

**PRECARITY,
PANDEMIC AND
GENDER:
HOW DID CASUAL
ACADEMIC WOMEN
EXPERIENCE
TEACHING AT THE
TIME OF COVID-19?**

Western Sydney University
Vice Chancellor's Gender Equity Fund
Final Report



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Acknowledgement of Country

With respect for Aboriginal culture and protocols, and out of respect that Western Sydney University campuses occupy their traditional lands, the University acknowledges the Bundjalung, Darug, Tharawal (also historically referred to as D'harawal), Gundungurra and Wiradjuri Peoples and thanks them for their support of its work in their lands (Greater Western Sydney) and beyond.

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Recommendations

1. Retain and support women casual academics: the University should consider strategies that retain women from leaving academia, encourage women with opportunities to develop their academic careers (eg. specific funding for casual women), and merit-based opportunities to transition casual academics to permanent positions (part-time and full-time).
2. Address unpaid work: student communication hours should be included in CEAs and paid accordingly. If this cannot be provided, then tutors should not have their staff email or phone number published on Learning Guides or provided to students (unless agreed to by the tutor), and the coordinator must be the point of contact for all student emails, requests for consultations, and enquiries.
3. Provide a clear guide and/or training outlining responsibilities of unit coordinators and tutors to both the unit coordinator/s (UC) and tutor. The tutor should not be put into a position to have to tell the UC when they are being asked to perform unpaid work beyond their role/responsibility. Similarly, materials (lectures, lesson guide/plans) necessary for tutors to teach should not be provided at the last minute.
4. The University and/or UCs to consider ways to improve team teaching and HyFlex relationships. For example, a paid meeting and/or training could be organised before teaching for tutors to get to know each other and undergo team teacher training. The University and/or UCs should provide tutors with clear guidelines about expectations, conduct, encourage collegiality and adopt a zero tolerance to hostile or unfriendly behaviour with strategies to address any issues that may arise.
5. Address student misconduct towards teachers: as a global leader in gender equality, at the University and/or School level, a stand against abuse, sexism, sexual harassment and aggression towards teaching staff, especially women, should be clear to students. For example, one step could be to include information about appropriate student interaction and conduct towards teachers in the Learning Guide.
6. Create a central point containing relevant information for casual staff that includes Western's policies, procedures, entitlements, information, guides, and instructional videos on Zoom/Blackboard (eg. vUWS site specifically for casual academics¹).
7. Entitlements, such as the Technology Allowance, should be made known to all casuals when onboarded and automatically paid to all eligible casuals.

¹ The CI suggested the idea of vUWS as a repository of information relevant to casual academics during Research Week 'New Research in New Contexts', on 27th October, 2021, in the 'Supporting Casuals' breakout room group while brainstorming ideas about centralising content relevant and related to casuals.

Executive Summary

The precariously employed academic staff are the engine of universities and the most valuable resource we have in the teaching space. Therefore, attention to their experiences is vital for quality education. Before COVID-19, research into the higher education sector highlighted the various disadvantages and challenges of being a casual academic. However, more recent research has identified that the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated disadvantage and added new challenges, especially among women casual academics.

This project set out with an aim to focus on women casual academics and their experiences of teaching in the context of COVID-19 at Western Sydney University (Western). There were stories of camaraderie and support, but the project also uncovered very concerning accounts of severe stress and anxiety, harassment, and unpaid work. Though the focus of this report is on the experiences of casual academics who were teaching online in 2020 and the second half of 2021 (due to lockdowns and campus closures), it is important to note that reports of stress and anxiety, harassment, and unpaid work were not isolated to this period. Many expressed that they did not speak out because of the precarity of their employment and powerlessness of being a casual academic.

Currently in Australia there is considerable social, media, industry and political attention regarding gender equity, sexual harassment, and sexism in the workplace. These gendered issues are not isolated to one sector, they are widespread and embedded within socio-cultural spaces, and they negatively impact the lives of many, particularly women and gender diverse individuals. For change, there must be active commitment through action to addressing gender inequity, sexual harassment, and sexism. As the Employer of Choice for Gender Equality for the 17th consecutive year, Western is a proud leader in advocating for change, and their commitment to change can be seen in a myriad of ways, including supporting gender-based research, like this project.

The key findings of this research are:

- Some casuals undertook more work than they were paid or responsible for. The most frequently reported types of unpaid work were responding to student emails and providing student consultation.
- Some casuals were not being provided with guidance on lesson plans beyond the outline of topics in the Learning Guide or provided with lectures with enough time to create robust lesson plans. This caused distress to casual academics who expressed concerns about the quality of teaching. None of these casuals knew how to report/address this issue without feeling that the outcome would negatively impact them, and as a result, nothing gets addressed or changed.
- Team-teaching and HyFlex partnerships are not always harmonious and as a result, have serious impacts on casual teachers and the student learning experience.
- During COVID-19 lockdowns and campus closures most staff did not have a space at home that was conducive to online teaching and learning.

- HDR candidates often had to put their studies at the bottom of their list of priorities during the pandemic, especially those who were parents.
- Women and non-binary academics are casually employed longer than men. For women, it is almost three times higher than men at 9.7 years, compared to 3.3 years for men, and for non-binary participants who did not disclose (DND) their gender identity, the average was 5 years.
- No commuting time was the most frequently, and in some cases, the only cited benefit of online teaching, and internet connectivity issues and teaching to a sea of black screens were cited as the most challenging aspects of online teaching.
- A high number of participants recounted experiences of sexual harassment, abuse, sexism, intimidation, bullying and aggression from students. The focus was during the pandemic, but some accounts were pre-pandemic.
- There were an overwhelming number of casual academics who felt that career development (publications and funding applications) was significantly impacted by COVID-19.
- The lack of information (such as policies, procedures, entitlements) was mentioned as a challenge for casual academics to be able to do their job effectively and/or report issues of misconduct.

Itemised Budget Expenditure

Total funded amount \$ 4,748.80

Date	Activity / Item	Cost (GST incl.)
12/11/2021	Gift cards for interview participants	\$1,063.28
9/12/2021	Transcription of focus groups and interviews	\$2,566.12
Total expenditure:		\$3,629.40

Notes on Expenditure

In the initial application, regarding funding (total \$4,748.80), \$1,000 was budgeted for gift cards, and \$3,748.80 was budgeted for interview transcripts. Due to delays as a result of the COVID-19 lockdowns from June-October 2021, the project amended its method of data collection to include focus groups. There were also 2 more participants for Phase 2 that had been planned initially and as a result the allocation of spending for gift cards and transcripts required updating. In summary, while there were changes in the allocation of funding, there were no changes to the total budget. The update to the allocation of spending was approved by the Gender Equity Fund team on 20/10/2021.

Research Report

Literature Review

Prior to COVID-19, there was already an extensive amount of research into the employment of casual academics in Australia (Coates et al., 2009; Couch et al., 2020; Crimmins, 2017; Crimmins, et al.; 2017; Kantitkar et al., 2020; Kneist, 2018; May et al., 2013a; May et al., 2013b; McCarthy et al., 2017; McComb et al., 2021; National Tertiary Education Union, 2012; Richardson et al., 2021; Ryan et al., 2013; Ryan et al., 2017; Yasukawa & Dados, 2018). The research interest in casually employed academics is due largely to the fact that over the past three decades the Australian higher education sector has become one of the highest users of casual employees (Crimmins et al., 2017; May et al., 2013b; Ryan et al., 2013, p.162). The exact or approximate number of casual academic staff employed in the Australian higher education sector is undisclosed, however most researchers in the field state that 'casual academic staff form the majority of academic teaching workforce' (May et al., 2013b, p.1), with some estimating the figure to be over 50% (Cretchley et al., 2014) and others stating that the figure is 60% or more of the total number of academic staff (Andrews et al., 2016; Crimmins, 2017; May et al., 2013a; McComb et al., 2021). It is important to note that the increase in casual academics working in higher education is not a uniquely Australian phenomenon, when looking at '[...] institutions globally, the majority of teaching is now conducted by casual staff on teaching-only contracts' (McComb et al., 2021, p.95). The research also shows that in Australia, women casual academics are overrepresented, thereby making casual academic employment a gendered issue (Baik et al., 2018; Crimmins, 2017; Kanitkar, 2020; McCarthy et al., 2017; Kneist, 2018; May et al., 2013a; May et al., 2013b; Strachan et al., 2012; Yasukawa & Dados, 2018).

There are several key themes that have emerged from the literature that relate to the circumstances and experiences of casual academic staff in Australian universities:

- The recruitment of casual academic staff predominantly comes from the casual academic informally and personally approaching the subject co-ordinator (May et al., 2013a; Ryan et al., 2013), or the subject co-ordinator informally and personally contacting the casual academic through their networks and/or connections (Coates et al., 2009; Crimmins, 2017). These processes of recruitment are unmonitored (Ryan et al., 2017) as they don't follow the path of recruitment and hiring that would take place for continuing academic/professional staff, and the appointments are often at short notice, either very close to the start of, or early into, the teaching semester/term (Coates et al., 2009; Crimmins, 2017; Kantitkar et al., 2020; Richardson et al., 2021; Ryan et al., 2013). As a result, 'lining up' enough work for the semester/term can be a highly anxiety-riddled experience (Ryan et al., 2013).
- The ad-hoc and informal nature of the recruitment of casual academic staff raises concerns and risks related to inconsistency, inequities (Coates et al., 2009; Ryan et al., 2017), and quality assurance (Andrews et al., 2016; May et al., 2013b; McComb, 2021; Percy et al., 2008; Richardson et al., 2021).
- Opportunities to develop casual academics' 'tacit knowledge and skills are hampered by their exclusion from mainstream departmental life' (Ryan et al.,

2017, p.66) and professional development opportunities (Crimmins et al., 2017; May et al., 2013b).

- A lack of access to training and/or support opens casuals 'up to excessive demands and bullying because of their financial vulnerability' (Coates et al., 2009, p. 50; May et al., 2013b).
- Concerns over unpaid work, especially in relation to student communication (emails) and student consultation (Andrews et al., 2016; Carr et al., 2021; National Tertiary Education Union, 2012; May et al., 2013b; Ryan et al., 2013).

In March 2020 Australian universities were forced to close campuses 'which prompted an unanticipated, sudden shift in education, from on-campus and face-to-face to an off-campus and online mode of teaching and learning' (Smith & Kaya, 2021, p.184). As a result, themes have emerged that impact all women academics (ongoing, fixed-term, casual), including:

- Across a vast array of industries, a higher number of job losses and reduced working hours were reported among women than men because women were more likely to work in 'the hardest-hit industries [...] and occupations' and were 'more likely to be employed in the part-time and casual roles that are the first to go in a downturn' (Wood et al., 2021, p.8). Specific to academia, most casual academics did not qualify for the Government's JobKeeper Payment Scheme 'because casual employees who had been with their employer for less than 12 months were deemed ineligible' (Wood et al., 2021, p.11).
- Women were more likely to be doing most of the domestic labour or 'reproductive work' (McLaren, 2020, p. 2) while managing 'professional, familial and social roles' (Couch et al., 2020, p. 268).
- Single-authored publication output from women decreased, whereas men's research submission to academic journals increased by 50% (Duncanson et al., 2020). For women finding 'the time and space needed for deep thinking required by our profession' meant waking up early, going to bed late, and working on weekends (Couch et al., 2020, p. 270).
- Women were 'less likely to have a dedicated workspace. They work at dining room and kitchen tables, in living rooms and even garages. [...] COVID-19 restrictions are laying bare structural discrimination at the heart of universities across Australia and making it worse' (Duncanson et al., 2020, para 27).

The entrenched structural gender-related disadvantages and privileges that existed pre-pandemic became further cemented (Duncanson et al., 2020). Broad social and political messaging that 'we are in this together' implied that everyone was suffering and sacrificing equally, but this was not the case. Women casual academics were at particular disadvantage compared to ongoing and some fixed-term staff because of the precariousness and powerlessness of their employment.

Methods

Mixed-methods research for this project comprised of two phases of data collection, between 28th June and 10th November, 2021. The Chief Investigator (CI) created a survey (Phase 1) in Qualtrics consisting of 36 multiple choice and open-ended questions². An invitation to the project and link to the Qualtrics survey was sent to all

² See Appendix 1 'Qualtrics Survey Questions'.

School Managers and one faculty in the College. Of the 163 attempts, 141 qualified for the project and 22 were deemed unsuitable (based on responses to the first three screening questions³). Except for the School of Engineering, Design and Built Environment, there were responses from casuals from all Schools and the College. Survey respondents were given the option of participating in an interview (Phase 2) to gain greater insight into their experiences of teaching in the context of COVID-19, and 78 (55%) of survey respondents agreed to participate in an interview (Phase 2).

Fifty-three survey respondents⁴ were invited then to participate in a focus group and interview (Phase 2)⁵. The CI of this project conducted two focus groups⁶ and 16 one-on-one interviews (Phase 2) with 22 casual academic staff that lasted between approximately 40– 90 minutes⁷. In qualitative research, many texts suggest a range of anywhere from 5 to 50 participants as adequate (Dworkin, 2012). Given the breadth of experiences that casual academics bring with them, a sample size of 19 women and 3 men is sufficient to provide diverse stories, and a wide range of insights into the experiences of teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, with a particular focus on how these experiences are gendered. The focus group and interview participants were asked semi-structured questions related to online teaching, sexism, parental responsibilities and the benefits and challenges experienced during this period. Participant identities have been kept confidential. Focus groups were conducted online via Zoom and the audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and thematically coded in NVivo12. Initially, the project had planned to conduct interviews with 20 women, however in the opened ended survey questions (Phase 1) six men had made interesting comments related to having witnessed sexism and/or technology-related challenges. The CI felt that their perspectives warranted inclusion in Phase 2⁸, 3 of whom agreed to participate in the follow-up focus group or interview (Phase 2).

In terms of confidence in the findings of this project, the survey (Phase 1) had 141 responses⁹. As previously stated, the number of casual academic staff at Western is undisclosed, however according to the 2020 Annual Report Volume 1 (2020), the number of full time equivalent Academic (Levels A-E) excluding casuals was 996.2¹⁰. Previously cited research indicates that more than 60% of academic staff employees are casual (Andrews et al., 2016; Crimmins, 2017; McComb et al., 2021). If we assume that 60% of academic staff employees at Western are casual, then the number of casual staff is 1,494.3 ($x = 996.2 \times \frac{40}{100} \times 60$). At a confidence level of 95% with an 8% margin of error, 137 is the ideal sample size of the total Western staff population

³ The first three questions in the survey ensured that participants qualified for study: that they were casually employed academic staff who taught at Western in 2020.

⁴ Potential participants were selected based on their survey answers, including parents, carers, HDRs, years of employment, and their experiences of sexism and online teaching and learning.

⁵ See Appendix 2 'Interview Prompts'.

⁶ As a result of delays due to the Greater Sydney COVID-19 lockdown from 26/06/2021-11/10/2021 focus groups were added to ensure that there was enough time for Phase 2 data collection. An ethics amendment to include focus groups was approved on 27/09/2021.

⁷ Participants were advised that they would not need to contribute more than 60 minutes of their time, however several participants were happy to keep talking about their experiences.

⁸ An ethics amendment to include men in Phase 2 was approved on 27/09/2021.

⁹ This figure excludes the 22 who attempted the survey but did not qualify for the project.

¹⁰ Data was extracted on 26 March 2021 (WSU, 2021, p. 37). The data does not include permanent part-time employed academic staff.

to ensure we have the correct amount of statistical power available to run any comparisons¹¹. Between 27 July – 7 August 2020 the MyVoice Survey had 2,335 responses from 1,802 ongoing, 391 limited-term and 142 casual academic staff¹². Therefore, based on the number of casual academic staff who responded, the data in this project is comparable to the 2020 MyVoice Survey.

Findings

The data from this project provides a wealth of new and important information from the perspectives of casual academic women who were teaching in the context of COVID-19 in 2020 and 2021¹³. The following section identifies the key themes that emerged in the survey (Phase 1) and the focus group and interviews (Phase 2). Greater discussion and analysis of the project data will be published in peer-reviewed academic journals and presented at seminars and conferences.

Participant profile

The largest gender group to respond to Phase 1 were women (73%, see Figure 1), this was also the case in Phase 2 (86%) because women participants were selected to address the project's aim of better understanding how precarity and the pandemic impacted women casual academics. The highest educational qualifications varied among Phase 1 participants, with 31% PhD/EdDs, 39% MAs (coursework/research), 16% with Honours and 14% who chose 'other'. Of these participants, 35.7% were Higher Degree Research (HDR) candidates (eg. Honours, Master, Doctorate) in 2020.

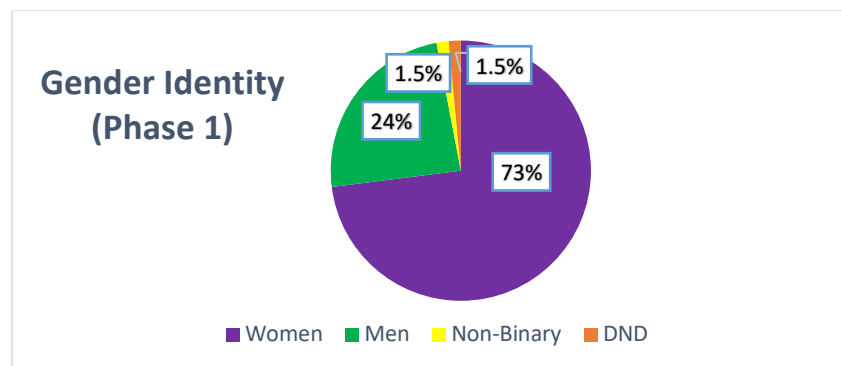


Figure 1: Survey respondents' declared gender identity¹⁴.

¹¹ Using the Qualtrics sample size calculator.

¹² Access to filtered MyVoice data has been discussed with SAGE officer and MyVoice team at the time of the GEF application submission (October, 2020).

¹³ In June 2021, when data collection began, Greater Sydney experienced an outbreak of the Delta variant which resulted in the longest and most restrictive lockdown experienced in Greater Sydney thus far. As a result, the University and College closed campuses again, and teaching and learning moved online. Therefore, the experiences of participants in the interviews and focus groups are from 2020 and 2021.

¹⁴ Note: 'DND', did not respond, and 'Other' was an option that was not selected.

HDRs

When HDRs were asked (Phase 2) about how they balanced their studies with casual academic work and other commitments (such as paying bills, parenting) only one HDR found that COVID-19 was beneficial to their degree.

Participant 10: COVID was good for me because I got no work at the end of last year. After the first semester, I got no work so that is a bad thing, obviously. We're seriously broke but I got all the time to do my PhD so that was fabulous and I really could concentrate on it and get a lot done.

However, other HDRs reported that productivity was significantly impacted as a result of the pandemic:

Participant 4: [...] so I'm still currently a PhD candidate, and so obviously the paid work had to come first, family had to come first, and it was the PhD work that got pushed to the backburner. I think I got virtually nothing done for probably those three months where it was sort of that overlap. What was particularly frustrating about that too, was that there wasn't, at that time, recognition really from the university that having kids home at school was a valid impact on your PhD candidature. So, yeah, that was the real challenge for me, I think.

Participant 20: [...] a leave of absence means no scholarship, so you need to be able to afford it financially [...] last year I didn't really think of my PhD really, I just thought of paying the rent, right? [...] So, that's how we scraped by. But that was basically all of it. No holidays, no nothing. No time off really. So, I think I manage to somehow, but also obviously mentally suffering. But I mean, I had the choice. Do I try to get as much work done - paid work as possible to be able to [...] keep on trying to do my PhD, or do I go home to XXXX with no prospects? It's not really a choice, is it?

Workspaces

The issue of space to facilitate teaching online was raised by most Phase 2 participants, with many having to work in high-traffic areas of the home (dining table, couch) or in bedrooms.

Participant 17: I teach everything from this place which is my bed. [...] So I would teach sometimes for seven, eight hours literally sitting in the same [spot]. Then just pull the cover back, then sit/lay back in the same place I've been for eight hours that day.

Participant 19: It was extremely difficult. I had two young adults in the house and a dog [...] It wasn't easy. I was doing it at the dining room table then.

Participant 11: This is my dining room table. We do have an office in the garage that my husband tends to use. [...] It is a bit of a pain, because I don't - yeah, I don't have a space that I can - I've got to pack this up so that we can have dinner, I've got to get out of his [my son's] room because he's coming home.

Participant 1: I work in my bedroom, yeah. [...] I've never had an office or a study because I've always had too many children.

Participant 2: Well, my partner [...] is taken up that office space. [...] I've ended up in a different location in a house, where it gets used for lots of things.

Participant 14: I was working in the lounge room. That's also the space I was writing my PhD which was not great. [...] Yeah, it was a nightmare. [...] it's not ideal working in a lounge room.

Participant 5: [...] when we went to the online delivery during COVID, the first lockdown, had a huge impact on me, because there was no space in firstly my house, for me to use except for the kitchen table. We didn't have enough devices.

When participants did have a dedicated space or office this still posed some problems.

Participant 6: my husband works from home as well, we'd just set things up so that I'm in an office [...] my husband's desk [is] over that side, this is my side, that he had to crawl under to [leave the room].

Participant 3: We have a very tiny office space. I can pretty much touch both walls. My partner and I both are teaching. [...] We have to share this space. Luckily, we haven't had teaching scheduled at the same time. I don't know how that happened.

Parents and Carers

Among Phase 1 respondents, 62% were a parent to a child/children under 18 years old and/or carers in 2020. Of this group, 69.5% were parents to a child or children under 18 years old, and 30.5% were carers (see Figure 2). There were 10 respondents who were both a parent and a carer in 2020.

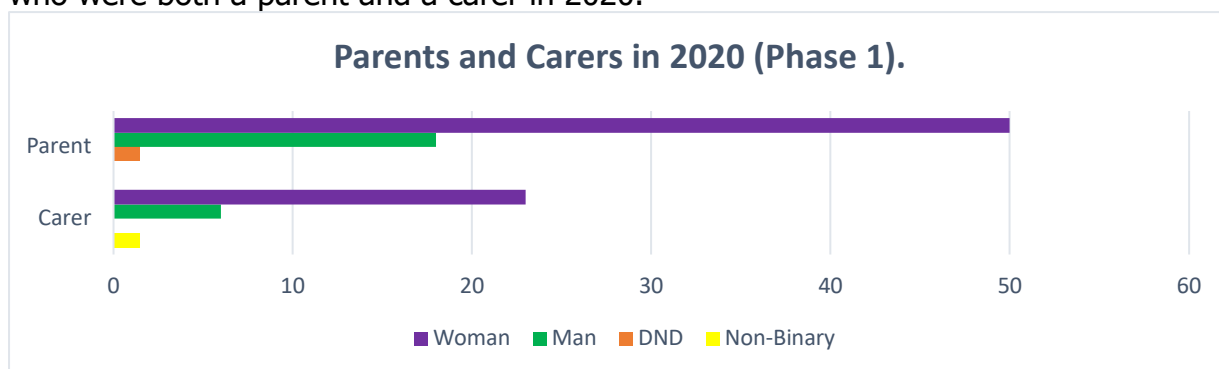


Figure 2: Survey respondents who were parents and carers in 2020.

85% of parents agreed that COVID-19 made balancing parenting responsibilities and work more challenging and/or difficult in 2020. When asked who assumed the most amount of responsibility parenting in 2020, 75% of women and 12.5% of men identified as the parent with most responsibility supervising their child/children. 31% of men were the only gender to state that their partner had the most responsibility caring for their child/children¹⁵ (see Figure 3).

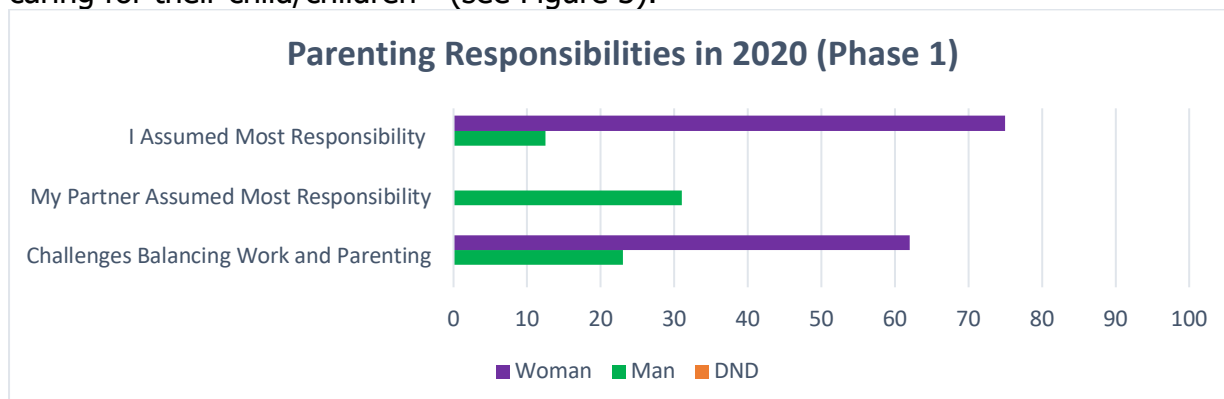


Figure 3: Parental responsibility and challenges to balancing work and parenting in 2020.

¹⁵ Note that the sexuality identity and/or sex of partners was not a question asked in this survey.

Among the Phase 2 participants, 50% had a child/children under 18 years old in 2020. Participant mothers revealed the pressures of balancing teaching, home-school, and gender and gender role expectations.

Participant 2: I'm lucky that my daughter is 17 [...] I haven't got a young child, and I think it would've been much more difficult if I had a younger child. But still, having said that, there's still been a certain amount of support. I'm the person at home who sorts out IT issues and we don't have the best broadband.

Participant 3: My other son has learning difficulties and is in primary school and really needed someone to be with him for all of the online learning all of the time. He could not manage that on his own.

Participant 1: Well, my youngest is 16-and-a-half, so he's in Year 10. Motivating him was near impossible. [...] So, when he's at home, getting him even up, he would - most half the day is done in bed. They [school] would ring me when I had a class on. I'd say, I can't talk. Talk to his father - my husband. I lost my cool completely. [...] I just said to him when he's saying, well, he's got a religion assignment that he hasn't put in. I lost it. I said, are you joking with me? He's in Year 10, I'm teaching at the moment, I've got students in the [breakout room] and I said, I'm worried about a religious assignment? I said, I'm worried about mental health. So, I found the stress on me - in the end, I had to hang up, because I was actually going to say things that probably weren't [unclear]. But it had got me to that point because every morning I'd start at eight o'clock trying to get him out of bed. Impossible. Then I'd get the Google thing saying he didn't come to his first class, can you respond? The last time - which was a Monday - when they said, can you give a reason? You know what I wrote? Your guess is as good as mine. I'd had enough. I actually said to them, don't ring me anymore. Don't ring me. Now I don't think I would've had ever got to that point if I wasn't teaching at home and having someone next door in bed. My mental health was not good on those days.

Online Teaching and Learning

Phase 2 participants reported that not having to travel to campus was the main benefit of teaching online. The most challenging aspect reported was teaching to black screens, even though they agreed that forcing students to turn their cameras on is an equity, bandwidth and safety issue that shouldn't be forced.

Participant 3: I couldn't see if the students [inaudible]. I couldn't tell if they understood what we were talking about. I couldn't tell if it was challenging to them in a way that, when I'm in a classroom, I could see the expression, I could see what was happening. I could respond to that. Sometimes students have a question that they can't articulate, but you can see on their faces that something's happening, that they need help. Then you can stop and you can do that. But you can't do that online.

Participant 8: Some students work better than others. I would definitely say the lack of interaction in the classroom was difficult for them. Like how can you engage if it's just basically the teacher talking into an abyss and nothing else. I did have some students saying that. [...] I did get students saying to me there are people in breakout rooms who aren't speaking. [...] Sometimes you would just go around to the rooms and there would literally be no-one there and you'd be like hello, anyone there? No, no-one is there. That's again another difficult thing when it comes to Zoom [...]

Student Conduct

A worrying theme that emerged from the data was reports of rudeness, aggression, sexism and sexual harassment from some students. Importantly, women were the

only participants to report first-hand experiences of rudeness, aggression, sexism and sexual harassment.

Participant 6: I didn't know how to use Zoom well enough. But students can be extremely rude, and like I say, I'd – they'd had one semester of this, so they're assuming that every tutor that steps in, is an expert on Zoom. I was running practice Zooms with my kids in each of their bedrooms to try and learn how to share the screen and all of this.

Participant 19: But we got a couple of Zoom bombers [...] in the first couple of weeks. [...] They'd come in and just be disruptive. So, just ask really obnoxious basic questions. I had one guy come in and go, oh Miss I really like your earrings, oh Miss what are you doing this weekend and it took me a minute to realise what was going on. I told him to stop and continued with the class and he started in again, saying that he really liked older women [...] It would never happen on campus. Why would someone bother going out to [campus] to tell an aging [...] tutor that he likes her earrings right, that's not a thing.

Participant 6: I started having – waking up during the night having, I suppose flashbacks of this one particular [student]. He waited until the very end of a class, and [...] point out everything that I was saying was wrong. I've never felt so vulnerable in my home.

Participant 21: [...] Oh yeah, you could definitely tell that they were like, oh, testing your boundaries because of your age, because the person I took over from, she's 25, so I guess she's on the same level as them. You certainly – you get that sort of, how far can we push her sort of thing, definitely.

Facilitator: Do you think that if you were a man who was in their 50s, that they would have done that to you?

Participant 21: No.

Participant 15: A student thought I had penalised her assessment, she was that angry she wrote to my supervisor about it and cc'd a lawyer. It was a deliberate attempt to intimidate me, and it worked.

Participant 22: I had a student complain to the convenor. She complained because my hair was not done and I wasn't dressed in professional clothes and she could hear my kids fighting in the background [...] So, I found you do - there was an absolute expectation that you had to be the top of your game skill on parenting, on housework, on work, as well. [...] they would never dare do that within a classroom; absolutely not, they are only doing it online, because they think they have some sense of entitlement and freedom that I am comfortable saying exactly what I think, whether it's true or not. There is an increased amount of aggression by students and also a higher demand for - like when they get marks back; they seem to be challenging their marks a lot more than they used to. [...] I think I - definitely, yes; absolutely, the students are a lot more aggressive when they're on screen, because most of them won't turn their camera on.

Participant 9: On Zoom I would get some male students making sexualised comments about how I looked. I would have to shut it down and say to them that you're being really inappropriate. [...] I raised this at a meeting but [...] nothing... [...]

Participant 9: One guy [...] was making really gross comments about me and my co-worker, who is also gay, [...] and she still hasn't told me what was said because apparently it was really horrifying. [...] That was actually handled really well [...] he was kicked out [...] and immediately blocked from vUWS.

Participant 9: One student would put a profile picture of some kind of German warcraft and it was weird. [...] I think in future I would say to students that if they put a picture up that it needs to be of themselves.

Career Development

Although 32% of respondents did not choose to develop their career in 2020, 45% believed that COVID-19 impacted their ability to work on career-advancing activities, such as publishing and applying for funding. The survey also revealed that in 2018-2019 women, men and non-binary casual academics¹⁶ were publishing and applying for internal funding and scholarships more than in 2020-2021.

The average age of Phase 1 participants was 44.7 years for women, 43.5 years for non-binary and 46.2 years for men¹⁷. On average, women and non-binary academics had been working as casuals at Western longer than men. For women, it is almost three times higher than men at 9.7 years, compared to 3.3 years for men, and for non-binary participants who did not disclose (DND) their gender identity, the average was 5 years. At the time of completing this survey, five casual academic women who were working in 2020 had since left the institution (see Figure 4). Most casuals wanted their future employment at Western to be permanent (full/part-time).

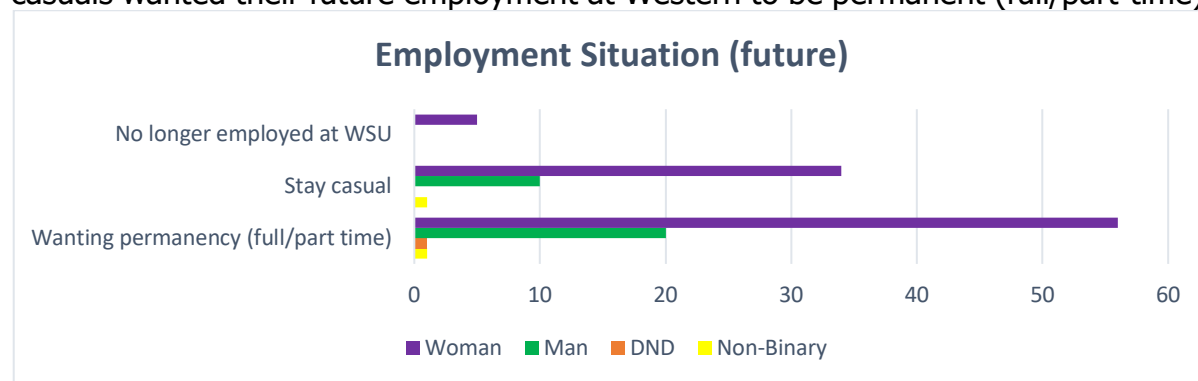


Figure 4: Casual Aspirations for future employment at Western.

Policies, Procedures and Entitlements

When participants shared their experiences of harassment, bullying, their coordinators, being seriously ill or requiring urgent time off work, or not knowing about their entitlements it became clear that there is a lack of awareness and consistent messaging.

Interviewer: Do you know how [...] to report these sorts of things [sexism, abuse, harassment]?

Participant 14: Yes, I don't know the institutional procedures at all for that sort of stuff.

Participant 21: She was admitted to hospital and [...] I said, look, I can't make it [...] I'll have to get somebody else to cover for me. [...] XXXX was like, well, yeah, what do you want me to do about it? Well, aren't you the unit coordinator? [...] you'll have to phone such-and-such a body and get them to cover for you.

Participant 3: I think last year, it was suddenly, everything's got to be online. So, training for all that is really difficult. There was an assumption that we would just figure it out, yeah? [...] We're just thrown in. Okay, you're going to be teaching. It's all going to be online. You've got Zoom, here's your account, go to it. There was no training, there was no conversation about - not even a little fact sheet of like, these are really cool things you can do. This is how it could work.

¹⁶ DND participants did not publish or apply for funding/scholarships in 2018-2019 or 2020-2021.

¹⁷ For individuals who did not disclose their age, the average age was 46.5 years.

Similarly, most participants were not aware of Western's Technology Allowance in the 2017 Enterprise Agreement (Western Sydney University, 2017), and the few who were aware of it said that they had to request payment from their School Manager.

Participant 1: I only knew about it because another student – another PhD candidate who also was doing teaching, told me about it. [...] but yeah, the fact that it's not even communicated [...]

Participant 2: Well, exactly XXXX, it's not communicated very effectively and it's something you've got to go and hunt down. I mean, it's a real – it's a jungle, that's how I would describe it. You may or may not get it, depending on what information you have [received].

Interviewer: [...] is there anything that you could think of that the university could've done to support you?

Participant 4: [Technology Allowance] Actually, giving it to everyone rather than [...] having to apply.

Unit Coordinators

Some relationships between casual and coordinator were friendly and respectful.

Participant 19: Yeah, so the PhD did get neglected. It kind of went into hibernation and I will say this – the team that I was working with [...] were fantastic. Like, it was an all-woman team, they were incredibly supportive, everybody shared their knowledge of Zoom and how online works [...] Looking back, I don't think I've ever worked with such a collegial you know, emergency response sort of – all in this together but they actually meant it.

But there were other accounts from participants who were waiting until the last minute to receive lectures or guidelines for lessons in 2020 and 2021. The participants expressed no problem devising their own lesson plans, but some often had little to nothing other than the Learning Guide to direct them.

Participant 14: I did have [...] notes and [their] PowerPoint, so I did [have] stuff to go off. Yeah, so I wasn't starting from scratch, but it still required a lot of work to make it your own content.

In these cases, the risk of content inconsistencies across tutorials was high.

Participant 20: But we weren't given any communication instruction either. So, there was no consistency. I have no idea what the other tutors did.

As a result of the rapid shift online, some coordinators relied on their tech savvy casual academics which meant that casuals were engaged in unpaid work.

Participant 14: [...] the pivot to online learning was so labour intensive, I had to run a discussion board, and a lot of that was unpaid, because it just was so much extra work...

Participant 19: So there was actually three generations. There was this – there was the boomer professor person, [...] there was me and [...] these millennial tutors, and unsurprisingly they were as precariously employed as I was, but they were also carrying more of that load of the digital uplift, that had to be done. All women.

Participant 15: I was asked by my unit coordinator to deal with the vUWS site [...] all unpaid.

Participant 9: They need to pay people to adapt it to online teaching [HyFlex] because you can't do it as a casual staff, I don't have the time.

Some of the reported unpaid work that participants engaged with appeared to come from their unit coordinator, who was either exploiting their casual academic/s, or there was a misunderstanding about what the roles and responsibilities of the unit coordinator and tutor are.

Participant 15: When students ask you to go over their assessment and give more feedback or remark their work, it's all unpaid and it really should be the unit coordinator that's handling those. The university policy is to apply for a review of grade, but because some teachers remark [...] so students think it's normal and will ask you to remark their work.

Participant 14: XXXX does ask for [...] really specialised feedback for each student and [UC] would go through each paper and check it all. Really robust lesson plans. The expectation that I might also look at student's essays before they submit and have a chat to them. So, I was doing lots of that. Even just pastoral support. So many of my students just want – I guess they were stuck at home and wanted someone to talk to and so there's was an expectation that I might just have a casual 10-minute conversation with them for a check-in. I think all of that is really good practice if you're on a permanent salary and well compensated. But I wasn't, so it was a lot of work.

Facilitator: You were doing Zoom, one-on-one sessions, in addition to the tutorials to support students who wanted a bit more guidance?

Participant: [...] It was on my mobile phone. I would call them.

Participant 15: I was employed as a tutor in a unit I had taught many times before and I quickly realised that the coordinator had never taught the unit before, had never coordinated and did not know how to use vUWS [...] I was brought on to train and upskill them.

Interviewer: Could you discuss this with anyone?

Participant 15: I wouldn't know who to discuss it with. They were obviously given this position by someone senior. So, I could either be a difficult person, not a team player and refuse to help and watch the unit fall apart and students suffer as a result, or do the coordinator's job, unpaid, so that the students wouldn't complain, and they could get a good experience from the unit and from us. I was really upset about the whole experience.

When asked why casuals did not ask to be remunerated for unpaid work or not complete unpaid work, responses were similar to those identified in a 2019 Western GEF report (Kantitkar et al., 2020, p.8), that they did not complain out of 'fear of appearing to be troublemakers and disrupting collegiality'.

Team Teaching and HyFlex

Participants who had experience with team teaching online or HyFlex emphasised the importance of good relationships between tutors, however this was not always recognised or not possible (e.g. due to last minute hiring). None of the men who had engaged in team-teaching or HyFlex reported problems working with their co-tutor.

Participant 13: Then there was a disagreement between them over something [...] within the first couple of weeks and then things got increasingly prickly [...] to the point where one or the other teacher may refuse to speak on a particular topic, or while the other teacher was teaching, or so other teacher was talking. So, they weren't interacting with each other at all. They were just giving each other the cold shoulder. [...] I actually heard this from the students who were in that class.

Participant 10: Both times with these male teachers. They would come in and say something about something else. Down this path or another example. [...] Well, let you, it took me [...] a number of weeks to get over it - feeling like that. The maninterrupting thing [...] and the chaos that ensued was hideous.

Participant 20: The way I think of the way team teaching works, it reminds me so much of students having to do group assessments online, and not really knowing each other, and then they email you and say, this person's not responding, this person's not talking to me.

Participant 20: it turned out me and my co-tutor couldn't actually work together. I don't think she listened to a word I was saying. [...] I realised that there's no guideline for co-teaching. I mean not as far as I'm aware. I didn't know what to expect. I didn't know what I could ask of this person, and you have to sort it out all by yourself.

Participant 9: I was team teaching in Hyflex and the person I was working with did not know how to use Zoom. [...] You need to put money and people aside for that [Hyflex prep], otherwise you're scrambling each week.

Conclusions

Research and government reports into the impacts and effects of COVID-19 have demonstrated that the pandemic has exacerbated existing gender inequities across workplaces and households. These findings were replicated in this project's investigation into the experiences of women casual academics who were teaching online during the pandemic. At Western, women casual academics who were also mothers, carers and/or higher degree research candidates revealed how much more challenging their responsibilities became as a result of COVID-19. For HDRs, especially those who were carers and/or parents, this meant putting their studies at the bottom of their list of priorities. Also, an overwhelming number of women casual academics felt that their career development (publications and funding applications) was significantly impacted by COVID-19. A recommendation from this project is that strategies to retain and support women casual academics be considered, such as greater/equitable opportunities to develop their academic careers (eg. specific casual academic funding), and merit-based opportunities to transition casual academics to permanent positions (part-time and full-time) (Recommendation 1).

The survey and interview data revealed that some casual academics were exploited by unit coordinators to undertake more work than they were paid or responsible for. The most frequently reported type of unpaid work from participants was having to respond to student emails and provide student consultation outside their paid/allocated teaching hours. To address this issue, the recommendation is that student communication hours be included in CEAs and paid accordingly. If this cannot be provided, then the tutor's staff email address should not be published on the Learning Guide and their phone number should not be provided to students. The coordinator must be the point of contact for all student emails, requests for consultations, and enquiries (Recommendation 2). Additionally, it was unclear what the responsibilities of the unit coordinator and tutor were in terms of lesson planning. Some casual academics were not being provided with the necessary materials to teach effectively. The most frequently cited issues were a lack of lesson plans or any material other than the weekly topic in the Learning Guide and recorded lectures that were provided at the last minute, leaving little time to prepare for lessons. This caused distress to casual academics who were dedicated to providing quality teaching and facilitating effective learning experiences for students. Therefore, the recommendation

is that Western provides a clear guide and/or training outlining the responsibilities of unit coordinators and tutors to both the unit coordinator/s and tutor (Recommendation 3). Given the precariousness and powerlessness that casual academics feel, they should not be put into a position to be asked to perform unpaid work beyond their role/responsibility/paid hours.

Participants who had engaged in team-teaching and/or HyFlex reported tutor-tutor problems, first-hand experiences of issues were reported only by women, men participants either had not experienced any problems or had heard of problems from their women colleagues. There was a strong emphasis on the importance of good tutor-tutor relationships to providing quality education and contributing to positive student learning experiences. It is recommended that the University and/or unit coordinators consider strategies to improve team teaching and HyFlex relationships. For example, a paid meeting and/or training could be organised before teaching for tutors to get to know each other and undergo team-teacher training. The University and/or unit coordinators should provide tutors with clear guidelines about expectations, conduct, encourage collegiality and adopt a zero tolerance for hostile or unfriendly behaviour with strategies to address any issues that may arise (Recommendation 4).

Women were the only participants to report first-hand experiences of sexual harassment, abuse, sexism, intimidation, bullying and aggression from students. When asked, none of the men had experienced student misconduct personally, but some did recount having been a witness to it. A recommendation is that at the University and/or School level, a stand against abuse, sexism, sexual harassment and aggression towards teaching staff, especially women, should be clear to students. For example, one step could be to include information about appropriate student interaction and conduct towards teachers in the Learning Guide (Recommendation 5).

A lack of information (such as policies, procedures, entitlements) was mentioned as a challenge for casual academics to be able to do their job effectively. A recommendation is that a central point of information is created online (such as vUWS) that contains information on Western's policies, procedures, entitlements, information, guides, and instructional videos on Zoom/Blackboard (eg. vUWS site specifically for casual academics¹⁸). It could also contain information as a result of this project (Recommendation 6), such as:

- guide and/or training outlining the responsibilities of unit coordinators and tutors to both the unit coordinator/s (UC) and tutor,
- guidelines on team-teaching and HyFlex about expectations, conduct, encourage collegiality and adopt a zero tolerance to hostile or unfriendly behaviour with strategies to address any issues that may arise, and
- information about appropriate student conduct towards tutors and how tutors could report any abuse, sexism, sexual harassment and aggression.

Finally, casual academic employee entitlements, such as the Technology Allowance, should be made known to all casuals when onboarded and automatically paid to all eligible casuals (Recommendation 7).

¹⁸ The CI suggested the idea of vUWS as a repository of information relevant to casual academics during Research Week 'New Research in New Contexts', on 27th October, 2021, in the 'Supporting Casuals' breakout room group while brainstorming ideas about centralising content relevant and related to casuals.

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Appendix

Appendix 1: Survey Questions

Screening questions (3):

1. Before we begin, we want to make sure you qualify for our study. To proceed please confirm the following three questions: Last year, in 2020, were you employed by Western Sydney University?
2. Last year, in 2020, were you employed by WSU as a casual employee (sessional staff)?
3. Last year, in 2020, were you employed in a teaching role (eg. tutor, facilitator, lecturer, unit coordinator)?
4. What is your name? (If you wish to remain anonymous you can choose to skip this question).
5. How old were you last year (2020)?
6. What is your gender identity? - Selected Choice
7. In 2020 were you enrolled as a higher degree student (eg. Master, PhD etc)?
8. As of December 2020 what was your highest educational attainment?
9. What was your relationship status in 2020?
10. Were you a parent to a child/children under 18 years old in all or some of 2020?
11. In 2020 what category did your child/children fit into: - Selected Choice
12. Did you home school your child/children at any point during 2020?
13. Were there additional difficulties/challenges due to COVID-19 in balancing your work and parent responsibilities in 2020?
14. Who had the most amount of responsibility for supervising the child/ren in 2020? - Selected Choice
15. Who had the most amount of responsibility for supervising the child/ren in 2020?
16. Were you a carer for someone/others (excluding your child/children) for all/some of 2020?
17. Were there additional difficulties/challenges in balancing your work and carer responsibilities as a result of COVID19?
18. Did you commence writing a peer-reviewed journal article/s (single or co-authored) in 2020 that was published in 2020 or 2021?
19. Did you commence writing a peer-reviewed journal article/s (single or co-authored) in 2018 or 2019 that was published in 2018 or 2019?
20. Did you apply for an internal scholarship or funding in 2020 and/or 2021?
21. Did you apply for internal scholarship or funding in 2018 and/or 2019?
22. Do you think that COVID-19 impacted your ability to work on progressing/developing your academic career in 2020 (such as applying for funding, publishing in peer reviewed journals, presenting conference papers)?
23. Are you happy/satisfied being a casual employee at WSU?
24. What would you like your WSU employment situation in the future to be? - Selected Choice
25. By the end of 2020, how many years had you been employed as a casual academic at WSU?

26. In 2020, what School/s at WSU employed you as a casual teacher/tutor [select all that apply]:
27. Approximately how many hours were you teaching in 2020? (Feel free to specify hours worked each term/semester in 2020 in your response)
28. Did you engage in any unpaid work as a casual at WSU in 2020 (eg. marking, training, communication, meetings)?
29. What kind of additional tasks did you complete in 2020 that were unpaid?
30. Did you also engage in unpaid work in previous years?
31. Did you engage in more unpaid work in 2020 than previous years?
32. Were you also employed outside WSU in 2020?
33. Thinking broadly, and not just in 2020, do you think or feel that your sex and/or gender has any influence on the following at WSU [select all that apply]: - Selected Choice
34. Thinking broadly, and not just in 2020, do you think or feel that your sex and/or gender has any influence on the following at WSU [select all that apply]:
35. Have you ever experienced sexism from your supervisor/coordinator/manager at WSU?
36. Is there anything you want to add to your responses in this survey, or something that was not asked that may be of relevance to this project?

Phase 2 (Interview) opt-in questions:

37. The next phase (Phase 2) of this project involves one-on-one interviews (max 60min). Would you like to be considered for Phase 2 of this project? (If 'yes', your email address will be requested in the next question).
38. What is your email address? (You can choose to skip this question if you don't want to participate in Phase 2 of the project).

Appendix 2: Interview Prompts

I'm interested in your experiences of teaching in last year in 2020 at WSU when COVID-19 closed university campuses and early into semester 1, all classes quickly moved online.

Can you reflect on some of the positive aspects to teaching online?

Did you find teaching online beneficial to you?

What were some of the challenges of teaching online that you experienced?

The University was frequently emailing staff and students during that time with information.

Were there things that you personally found that the University offered that supported you in 2020?

Do you think there could have been things that the University could have done, or existing things that could have been improved on to better support you?

I want to understand how you balanced your work and personal responsibilities last year, when COVID-19 forced teaching online.

What personal responsibilities did you have to balance at that time (eg. home-schooling, carer's responsibilities)?

Did any personal responsibilities contribute to pressure, anxiety or distress?

Now, thinking about your professional plans or ideas for future employment...

What kind of career or employment would you like for the future? (Do you want to remain in casual academic roles?)

What kinds of advancements to your career goal did you make last year? (Was it more/less than 2019/pre COVID-19?)