casual employment is probably more attributable to the growth of the service industries with their fluctuating demands for labour (Chockalingham, 1994, p. 2), and in public education, to the effects of funding cuts and uncertain student demand. Recently the NSW government has introduced legislation providing leave benefits, such as unpaid parental leave, to casual employees who have worked for the same employer for two years, and has given the Industrial relations Commission the power to recognise some types of independent contractors and employees (Discrimination Alert, 2000, p 1). Similarly, the National Tertiary Education Union has recently won job security rights for temporary lecturers in higher education, suggesting the casualisation trend there is being somewhat curtailed.

While the Australian Bureau of Statistics does not collect data on the number of casual teachers in ESL education or the education industry generally, recent policy developments and other figures point to trends in this area.

Some researchers have named the growing tendency for jobs to become less secure and protected as 'precarious employment' (Burgess & Campbell, 1998; Brosnan U Walsh, 1998). Burgess and Campbell suggest that there are eight dimensions of precariousness, ranging from employment insecurity through to benefit insecurity and difficulties in accessing representation (such as the right to be in a union). Using this classification system, they estimate that a majority (two thirds) of jobs in Australia exhibit some degree of precariousness (p. 13).

To this extent, it is misleading to consider the dichotomy in jobs as being one between casual and permanent employment. Walsh and Deery argue that the distinction between 'core' (standard) and 'peripheral' (non-standard) jobs is essentially misplaced, since part-time and temporary workers might in some cases constitute the largest component of a company's workforce (1999, p. 1). In fact, as Burgess and Campbell's figures suggest, most jobs now embody some degree of insecurity, with the differences between a matter of degree. In an industry such as education, the casualisation trend can therefore be seen to challenge the security of all jobs. Nevertheless it is arguable that elements of the core/periphery dichotomy are discernable in certain sectors of the industry, such as higher education, while in others, such as TAFE most jobs are precarious.

Women are more likely to be in precarious jobs than men, and industries employing a high percentage of females are more likely to offer precarious (including casual) employment.

## **The Education industry**

A major survey of employers conducted in 1995, the Australian Workplace Industrial Relations Survey (AWIRS) found that education was among four industries most involved in outsourcing or contracting out of jobs. Sixty per cent of organisations in education had outsourced work (ACIRRT, 1999, p. 141), much of which would have resulted in casual employment. For example, sessional teaching in tertiary institutions, such as universities and TAFE, makes extensive use of casual teachers to deliver a

range of subjects and courses to students. Very often, only a small core of permanent full-time teachers is employed to coordinate the overall program of teaching. In American community colleges, the use of 'adjunct faculty' as it is called, has reached a level where the number of part-time teachers, at 41%, is fast approaching the number of full-time, permanent teachers (Kimberley, 1998, p.9). The result reported in one major college with 25,000 students was that only one in three classes was taught by a full-time instructor (Kimberley, 1998, p.8).

According to AWIRS, the incidence from 16% of all employees in 1990 to 18% in 1995 (Morehead et al., 1997, p. 42). In higher education, there has been a growth of casual academic employment of close to 70% (Richards, 1998 cited in Bassett, 1998, p.2) In 1995, casual academics employed in Australian universities made up 11% of a total of 82,028 full-time equivalent staff (Bassett & Marshall, 1998, p.5). Some of the factors contributing to them to these trends may be surmised by looking at the changes, which have occurred in education generally.

The education sector has experienced a range of funding cuts and reorganisations in the past decade. Federal cuts to universities over the last four years have amounted to 6%, with unfunded salary increases resulting in considerably higher reductions in real terms. The TAFE sector has also seen huge cuts, amounting to 20% over a seven-year period in Victoria (internal Victoria University memorandum). Competitive tendering for TAFE places has also led to a significant number of places going to private training providers. Similarly, the Adult Multicultural Education Program (AMEP) has cut staff and been corporatised to meet the challenge of competitive tendering. Tendering out of AMEP services by the federal department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs in 1997 resulted in hundreds of job losses in NSW and Victoria and the conversion of many permanent jobs to temporary status. Across Australia there was a range of potentially negative impacts flowing from this change which cannot be examined in detail within this paper, such as reduced budgets, lowered staff morale, a decline in inter-provider cooperation and constraints on long-term planning. However, the specific effects in AMEP serve as useful examples of the kinds of problems canvassed generally in this paper.

Schools have met with similar pressures such as the requirement under the Kennett government in Victoria for schools to become self-governing and operate with reduced budgets. However there may be some difference in terms of the degree of casualisation in schools, where a high percentage of staff are permanent and other staff generally on fixed term contracts.

Clearly, casual employment provides an opportunity to institutions, whether privately or publicly funded, to cut cost.

By employing teachers only when needed, they avoid paying for non-teaching time, staff development and various staff entitlements such as paid leave and non-compulsory superannuation. By 'contracting out' some teaching functions, such as direct classroom teaching, marking etc., to 'contractors' they also avoid workers compensation, payroll tax, and other cost imposts. Such contractors may in fact be

little more than casual employees by another name. The implications of such employment practices are significant for both the employees affected and their work colleagues. Students and institutions may experience both negative and positive effects from work.

This paper is concerned with casual teachers who deliver ESL programs across the whole spectrum of education settings, from pre-school through to tertiary education, including workplace and adult education. It looks at the potential consequences of casualisation for the teachers, the students and the discipline.

## Challenges to ESL education

We can group the consequences of casualisation in ESL teaching under five general categories:

- teaching standards/quality/professional development/integration
- employment relations/working conditions
- relationships with students
- Service provision
- costs/delivery modes/efficiency

These are briefly described, with examples derived from empirical research, the author's experience and anecdotal material derived from working in the multicultural field for many years. More empirical research is needed to assess the actual impact and dimensions of casualisation in ESL employment. However, given the figures already referred to, there is little doubt that the issue is a significant one.

## Teaching standards and quality

Since casual workers are often seen as short-term or peripheral to the core workforce of an organisation, they receive less training and fewer professional development opportunities, such as attendance at conferences and seminars (ACIRRT, 1999, p. 141; Bassett, 1998, p. 8; Bassett & Marshall, 1998, p. 9; Chockalingam, 1994, 1994, p.2)

This has implications for the quality of teaching, as the responsibility for keeping up with developments in the discipline falls on the individual, who is often holding more than one teaching job in an effort to make ends meet (Bassett, 1998, p. 11). This situation is quite common in the higher education and TAFE contexts and to a lesser extent, in schools. In such cases there is a real danger that teaching quality will erode over time.

Casual teachers tend also to be isolated from their peers. Arriving to collect work, commence classes or working from home, they often miss out on informal networking and discussion with their colleagues about work matters as well as more formal gatherings such as department meetings

(Bassett, 1998, p. 11). As one American observer has commented:

They just teach their classes and go home. They aren't around to advise students. They aren't on committees. They just don't do their part in the academic life of students (Kimberley, 1998, p. 10).

The opportunities for reflection and analysis of teaching practice are also more limited. Casual teachers are less likely to evaluate their teaching in any formal sense, as this takes extra time that is not encompassed in the hourly rate. Casual teachers may not feel they have the continuity to carry out follow-up studies and evaluate the effects of their programs. Research generally tends to suffer, as the teaching free rarely builds in time for professional research which might enhance teaching practice. This is particularly true in the higher education context, but also applies to teachers working in schools.

Opportunities for integration between ESL and other curricula, such as vocational training, are affected by the lack of opportunities and authority to talk with other teaching professionals and participants at the workplace, including unions and employers. Nowhere is this more apparent than in workplace ESL education, although it is also relevant to TAFE and school education. Studies have argued the importance of providing ESL teaching in a context (vocational, social) which gives meaning and relevance to the language skills being taught (Stephens & Bertone, 1995, p. 35). Without integration, ESL education risks being irrelevant or ineffective.

Bassett and Marshall (1998, p.12) have observed that the extensive use of part-time and casual academics in universities has meant that core staff have to undertake more of the general academic tasks, such as course or subject administration, and even the management of part-timers. An American case study also suggests that full-timers do the overwhelming majority of curriculum development for new courses (Kimberly, 1998, p. 9). This places added strain on the workloads of permanent full-time teachers, affecting both their working conditions and potentially, the quality of their work as fewer staff carry out the important tasks of quality review, course administration and curriculum development. As the president of one American college noted: "The absence of full-timers impacts on the creative renewal of the college", since part-timers cannot contribute to the work needed to keep the college up to date with changes in the field of work. He observed that a very heavy reliance on adjunct teachers had led to the college falling behind other institutions in offering new and innovative programs (Kimberley, 1998, p. 9). The implications for ESL education are clear. A heavy reliance on casual teachers could lead to courses becoming out of touch with advances in pedagogy and research, with consequences for the relevance and quality of courses. Casual staff are also less likely to be provided with even the most minimal office facilities, thus making it more difficult for them to maintain a professional standard of teaching aids and materials (Kimberley, 1998, p. 8).

The fact that most student consultation also falls on the shoulders of the permanent staff leads to a further erosion of opportunities for research and staff development. In effect,

the presence of large numbers of casual teachers has a deleterious impact on the job content and professional development of permanent teachers too, by increasing administration and squeezing the time available for all staff to engage in development activities (Kimberley, 1998, p. 9). These constraints are just as likely to occur in schools, TAFE and other teaching contexts as in universities, and mean that all EL teachers, both permanent and casual, have less time to inject a critical and discursive element into teaching practice.

There are more direct implications for students too. Given the disempowerment experience by many ESL students, both children and adults, the inability to access a familiar teacher outside the classroom for help and advice could increase feelings of alienation and exacerbate learning problems. For many overseas born students, the personal rapport they develop with their teacher is a key to their learning success, but such rapport is undermined when that teacher is unavailable for consultation because their pay rate does not cover this.

Fragmentation and the maintenance of standards become key issues when ESL education tendered out to competing organisations, particularly where the winning tenders result in casual employment based on fluctuating demand within the tendering organisation. With ESL institutions and bodies now less sure of where their next funding dollar is coming from, and how much the dollar will be, there is even greater pressure to employ staff on a short-term, contingent basis.

With the tendering out of contracts comes greater fragmentation of services, with harmful consequences for articulation and integration of courses, as well as overall quality. Without any overarching quality agency to monitor standards of ESL education fails those who are among the most vulnerable in our society: those who need of the 'lingua franca' that will provide their ticket to education and employment. Casual employment is closely bound up with the dilemma as it offers the capacity to sidestep quality issues and gain a relatively powerless and compliant workforce who will 'deliver' ESL courses without raising fundamental issues of quality and accountability.

A contrasting view from anecdotal observation is that many temporary teachers do in fact engage in a range of professional activities, such as staff development, student counselling and curriculum development and evaluation for which they are not paid. Their motivation for this might be based on a mixture of pressure from supervisors, fear of job loss, concern for students and professional considerations. While there has been no research to substantiate this, such a situation would suggest widespread exploitation of temporary teachers and a need to reappraise the role and contribution of temporary and casual staff. It further underlines the potential for overwork and consequent effects on quality, since work which is not paid for will often lead to multiple job holding, significant travel between jobs and exhaustion.

Overall, it seems unlikely that casualisation of ESL education would have positive implications for quality, given the constraints and limitations mentioned here. While some employers may feel it allows them to hire and fire staff more easily, in reality few have the time to properly evaluate the

performance of casual teachers to make informed judgement. Given the reduced opportunities for professional development it would also seem unlikely that other casuals hired to replace staff would offer more than a marginal gain in teaching skills. The longer casualisation continues, the more degraded the overall pool of skills is likely to become. Casualisation could have implications for the quality of teaching in general, as the added administrative burden on permanent teachers leaves them less time to focus on quality enhancement activities, such as professional development and course review.

On the other hand, casual employment enables institutions to employ practitioners or experts who can provide very relevant, new or practical knowledge derived from a practice setting. This may apply in the case of workplace consultants who are qualified to teach ESL, or researchers who also do some teaching. These people are often employed on a fee for service basis for limited after-hours teaching, such as guest lectures or one semester of a subject. While there are benefits in such arrangements, the question is then about the proper balance between this kind of teaching and the overall teaching program (Kimberley, 1998, 1998, p. 9).

## **Employment relations/working conditions**

Casual employment places the ESL teacher in an inherently weak bargaining position with respect to their employer. Employed on a contract that allows the employer to hire and fire at will, and without any formal right to employment benefits such as paid sick leave or holidays, the casual employee enjoys virtually no security or rights of participation in workplace decision making (ACIRRT, 1999, p. 141). Casual employment also has indirect consequences for the workloads and quality of working life of permanent full-time teachers, many of whom are expected to cover those tasks (such as course administration and curriculum review and development) which casual teachers cannot.

Research and casual academics in higher education has found that a high percentage of participants were uncertain about their continued employment as seasonals in the long term, and few considered likely they would be offered a continuing or tenured position. The study noted that casual academic positions are rarely advertised, staff being appointed by direct approach or word of mouth (Bassett, 1998, p. 10). Some expressed dissatisfaction about the lack of payment for work undertaken, such as marking, and insecurity about their income. The way that casual teachers are employed also raised questions about equal employment opportunity and favouritism in institutions, since informal recruiting methods are by their nature closed to scrutiny and difficult to challenge.

Casual loadings paid to teachers working to a short-term contract may appear to compensate for lack of benefits, such as sick leave, and in the 'intermittence and impermanence' of casual work, but over time, prolonged and extensive reliance on temporary employment has a built-in social cost" (Chockalingham 1994, p. 952). Such social costs may include being unable to access mortgage finance, taking too few holidays and having little or no retirement income to fall back on. In any case, recent ABS data has shown that

casual employees do not always benefit from higher pay rates. In fact, they are more likely to fall within the lower salary ranges than temporary or ongoing employees. For example, 60% of casuals earned less than \$30,000 per annum compared to 29% of temporaries and 25% of ongoing employees (Office of Public Employment, 2000, p. 1). In the TAFE sector, the award rate of pay for casual ESL teachers is actually lower than that of salaried staff, and is compounded by the inability to earn incremental increases.

These findings potentially apply to a range of education settings. The resulting financial insecurity may prove a powerful deterrent to freedom of speech or professional practice at the workplace. While this may suit a hierarchical employer, it does nothing to promote debate and accountability in the profession. This is both a quality issue and a quality of work life issue.

General morale and working conditions may suffer, especially as casual teachers are more likely to be paced in a position of accepting individual contracts and to feel marginalised from their place of employment. Again, studies of casual academics point to some of the pitfalls and dangers:

‘I don’t feel part of the system and sometimes wonder if we are welcome by the full time staff.’

Seasonal tutoring and lecturing are severely underpaid if one considers the many hours of preparation and marking and student consultation’.

‘I am saddened by the lack of political will of departments, universities and full time academics to fight for the working conditions and futures of seasonal academics. It also saddens me to find the speed with which academics are willing to exploit the precarious positions of seasonal academics’.  
(Comments from survey respondents, as cited in Bassett, 1998, p. 10).

Union ionisation levels tend to fall, as casuals are less likely to join unions (Morehead et al., 1997, p. 144). This means that institutional and collective means of addressing grievances for groups of teachers become more difficult, as reduced membership income leads to the resources of relevant unions being over-stretched. Increasingly, unions also lose authority and bargaining power in the workplace, as fewer employees become members. Unions end up providing a voice only to the relatively more privileged, predominately male, permanent staff while sessional staff, who are more likely to be women, are treated as ‘second class citizens’ (Rajogopal & Farr, 1989, p. 3). Moreover, individual bargaining (particularly in the Victorian context, with its minimal safety net) is more likely to promote inferior wages and conditions for teachers agreeing to contracts (Bertone & Doughney, 1998).

Employee turnover may rise, as problems with work life are left unresolved, leading teachers to leave jobs. This is potentially wasteful of expertise and experience from the profession, as teachers who are dissatisfied with their working conditions seek more secure or satisfying employment in other fields. Anecdotally, there is evidence of a large outflow of ESL teachers, formerly employed in a temporary or casual capacity, from ESL education (TAFE,

AMEP) into a range of other fields, such as research, public administration and academia, where pay rates may be higher and contracts somewhat more secure.

Over and above this is the issue of the heavy personal cost to teachers who work under these arrangements. A high and often unrecognised workload, professional isolation, the demands of multiple job holding, attending work even when sick (because of the lack of sick leave) and potential frustration with the dual working conditions operating in a workplace may all take their toll. Peer support and cooperation may also suffer due to possible resentment by casual and temporary staff against the superior industrial conditions enjoyed by others.

User pays systems and competitive tendering interact with casualisation to compound such problems. There is some evidence that increasing precariousness of work (of which casualisation forms a part) leaves workers more vulnerable to workplace bullying, and certainly to more managerial control (Underhill & Fernando, 1998, p. 53).

Individual employment agreements have been touted by some policy makers as promoting freedom of choice for employees and employers, allowing these parties to tailor their employment relationships to suit their needs. In reality, deregulation has resulted in increased stress, work intensification and powerlessness (ACIRRT, 1999, p. 138; Morehead et al., 1997, p. 264). These arrangements based on a reduction of employment protection, have also provided the conditions under which increased casualisation could occur (Underhill & Fernando, 1998, p.43).

Examples of these scenarios –reduced quality of work life, employee turnover, work intensification, individual employment contracts – are found in a variety of ESL settings, such as TAFE, AMES, universities and community-based and private teaching colleges. Ironically, the teachers who are experiencing these stresses are often teaching students from insecure backgrounds, such as retrenched and unemployed workers, professionals striving for Australian recognition, and children and adults from refugee situation. While the two groups, students and teachers, may find commonality in their shared insecurity, it raises questions about how much ESL education can do when it is delivered in such an insecure, competitive and often fragmented manner.

In education, the gender bifurcation of the employment relationship, with males increasingly enjoying more security of tenure and career paths compared to females, has led to a gender bias in the kinds of issues facing casual teachers (Bassett & Marshall, 1998, p. 3). Higher education, in particular, has been observed to have a more distinct core/periphery staffing strategy than other industries, such as retail and hospitality. Higher education appears to have a larger proportion of full-time permanent workers in receipt of distinct employment conditions and job security compared to casual and temporary staff, who enjoy considerably fewer benefits. Men hold the balance of power in these institutions, where they form the core workforce and women predominate in the marginalised, non-core workforce. The employment relationship this takes on a distinctly generalised character, deepening the disadvantage already faced by those on casual

and are severely curtailed, partly because of their concentration amongst casual staff (Bassett, 1998, p. 1).

‘In this climate, realistically, sessional work leads nowhere’

‘I think it is an unwritten policy that sessional won’t get a tenured position. Sessional work seems to be the end of the road.’ (as cited in Bassett, 1998, pp. 8-9)

## Relationships with students

Where casual teachers are employed solely to provide classroom teaching, as is often the case in TAFE, higher education and workplace education, they have little or no opportunity to interact with students individually outside the classroom. This can affect the overall relationship, which students have with teachers, their satisfaction with teaching and the quality of education students receive.

As observed above, students have no recourse to these teachers for remedial education, assistance with family, or vocational and personal issues, as casuals have little or no time to provide out-of-class support or consultations. Breaks in continuity of employment, or high turnover of staff on casual or temporary contracts, may also affect students’ overall satisfaction with their course or institution, as well as staff frustration. As Bassett’s study showed:

‘Students can’t consult us unless we work unpaid overtime.’

‘It is extremely frustrating at times to enable students to get the best of your help when you can only provide this in your own unpaid time.’ (as cited in Bassett, 1998, pp. 9-10)

Of particular concern to students is the way that ESL education articulates with other programs of education, including higher levels of ESL tuition, such as English for professional purposes. Students seeking to use English for occupational entry need to ensure their English studies link up with other, more vocational courses in the same or other institutions. However, a shortage or absence of permanent staff to provide help with articulation pathways might leave students without adequate counselling or advice about their options. This is both a quality issue and a matter of student access and rights. Employers and the community also stand to lose if the best learning pathways are not developed because casual ESL staff has neither the time or the authority to negotiate these pathways on behalf of students. Recognition of prior learning is another areas, which often dovetails with ESL education, but again, where casual teachers are involved, they may not have the resources or authority to offer learning assessments to students. Once again, such tasks are likely to fall on the shoulders of the few permanent teachers who are overloaded with other administration tasks. Some would argue that, without the use of casual teachers, many students would simply not receive a place in education, given large funding cuts and the high costs of employing permanent staff. Education institutions, both public and private, would experience severe financial difficulties if they were not able to utilise such employment strategies. This would affect the viability of some institutions and courses.

Casual employment is also often necessary to relieve permanent staff who are on long-term leave, such as maternity study and long service leave. The costs of hiring continuing staff instead might make the provision of such leave prohibitive. Casual hiring strategies may also underpin the capacity of institutions to tender successfully for ESL programs, given the uncertainty surrounding student numbers until the outcome of such tenders is known. While there may be core group of teachers and administrators, both public and private tendering bodies may not feel able to employ significant numbers of other ESL teachers without some temporary or casual restrictions to enable them to shed labour rapidly when needed.

These are economic arguments that undoubtedly have validity. Many department and school heads have wrestled with the pros and cons of hiring casual versus fixed term and permanent staff, and made compromises they may not have preferred. The causes often lie in funding regimes and competitive pressures outside those managers’ control, and ultimately lie within the responsibility of the state.

One issue which is rarely discussed but which may have a range of intangible effects on service on service provision, quality and working relationships is that of employee commitment. There has been very little research into the attitudes, preferences and characteristics of non-standard employees (Walsh & Deery, 1999, p/10). What research exists shows that temporary employees are significantly more dissatisfied and less committed to their work than employees with more stable working patterns and income. There is a direct relationship between the degree of dissatisfaction and the extent to which working hours are irregular and unsociable and whether casual employees desire another status, such as permanent part-time or full-time work (Walsh & Deery, 1999, p. 10).

These findings are relevant to ESL professionals, especially those who work irregular casual hours, including night times. Where ESL teachers are employed at short notice (for example, at the beginning of a semester), receive variable teaching loads from semester to semester, have nor guarantee of employment and teach night classes, a high level of dissatisfaction is likely. It is certainly possible that they are less satisfied and committed than more permanent ESL teachers. The potential consequences for the quality of teaching and service provision is a matter of concern for students, employers and the community.

## Costs/delivery modes

Casual teaching can provide the scope for institutions to offer more flexible course deliver, round the clock teaching programs, including distance learning and electronic based learning, as well as the opportunity to draw on a larger pool of teachers. In this respect, casual teaching may increase the choices open to students, enhance access and increase the diversity of the teaching population available to the institution. Such arrangement may also cater better to teachers with family responsibilities who may prefer to work on a more casual intermittent and /or part-time basis. By lowering the costs of service provision, the institution maybe able to support a wider range of teaching programs and enrol more students than would otherwise be the case. In this

respect, casualisation may help fuel the increasing participation of students in education of all kinds (Manrington, 1997). For ESL education, this could mean more ESL courses being offered through a variety of student-centred media at lower costs.

On the other hand, casualisation is unlikely to promote course innovation and development. Unless they are full-time and enjoy continuing employment, most casual teachers have no time or, arguably, skills to build up new courses and ways of teaching. Not only are they likely to be more conservative in their curriculum planning and delivery, but less able, and possibly, willing to customise their work to the particular needs of that institution or its students. Teachers who work across more than one institution are particularly susceptible to this danger, offering a 'McDonald's fare of standardised, low quality teaching curricula. The fault lies not with those teachers but with the structural arrangements in which they are forced to work.

## **An overview**

Many of the possibilities and issues sketched here relate specifically to the use of casual ESL teachers, and some are drawn from other areas of education, such as academia. It is very likely that these concerns also apply, to a lesser degree, to other forms of non-standard employment in the ESL field, such as temporary or fixed term employment, part-time employment and the use of contractors or consultants.

Brosnan and Walsh (1998, p. 30) identify a hierarchy of security of employment, with casual jobs being the least secure, temporary jobs being slightly more secure, followed by contractors/consultants, fixed term employees, apprentices and finally, permanent employees, who are the most secure (but may still experience elements of precariousness, such as representational insecurity and employment insecurity).

In ESL education, all these categories (other than apprentices) are utilised. While this paper is not able to offer statistics on the breakdown of such employment by category, broader workforce figures may be indicative. A 1995 survey of 5000 employers found that, in Australia, casuals made up about 10%, temporaries somewhat more than 2 per cent. contractors/consultants 4% and fixed term employees were more than 2% (Brosnan & Walsh, 1999, p. 139) but indicates that nearly one-fifth of employees generally fall within these less secure forms of employment.

As a highly feminised industry experiencing major pressures for cost cutting due to government cutbacks, corporatisation has at least these proportions of non-secure jobs.

In analysing the effects of casualisation, some caution is required because of the distinction between different forms of casual employment and the level of insecurity attached to them. Based on their research into manufacturing, Weller et al. (1999, p. 18) identify six types of casual jobs: probationary, quasi-permanent, restructuring, technical-organisational, labour pool and agency. The use of casual employment in some cases may lead to more secure workers employed for a probationary period as casuals before being offered permanent or fixed term work. However, research in

higher education has shown that such job paths are illusory, with most casual teachers remaining as casuals (Bassett, 1998, p. 9).

When used during a restructuring phase, casual jobs can sometimes be converted to more secure jobs after the restructuring has been completed (Bassett, 1998, pp. 19, 22). Some workers covered by awards and casual loadings also prefer to receive higher hourly rates rather than non-pay, and thus remain as casuals rather than becoming permanent.

Overall, however, there is no question that casual employment is far less secure and more vulnerable than any other category of employment. Enough is known about the characteristics of casual employment to identify a range of problems, such as lack of training, consultation and task variety (ACIRRT, 1999, p. 141) and lower satisfaction and organisation commitment (Walsh & Deery, 1999, p. 10). These problems, when translated to the context of ESL teaching and the general environment of large funding cuts, employment deregulation and organisational uncertainty, indicate the emergence of major professional, industrial, consumer and political issues. What kind of ESL education students receive is closely bound up with the kind of working conditions and opportunities for professional development, peer networks and peer review that teaching professionals enjoy. Since casual teachers receive few or none of these benefits and potentially suffer from lower moral, the quality, relevance and accountability of casual teaching is in question.

This paper has also pointed out that large scale casualisation of ESL has deleterious impacts on permanent teachers as well as on the casual teachers themselves. These impacts are generally felt in the form of higher administrative workloads and reduced time for staff development and research. Given the gendered division of labour in many institutions – men doing the research and high level administration, women undertaking day to day administration that is rarely recognised, such as student consultations and committee work – this process can have long-term adverse consequences for all women ESL teachers, both permanent and casual.

Any trend toward significant casualisation of ESL teaching should be of concern to the major stakeholder – the teacher themselves, educational institutions, students employers, governments and the community generally. It should also be of concern to women's groups and those concerned about gender equity and the kinds of role models projected to young people, since casual teachers, who are among the most underpaid and powerless of employees in institutions, are predominately female.

While there are some professional benefits in employing casual ESL teachers, it is unlikely that such factors are behind the large increases mentioned in this paper. Rather, economic considerations have probably overshadowed the industrial, professional and equity considerations. It is likely that the balance between casual employment and more secure forms of employment has not been properly addressed. This is not surprising. As the paper has argued, the increase in casual employment is a nation-wide trend across all sectors and industries, and has been observed in

many overseas countries. The implications of this trend need to be further debated and researched and it is hoped the issues identified here will be a starting point in the process. Professional association could identify priority needs for their membership in the area of casual and temporary employment. This might begin by identifying sectors of education and those states where the highest of casual ESL employment occurs and opening discussions with state governments, educational institutions and unions about ways to reduce it. A number of state governments are currently reviewing their industrial relations arrangements, with for example, the Victorian Government setting up the Industrial Relations Task Force and the NSW Government, the Industrial Relations advisory Committee. These developments offer opportunities to argue for changes in the status and tenure of temporary or casual workers, as well as restrictions on their use within publically funded employment. In contractual arrangements with providers, governments may be able to stipulate limits to casual employment as a quality assurance mechanism. Discussion could take place within the professional associations about which employment issues require particular targeting and lobbying, such as professional development, course review, leave provisions and the like. Collective action within an institutional framework is essential, given the isolating nature of casual employment and the disempowerment faced by many individuals in this situation.

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> The author is indebted to an anonymous referee for these insights.

<sup>2</sup> This information is provided by an anonymous referee.

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