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## What are the Facilitators and Barriers Experienced by Sessional Academics during the Process of Onboarding: A Scoping Review --Manuscript Draft--

<b>Full Title:</b>	What are the Facilitators and Barriers Experienced by Sessional Academics during the Process of Onboarding: A Scoping Review
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<b>Keywords:</b>	Sessional Academics, Adjunct, Onboarding, Facilitators, Barriers, Higher Education Policy.
<b>Abstract:</b>	<p>Sessional academics undertake a large proportion of teaching and marking and are essential for current university structures and student success. Employment of sessional academics has primarily been driven by cost savings and flexibility in hiring practices for employers, in addition to managing academic staffing shortages. Despite the increase in sessional employment, little is known about the experience of sessional academics regarding support and processes for integrating them into university structures. This scoping review focused on identifying the facilitators and barriers experienced by sessional academics during the onboarding process. Two university departments that can contribute to improving the onboarding process are identified: human resources and the individual academic unit. Six subthemes were identified during the literature analysis to support onboarding: contractual, orientation, resources, communication, mentoring and belonging. These themes have been explored and discussed and key recommendations have been made for policymakers and managers, with further research proposed.</p>
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<b>Response to Reviewers:</b>	<p>Dear Peter Bentley,</p> <p>I am grateful for your thoughtful feedback and insightful comments, this has improved the accuracy of the content and quality of the manuscript. Your constructive criticism and suggestions have not only helped me improve this manuscript but also enriched my understanding of the sessional academic workforce, in which I am very passionate about. I have attached a separate document titled "Response to reviewer" that outlines the amendments made.</p> <p>Kind regards,</p> <p>Heidi Brouwer</p>

1 **What are the Facilitators and Barriers Experienced by Sessional**  
2 **Academics during the Process of Onboarding: A Scoping Review**

3

4 **Abstract**

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6 essential for current university structures and student success. Employment of  
7 sessional academics has primarily been driven by cost savings and flexibility in hiring  
8 practices for employers, in addition to managing academic staffing shortages. Despite  
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12 experienced by sessional academics during the onboarding process. Two university  
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16 resources, communication, mentoring and belonging. These themes have been  
17 explored and discussed and key recommendations have been made for policymakers  
18 and managers, with further research proposed.

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22 **Keywords:** Sessional Academics, Adjunct, Onboarding, Facilitators, Barriers, Higher  
23 Education Policy.

24

## 25 **Introduction**

26 Sessional academics are increasingly more recognised for their significant contribution to the  
27 quality of teaching and learning that positively enhances student experience and graduate  
28 outcomes (Hamilton et al., 2013). They are considered vital for course delivery, pedagogical  
29 relationships, and student satisfaction (Hattam & Weiler, 2021; Leathwood & Read, 2022).

30 This review focuses on the onboarding process of casual or fixed-term teaching and marking-  
31 only employed academics paid an hourly rate, referred to as ‘Sessional Academics’. Globally,  
32 obtaining precise data on sessional academics proves challenging due to the high turnover  
33 and inferior data collection of universities (May., 2014). For example, the Australian  
34 Government Department of Education (2023) reports a casual academic workforce of 15.7  
35 per cent employed in 2021. In response, Monash University President and Vice-Chancellor  
36 Professor Margaret Gardner (2014 - 2023) estimated that 31 per cent of the academic  
37 workforce is sessional (2023). This significant discrepancy between expert opinions is  
38 evidence of the difficulties in ascertaining accurate data. Secondly, varying naming  
39 conventions and employment arrangements nationally and globally add to the challenge of  
40 comparing this precarious workforce (May., 2014). Cost savings have primarily driven the  
41 employment of sessional academics; however, flexible hiring practices for employers and  
42 academic staffing shortages have also contributed (Santra, 2021; Smith et al., 2022).

43 Globally, the response to calls for improvement for sessional academics in higher education is  
44 seen as challenging institutional policy and practice (Knight, 2007; Crawford & Germov,  
45 2015). With large numbers of sessional academics employed in universities, it is vital to  
46 understand the professional expectations of sessional academics to establish successful  
47 onboarding practices and meet their professional development needs to increase student  
48 satisfaction, organisational commitment and continuity in employment (Peters et al., 2011).

49

## 50 **Background**

51 Onboarding refers to the process through which new employees are integrated into an  
52 organisation. It is defined as ‘the process in which new employees gain the knowledge and  
53 skills they need to become effective members of an organisation’ (Cambridge Dictionary,  
54 2023). It is a comprehensive process that starts with the employment contract and involves an  
55 initial orientation to the role, understanding university structure and reporting lines,  
56 introducing mentors, outlining available resources, and completing required training  
57 programs, including induction into the culture, mission and values of the organisation, and  
58 usually occurs over a set period (The Society for Human Resource Management, 2023).  
59 Sessional academic onboarding practices are essential to encourage staff retention, reduce  
60 sick leave, improve teaching quality, and increase staff commitment and accountability  
61 (Joiner & Bakalis, 2006; Peters et al., 2011; Richardson et al., 2021). Poor onboarding and  
62 orientation practices affect staff motivation, resulting in turnover and poor quality of teaching  
63 outcomes (Knight, 2007; Sokolowich, 2018). Barriers to onboarding include the lack of or  
64 late orientation due to late hiring, insufficient mentoring, and a lack of commitment by the  
65 organisation to fund onboarding programs and mandatory training (Jackson, 1996; McComb  
66 & Eather, 2023; Rodrigues, 2019). This paper aims to explore the barriers and facilitators that  
67 sessional academics experience during onboarding, provide recommendations for  
68 policymakers and managers to meet the onboarding needs of sessional academics that are low  
69 cost but have a high impact and propose areas for further related research to improve these  
70 processes for sessional academics.

71

## 72 **Methods**

73 A scoping review was selected for this study as a method used to undertake a preliminary  
74 assessment of the available research, report on evidence of practice, and inform future

75 practice. This review type is broad in its research questions and objectives and, whilst seeking  
76 a potentially large and diverse body of literature, is explicit and unbiased in its description of  
77 the scope of literature included to map that evidence (Munn et al., 2018; Peters et al., 2020;  
78 Peters et al., 2021). Sharing similarities with systematic reviews such as the need for  
79 comprehensive, systematic, and transparent conduct and reporting, a key difference is that  
80 systematic reviews address a clearly defined question and attempt to not only collate but sum  
81 up the best available empirical research - most often drawn from randomised controlled trials,  
82 to answer that question. Systematic reviews must furthermore assess and synthesise evidence  
83 for risk of bias, a recommended but optional step for scoping reviews. Narrative literature  
84 reviews offer an evaluation of available evidence; however, they lack a rigorous plan and  
85 strategy and are therefore subject to bias by authors wanting support for their views (Grant &  
86 Booth, 2009). This scoping review adheres to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic  
87 Reviews and Meta-Analysis Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) guidelines  
88 (Tricco et al., 2018).

89

### 90 ***Search strategy***

91 The literature search and study selection process was conducted according to the PRISMA-  
92 ScR guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018). The search strategy was designed to align with the  
93 research question, focusing on the onboarding processes for non-permanent, paid university  
94 academics in the university sector internationally. Initial searches of the World Wide Web and  
95 Education Resource Information Center (ERIC) via EBSCOHost revealed that the literature  
96 illustrated a broad and varied interpretation and naming of these academics. Without a global  
97 definition for ‘sessional academics’, a wide range of terms were confirmed for inclusion in  
98 the search strategy. The final search strategy was conducted in ERIC (EBSCOHost), then  
99 translated to other health and multi-disciplinary databases: MEDLINE (EBSCOHost), the

100 Cumulative Index for Nursing and Allied Health (CINAHL) (EBSCOHost), and Web of  
101 Science. All databases were searched from inception through to March 2023. The detailed  
102 search strategy used in ERIC included keywords, synonyms, and controlled vocabulary, and  
103 can be viewed in Table 1. The database searches resulted in a total of 1409 citations, collated  
104 in Endnote v20.5 (Clarivate Analytics, 2023). These results were then imported into  
105 Covidence (Veritas Health Innovation, 2023) for the removal of duplicates and for screening.

106

107 **[Insert Table 1 about here]**

108

### 109 *Eligibility criteria and study selection*

110 The population, concept and context framework (PCC) was used to construct this scoping  
111 review's objectives and eligibility criteria (Pollock et al., 2023). All international publications  
112 (peer-reviewed and otherwise) containing quantifiable data were considered relevant and  
113 therefore included if they discussed the experience of onboarding processes by sessional  
114 academics in universities. No date restrictions were applied to ensure a comprehensive  
115 collection of contemporary and historical discussions on the topic. Only English-language  
116 publications were considered in this review. As onboarding processes differ between  
117 community colleges and universities, publications focused on community colleges and non-  
118 tertiary level education, such as secondary high schools and teachers, were excluded.  
119 Literature reviews and other review articles, as well as grey literature sources such as  
120 commentaries, editorials and letters, were also excluded. In Covidence, the title and abstract  
121 of retrieved articles were each screened for inclusion anonymously by at least two of the six  
122 authors (HB, LL, SL, PS, EJ, TR). All authors were involved in the title abstract and full-text  
123 review to determine eligibility. Covidence automatically progresses publications to the next  
124 appropriate stage, when any two authors have voted to accept or reject it according to the

125 above pre-designed criteria. A third author resolved conflicting votes between any two  
126 authors. For final eligibility, three authors (HB, LL, TR) assessed the remaining papers for  
127 inclusion according to the above-outlined criteria, including discussions of the onboarding  
128 process of sessional academics at a university. Figure 1 outlines the PRISMA (Page et al.,  
129 2021) results and study selection process.

130

131 **[Insert Figure 1 about here]**

132

### 133 **Results**

134 A total of 11 articles were eligible for inclusion in this scoping review. Seven of these articles  
135 originated from the US (Anderson, 2007; Farakish Negar et al., 2022; Frias, 2010; Jackson,  
136 1996; Rodrigues, 2019; Sandhoff, 2018; Sokolowich, 2018), two from Australia (Brown et  
137 al., 2013; Smith & Coombe, 2000), one from the UK (Knight, 2007), and one from Canada  
138 (Davidson & Rourke, 2012). The studies were qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods in  
139 nature and included surveys, interviews, and focus groups (see Appendix 1). Analysing the  
140 11 articles, the facilitators and barriers raised that impact the onboarding process for sessional  
141 academics lay mainly with two organisational departments: human resources and the  
142 academic department.

143 The human resources department is mainly responsible for administrative hiring practises, in  
144 particular the provision of contracts, mandatory training, records management, and the  
145 management of organisational workplace issues related to sessional academics. The themes  
146 related to this area were contractual employment arrangements, orientation and resources.

147 The theme '*contractual employment arrangements*' refers to the conditions of employment  
148 experienced by sessional academics. Issues identified included last-minute hiring (Brown et  
149 al., 2013; Frias, 2010; Jackson, 1996; Rodrigues, 2019; Sandhoff, 2018), job insecurity

150 (Jackson, 1996), paid poorly (Jackson, 1996), lack of compensation for preparation and  
151 marking (Jackson, 1996), poor performance management (Knight, 2007; Sandhoff, 2018;  
152 Smith & Coombe, 2000; Sokolowich, 2018), and absence of, inadequate or late onboarding  
153 (Brown et al., 2013; Farakish Negar et al., 2022; Frias, 2010; Jackson, 1996; Rodrigues,  
154 2019; Smith & Coombe, 2000; Sokolowich, 2018).

155 The second theme of human resources is *orientation*, which refers to the process of  
156 introducing sessional academics to organisational expectations. This includes challenges in  
157 understanding role expectations (Anderson, 2007; Brown et al., 2013; Frias, 2010; Rodrigues,  
158 2019; Sokolowich, 2018), access to training modules (Farakish Negar et al., 2022; Knight,  
159 2007; Sandhoff, 2018; Smith & Coombe, 2000; Sokolowich, 2018), attendance at workshops  
160 (Farakish Negar et al., 2022; Knight, 2007), access to policies and procedures (Anderson,  
161 2007; Davidson & Rourke, 2012), understanding the curriculum (Anderson, 2007),  
162 understanding the mission, vision and values of the organisation (Frias, 2010; Rodrigues,  
163 2019) and receiving orientation (Anderson, 2007; Brown et al., 2013; Frias, 2010; Jackson,  
164 1996; Sandhoff, 2018).

165 The third theme under human resources is access to *resources*. This refers to the ability of  
166 staff to access support to facilitate their teaching and inclusion in the teaching unit. Areas  
167 identified under this theme included staff requiring early access to teaching material (Brown  
168 et al., 2013; Farakish Negar et al., 2022; Jackson, 1996; Knight, 2007; Sandhoff, 2018), no  
169 training available and no access to learning systems (Davidson & Rourke, 2012; Farakish  
170 Negar et al., 2022; Knight, 2007), faculty handbook/lack of institutional resources or unaware  
171 of resources available (Anderson, 2007; Farakish Negar et al., 2022; Frias, 2010), IT/no  
172 access to internal information technology (Davidson & Rourke, 2012; Sandhoff, 2018) and  
173 below standard teaching spaces (Farakish Negar et al., 2022; Knight, 2007), access to  
174 mentors/ support systems (Anderson, 2007; Brown et al., 2013; Farakish Negar et al., 2022;



175 Jackson, 1996; Knight, 2007; Rodrigues, 2019; Sandhoff, 2018; Smith & Coombe, 2000;  
176 Sokolowich, 2018).

177 The individual academic unit was the second area of the university that impacted the  
178 onboarding experiences of sessional academics. The academic area is responsible for  
179 managing the educational programs and teaching students. Themes identified in this area  
180 included communication, mentoring and belonging to the school. The first theme,  
181 *communication*, referred to the verbal, written and emailed communication between the  
182 sessional academic and staff in the academic department. This theme was discussed in four  
183 papers (Brown et al., 2013; Farakish Negar et al., 2022; Frias, 2010; Smith & Coombe, 2000)  
184 and is considered a facilitator to onboarding when sessional academics receive regular and  
185 effective communication and a barrier if there is a lack of or absence of communication from  
186 the school. The second theme, *mentoring*, referred to the availability of academics to support  
187 and mentor sessional academics. Issues identified included a lack of mentorship/support from  
188 colleagues (Anderson, 2007; Brown et al., 2013; Frias, 2010; Jackson, 1996; Knight, 2007;  
189 Sandhoff, 2018; Smith & Coombe, 2000; Sokolowich, 2018), lack of self-confidence  
190 (Knight, 2007), status (Jackson, 1996) and feeling isolated (Anderson, 2007; Brown et al.,  
191 2013; Knight, 2007). The third theme, *belonging*, referred to how well sessional academics  
192 felt part of the academic team. This included having a passion for teaching (Brown et al.,  
193 2013; Jackson, 1996; Sokolowich, 2018), strong motivation (Knight, 2007; Sokolowich,  
194 2018), ongoing teaching within the same unit (Jackson, 1996; Knight, 2007) and sense of  
195 connectedness (Anderson, 2007; Farakish Negar et al., 2022; Rodrigues, 2019; Sandhoff,  
196 2018; Smith & Coombe, 2000).

197

198 **Discussion**

199 Considering the significant presence of sessional academics in higher education that require  
200 onboarding, it is noteworthy that only 11 articles were analysed as appropriate for inclusion  
201 to answer the question, ‘What are the facilitators and barriers experienced by sessional  
202 academics during the process of onboarding?’. This paper identified several facilitators and  
203 barriers that sessional academic staff experience during the onboarding process. The two  
204 main university departments influencing the onboarding process are the human resources  
205 department and the individual academic department. The practices of the first department, the  
206 human resources department, influence the onboarding process for all sessional academics.  
207 The main influences were the contractual arrangement, orientation process and available  
208 resources. Human resources practices were seen to impact teaching preparation and  
209 employment continuity. Brown et al. (2013), Frias (2010) and Sandhoff (2018) identified that  
210 the successful onboarding of sessional academics increases performance, belonging and  
211 connectedness, overall wellbeing and organisational commitment.

212

### 213 *a) Contract*

214 Supplying contracts with sufficient time to increase job security and provide early access to  
215 the organisation's systems allows adequate preparation time for teaching classes, the ability to  
216 familiarise with the course material and to timely address students' queries, eliminating  
217 emotions of stress (Brown et al., 2013; Frias, 2010; Sandhoff, 2018). Receiving a contract  
218 early enough has been identified as a major facilitator to create a sense of belonging and  
219 preparedness as it allows access to internal systems to prepare for teaching (Brown et al.,  
220 2013; Frias, 2010; Jackson, 1996; Sandhoff, 2018). [Historically](#), in the US and Australia, it  
221 appears to be common practice to hire staff the week or day before teaching begins, allowing  
222 little time for preparation (Brown et al., 2013; Frias, 2010; Sandhoff, 2018). Ryan et al.,  
223 (2013) and Sandhoff (2018) acknowledge that the tight timeframe between hiring and

224 teaching is a difficult obstacle to navigate as it is the nature of insecure employment, referred  
225 to as precarious employment and, more recently, a new term ‘gig’ is commonly used to  
226 describe this high level of insecure employment (La Montagne et al., 2022). Although the  
227 benefits of this type of employment lay mainly with the employers, providing employers with  
228 a flexible workforce to manage fluctuations in student numbers and to buffer an already  
229 overstretched budget (Ryan et al., 2013), conditions must be favourable for sessional  
230 academics to improve job commitment, satisfaction and retention. The Red Report, an  
231 Australian-focused seminal study conducted by Percy and Szorenyi-Reischl (2008),  
232 advocates stepping away from the current human resources model, which focuses on full-  
233 time academics and advises introducing a more suitable approach that benefits sessional  
234 academics, suggesting that the current model is outdated as policy and practice mainly  
235 focuses on full-time permanent centrally located teaching/research academics. Santra (2021)  
236 indicates that the effective management of sessional academics can be achieved by using  
237 value-based practices focused on commitment and characteristics of the nature of  
238 employment instead of the traditional models used.

239

#### 240 ***b) Orientation***

241 Orientation is the foundation stone for commencing a new position and building a  
242 relationship with the organisation. When done well, it functions as a positive anchor for  
243 sessional academics that drives engagement, loyalty, positive attitude and behaviour (Smith et  
244 al., 2022). Orientation facilitates a trained workforce and thereby enhances the quality of  
245 teaching and learning (Baik et al., 2018) and significantly adds value to the onboarding  
246 experience, instilling organisational commitment and improved performance (Knott, 2018).  
247 Smith et al. (2022) state that orientation works as an ‘anchoring event’, leading to a cost-  
248 neutral outcome as staff turnover is significantly reduced. Lack of orientation or late

249 orientation to the university impacts a sessional academic's ability to perform their teaching  
250 duties to the expected level. Consequently, this translates into the classroom and subsequently  
251 detrimentally affects the student's overall learning experience (Brown et al., 2013; Davidson  
252 & Rourke, 2012; Frias, 2010; Jackson, 1996; Ryan et al., 2013; Santra, 2021). Several papers  
253 report that sessional academics do not commonly receive orientation when employed  
254 (Jackson, 1996; Brown et al., 2013). Not receiving orientation particularly impacts novice  
255 sessional academics with less than three years of teaching experience (Brown et al., 2013).  
256 When managed well by a high-performing human resource department, orientation fosters  
257 job engagement, job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Zhong et al., 2016).

258

### 259 *c) Resources*

260 The resources available to sessional academic staff, such as access to email accounts, learning  
261 systems, information technology, printers, guidelines on teaching and marking, available  
262 training, good facilities and being aware of available resources, influenced their ability to  
263 prepare for teaching. Davidson and Rourke (2012) suggest that access to resources, such as  
264 office areas, printers and online learning systems, is essential to the success of sessional  
265 academics. It supports productivity and efficiency and creates a sense of belonging and  
266 connectedness (Davidson & Rourke, 2012). Knight (2007) reports that the lack of  
267 institutional resources hinders the quality of teaching and creates dissatisfaction among  
268 sessional academics with feelings of being treated as second-class citizens. Continuous access  
269 to resources improves teaching as staff can orientate themselves to teaching material, prepare  
270 class material and feel prepared for teaching (Sandhoff, 2018). New sessional academic staff  
271 must be provided with a network of resources to ensure they understand processes and  
272 policies and feel included and supported (Rodrigues, 2019).

273

274 The second area that influenced the onboarding experience was that of the individual  
275 academic unit. The main areas of influence were seen as communication, mentoring and  
276 belonging.

277

#### 278 *a) Communication*

279 Communication is vital to enable sessional academics to perform well as it promotes  
280 inclusion, belonging and investment in the organisation. Brown et al. (2013) and Frias  
281 (2010) report that poor or absent communication significantly compromises sessional  
282 academics' understanding of processes, belonging and association with the university  
283 ultimately leading to high staff turnover. Survey respondents reported being isolated and  
284 unaware of who is who and which resources are available (Brown et al., 2013; Frias, 2010).  
285 Frias (2010) suggests a practical guide or a faculty handbook would significantly improve  
286 communication and provide institutional support.

287

#### 288 *b) Mentoring*

289 Mentoring in the form of a buddy, assigned mentor or direct supervisor is recognised as a  
290 positive contribution to the onboarding process (Jackson, 1996; Knight, 2007; Sokolowich,  
291 2018). Providing guidance and mentorship can be informal or formal and promotes  
292 organisational socialisation and a sense of belonging and is part of professional transitional  
293 development in a new role (Frias, 2010). Farakish Negar et al. (2022) found that sessional  
294 academics felt empowered and connected through receiving positive mentorship. The feeling  
295 of being an outsider, low status and lack of confidence are closely associated with lack of  
296 guidance and mentorship (Anderson, 2007; Brown et al., 2013; Jackson, 1996; Knight, 2007;  
297 Sandhoff, 2018; Smith & Coombe, 2000; Sokolowich, 2018). Sokolowich (2018) found that  
298 mentoring was a significant facilitator of onboarding and retention. A lack of support from

299 colleagues may inhibit the professional development of sessional academics and instil a  
300 negative culture of ‘do-it-yourself apprenticeships’ (Knight (2007). Formal mentoring  
301 programs require an investment of finances and time to produce the desired results of  
302 sessional academics feeling supported, thereby increasing teaching effectiveness (Dahlke et  
303 al., 2021). To implement mentoring programs, individual academic departmental support is  
304 required to ensure that the sessional academic is paid for their time and hours are included in  
305 workload calculations for the mentor. Positively, this could be considered part of professional  
306 development for both mentor and mentee (Dahlke et al., 2021).

307

### 308 *c) Belonging*

309 Feeling connected to an organisation creates a sense of belonging and feeling part of the  
310 culture, promoting staff wellbeing (Rodrigues, 2019). Unfortunately, it is more common for  
311 sessional academics to feel disconnected, isolated, undervalued and an outsider treated as  
312 second-class citizens (Anderson, 2007; Brown et al., 2013; Knight, 2007; McComb & Eather,  
313 2021). To create a sense of belonging, Brown et al. (2013) found that sessional academics  
314 empowered themselves through their passion and commitment to teaching. Personal  
315 motivation and the enjoyment of working with students create a strong sense of belonging,  
316 leading to job satisfaction (Jackson, 1996; Sokolowich, 2018). Sessional academics are  
317 mainly employed at the peripheries of academia, i.e., working directly with students, and they  
318 are well positioned to achieve a sense of belonging, enhancing students’ overall learning  
319 experiences.

320

321 The above discussion highlighted multiple facilitators that can be implemented to improve  
322 onboarding practices and the overall wellbeing of the sessional academics and, in return, the  
323 intent to stay. Further, the enjoyment of working with students, passion for teaching, and

324 hope to advance into a tenured position are strong intrinsic motivators to stay in academia  
325 (Brown et al., 2013; Jackson, 1996; Sokolowich, 2018).

326

### 327 **Limitations**

328 This study involved an extensive search and looked at the experiences of sessional academics  
329 globally. As with any global research, there may be a lack of nuanced in-depth analysis of  
330 staff in any specific jurisdiction. This is particularly the case for this study as significant  
331 differences exist in employment and labour hire practices between jurisdictions. A lack of  
332 standardised terminology for sessional academics impacted the search and may have resulted  
333 in some relevant papers being missed. Moving forward, a standardised definition and  
334 understanding of the parameters of who are considered to be sessional academics would be  
335 beneficial.

336

### 337 **Recommendations**

338 Policymakers and relevant managers are encouraged to develop organisational workforce  
339 strategies and implement new policies and practices that meet the onboarding needs of  
340 sessional academics, thereby optimising organisational commitment, continuity in  
341 employment and ultimately student satisfaction. Even though previous recommendations  
342 have been suggested to improve the onboarding processes for sessional academics (Crawford  
343 & Germov, 2015), pushback at an organisational level has hindered this process as the  
344 universities are protecting their financial budget (Champlin and Knoedler 2017; Smith et al.,  
345 2022). Optimistically, this review has identified multiple strategies that positively contribute  
346 to the employment satisfaction of sessional academics during the onboarding process. The  
347 scoping review matrix (see Appendix 1) comprehensively outlines all facilitators identified in  
348 the 11 articles included in this scoping review. The following recommendations are suggested

349 as they may have a high cost benefit ratio and carry a high-value impact utilising evidence-  
350 based facilitators identified in this scoping review to improve the onboarding process for  
351 sessional academics.

352

353 At a human resource level, under the below themes, it is recommended that managers  
354 influence, develop and advocate for the following implementations:

355

356 a. ***Contracts:***

357 Clarify role and responsibilities by simply adding a job description in the employment  
358 contract to support the sessional academic in their role, thereby eliminating emotions of stress  
359 due to feeling unprepared and unsure of role expectations as discussed in Anderson (2007),  
360 Brown et al. (2013), Frias (2010), Rodriques (2019) and Sokolowich (2018).

361 Secondly, it is recommended to supply a contract or agreement that allows continuous access  
362 to emails and learning systems in between teaching periods to provide uninterrupted email  
363 communications with students and sufficient time for class preparations. Ongoing access to  
364 the organisation systems improves the wellbeing of sessional academics and consequently the  
365 student learning experience (Farakish et al., 2022; Sokolowich, 2018).

366

367 b. ***Orientation:***

368 Based on the findings of this review, it is recommended that orientation includes an overview  
369 of the university's mission, purpose and values, information on policies and procedures and a  
370 curriculum overview. Davidson and Rourke (2012) survey respondents highly rated the need  
371 for orientation to policies and procedures and curriculum to better understand how the  
372 policies are linked to the curriculum and relate to the varying student levels. This can be  
373 facilitated by developing an orientation handbook and online modules, as implemented



374 successfully by the University of Wollongong as part of their workforce strategy to engage  
375 and support sessional academics (Crawford & Germov, 2015).

376

377 ***c. Resources:***

378 Access to the university's information technology, learning management systems, office areas  
379 and printers significantly increases productivity and job satisfaction among sessional  
380 academics (Davidson & Rourke, 2012). Access to resources is closely linked to the provision  
381 of employment contracts as this allows for access to the organisational facilities, buildings  
382 and internal websites. Therefore, if the recommendation of implementing a contract or  
383 agreement that allows for continuous access is adopted, then there is no cost involved to  
384 improve productivity and create a sense of belonging (Knight, 2007).

385

386 Under the themes below, it is recommended that managers and policymakers implement the  
387 following at the individual academic unit to increase the retention of sessional academic staff,  
388 job satisfaction, and, ultimately, the student learning experience.

389

390 ***a. Communication:***

391 Communication nurtures a sense of belonging with the organisation, the ability to perform a  
392 job efficiently, and improves the overall wellbeing of the sessional academic (Farakish et al.,  
393 2022; Smith & Coombe, 2000). Anderson, (2007) and Frias, (2010) findings suggest that  
394 communication between the department and sessional academics can be improved by  
395 utilising a faculty handbook that outlines practical onboarding information, including a guide  
396 on communication processes and a quick guide summarising who is who and who to contact  
397 for what.

398 Additionally, the authors of this paper suggest disseminating an electronic newsletter that  
399 provides an overview of interesting topics relevant to sessional academics, such as  
400 information on available resources and a list of professional development opportunities. The  
401 newsletter can function as a vehicle that facilitates open communication, inclusion and  
402 engagement between the departmental levels and sessional academics. From the authors'  
403 experience, once the template has been created, it requires minimal time to compose and  
404 maintain.

405

406 **b. *Mentoring:***

407 As discussed, mentoring supports professional development and significantly increases job  
408 commitment and retention (Olaniyi, 2016). The authors recommend offering a structured  
409 support system with access to their line manager or a senior academic who can guide  
410 professional development and career advancement (Olaniyi, 2016). Additionally, it is advised  
411 to offer an informal buddy system, whereby the new staff member is paired with another staff  
412 member. This is proven to be highly successful as it provides personable support and  
413 guidance and is a mechanism to share experiences, resulting in increased job satisfaction  
414 through validation and appreciation and can be [paid](#) under professional development hours  
415 for both staff members (Knight, 2007; Sandhoff, 2018). The benefits of such an improved  
416 work culture and attrition will significantly outweigh the cost of high staff turnover (Fischer  
417 et al., 2020).

418

419 **c. *Belonging:***

420 The nature of precarious employment can lead to feelings of isolation within an organisation  
421 compared to staff in tenure positions (Dixon et al., 2015). Creating a sense of belonging is  
422 crucial to fostering a supportive and inclusive environment (Sandhoff, 2018). Belonging can

423 be achieved by inviting sessional academics to relevant meetings to ensure they are part of  
424 the wider academic community (Farakish et al., 2022). Sessional academics should also be  
425 invited to social events to provide networking opportunities and building professional  
426 relationships (Farakish et al., 2022). *While these recommendations may carry a cost, the*  
427 *long-term benefits of this investment are invaluable and outweigh any expenses.* Further,  
428 acknowledging sessional academics for their excellence in teaching through teaching awards  
429 and having an open-door policy to ensure their voices are heard can strengthen a sense of  
430 belonging (Farakish et al., 2022).

431

432 Based on the findings of this study, the authors also recommend further research into two  
433 areas to improve the experience for sessional academics during onboarding. Firstly, a joint  
434 research project with the human resource department to understand the complexities of  
435 precarious employment in universities with a particular focus on contracts, orientation, and  
436 provision of resources to improve onboarding processes. Secondly, research at an academic  
437 department level to understand the current practice of managing sessional academics to  
438 identify areas of practice that can be improved to achieve job satisfaction and ultimately  
439 enhance student experience, the core business of the universities.

440

#### 441 **Conclusion**

442 Acknowledging the critical role sessional academics hold in academia, it is evident that  
443 current practices need to be understood to improve onboarding processes and overall  
444 experience for this group. Historically, the onboarding process needs to be improved and  
445 meet expectations for sessional academics. From the 11 studies included, two university  
446 departments were identified as barriers and facilitators to onboarding sessional academics.  
447 The human resources department can assist sessional academics onboarding through good

448 contractual and orientation processes and the provision of resources. The academic  
449 department can assist with strong communication, mentoring and processes that encourage  
450 belonging of sessional academics.

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453 **Declaration of interest**

454 The authors declare no financial/personal interest or belief could affect their objectivity.

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645 Table 1: ERIC (EBSCOHost) Search strategy

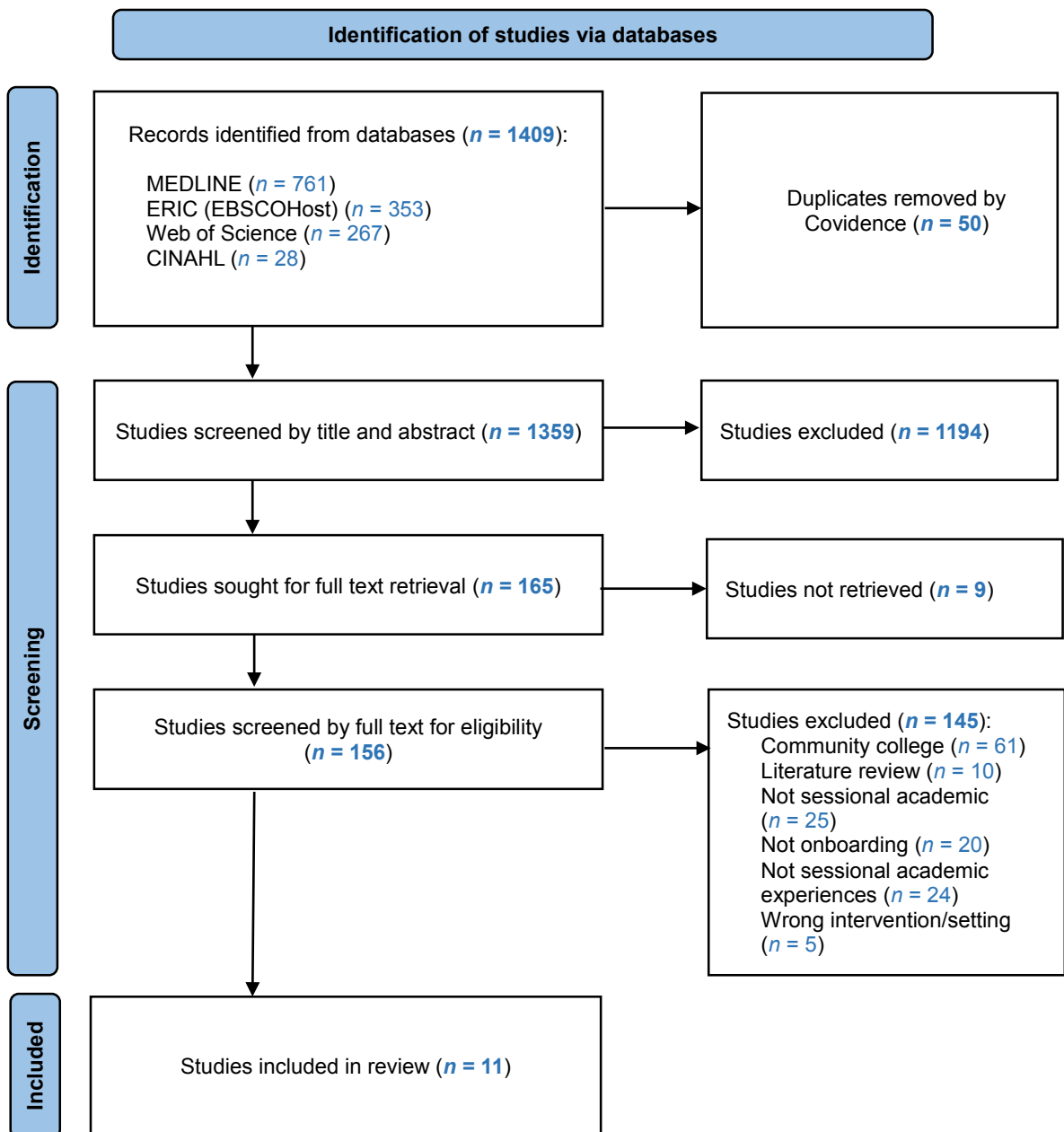
Search no.	Query
S1	onboarding OR induction OR orientation OR "initial training"
S2	(DE "Staff Orientation") OR (DE "Teacher Orientation")
S3	S1 OR S2
S4	tertiary OR "higher education" OR universit* OR college OR "post#secondary" OR "polytechnic institut*"
S5	((DE "Postsecondary Education") OR (DE "Higher Education")) OR (DE "Universities") OR (DE "Colleges")
S6	S4 OR S5
S7	(sessional OR casual OR "non-tenure track" OR untenured OR "non-continuing" OR contingent OR associate OR "non-permanent" OR temporary OR adjunct OR visiting OR "off-tenure track" OR "part time") AND (faculty OR academic OR lecturer OR employ* OR teach* OR staff OR contract OR instructor OR professor)
S8	(DE "Nontenured Faculty") OR (DE "Adjunct Faculty") OR DE "Part Time Faculty") OR (DE "Temporary Employment")
S9	S7 OR S8
S10	S3 AND S6 AND S9
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648 Figure 1: PRISMA study selection and results

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## Appendix 1: Scoping review matrix

Author, Year & Country	Study Title	Aim of study	Study design	Barriers	Facilitators
Anderson 2007 United States	Mentoring New Adjunct Faculty to Teach Science Laboratories	To discuss mentoring and training strategies for adjunct faculty to support the development of an adjunct faculty handbook to improve efficiency, collegiality, and retention rate.	Mixed methods 95 surveyed 9 – 12 Interviewed	Isolation Separation between teacher and campus	Orientation Understanding role expectations Policies and procedures Support system with other instructors Adjunct Faculty Handbook
Brown et al. 2013 Australia	A Message from The Chalk Face-- What Casual Teaching Staff Tell Us They Want To Know, Access and Experience	To understand the information needs of casual teaching staff; obtain additional baseline data against which to evaluate the casual teaching staff project and implementation of the Casual Teaching Staff Policy; and make recommendations to improve the experiences of casual teaching staff in line with the benchmarking leadership and advancement of standards for sessional teaching (BLASST) Framework.	Mixed methods 199 surveyed Focus groups (n=46)	Lack of mentorship No orientation and/or induction Poor communication No support system Last minute hiring Feelings of isolation Lack of respect Not being valued and being discriminated against	Understanding of role and responsibilities Passion and commitment to teaching
Davidson & Rourke 2012 Canada	Surveying the Orientation Learning Needs of Clinical Nursing Instructors	To identify the knowledge and skills that part-time clinical nursing instructors need to be successful.	Quantitative Study 44 surveyed	Difficulties with information technology No access to learning management systems (LMS) Lack of understanding of the curriculum, policies and procedures	Training in IT platforms Early access to LMS Understanding the curriculum
Farakish et al. 2022 United States	Faculty Success Initiative: An Innovative Approach to Professional Faculty Onboarding and Development	To describe the design and operationalisation of the New York University Faculty Success Initiative (FSI), an onboarding and professional development program	Mixed methods 77 surveyed 10 interviewed	No onboarding program in place Lack of institutional resources access to IT Buddy and/or peer support LMS	Belonging and connection Regular communication from the school Support – peer - mentor Workshops and networking events Access to educational resources – LMS
Frias 2010 United States	The Socialization of Part-Time Faculty at Comprehensive Public Colleges	To explore the first-person accounts of part-time faculty perceptions of socialisation as it relates to learning their role in comprehensive public colleges.	Qualitative Study 17 interviewed	Lack of faculty socialisation networks The absence of adequate communication from the school Orientation Late hiring	Effective communication Orientation sessions Understanding of the mission, purpose, and expectations of the organisation Handbook

Jackson 1996 United States	A survey of part-time faculty in baccalaureate schools of nursing and their learning needs	To assess the nursing and teaching educational backgrounds of part-time faculty in baccalaureate nursing programs and examine the learning needs of the respondents	Quantitative Study 239 surveyed	Lack of mentorship, orientation, and status Last-minute hiring No job security Paid poorly and not compensated for preparation and paper-grading time	Teaching in an area in which they had expertise (69.0%) Being hired with adequate time to be oriented (62.7%) Mentoring Enjoyment of working with students
Knight 2007 UK	Enhancing Part-Time Teaching in Higher Education: A Challenge for Institutional Policy and Practice	To enhance the understanding of the processes of teachers' professional formation in higher education by developing a grounded view of how teaching practices develop in universities and by considering the implications for policy and practice that might be derived from that view.	Qualitative Study 32 interviewed	Lack of confidence, knowledge, time and direction Poor resources No access to IT and training Lack of support from colleagues	Buddying and mentoring Courses and workshops Information technology training Teaching the same subjects from the previous year Confidence and motivation Access to teaching resources
Rodrigues 2019 United States	Perceptions and Knowledge of a University Mission and Vision among Faculty Members: A Mixed-Methods Study on the Onboarding for Full-Time and Adjunct Faculty	To explore differences in perceptions of the onboarding process between adjunct and full time faculty and see if there was a difference in the attitudes and understanding regarding the mission and vision of the institution.	Mixed methods/ Focus groups 11 Interviews 29 Surveyed	No onboarding Late onboarding post-teaching Inconsistent onboarding processes	Mentoring Support and instruction from the school Onboarding program Understanding of role expectations Understanding of the mission
Sandhoff 2018 United States	Novice Adjunct Online Faculty: Perceptions of Orientation and Faculty Development	To explore the lived experiences of novice adjunct online faculty in the first year of teaching online.	Qualitative Study 6 interviewed	Late hiring Not being informed of role expectations Lack of guidance on how to teach a course Short time to prepare for teaching	Support (mentors) Orientation to LMS systems Belonging
Smith & Coombe 2000 Australia	Distance Education at Arm's Length: Outsourcing of Distance Education Marking	This project focused on teaching and learning issues and was designed to explore differences between the marking approaches of permanent and sessional staff.	Qualitative Study 8 interviewed	Lack of understanding of the performance management process Insufficient marking time allocated Insufficient guidelines on marking Inadequate training No supervision	Connection with campus and industry
Sokolowich 2018 United States	Adjunct Clinical Nursing Faculty Online/Hybrid Orientation Experience: A Basic Qualitative Study	To describe the experiences of the adjunct clinical nursing faculty who have participated in a hybrid or online faculty orientation program in a Midwestern state.	Qualitative Study 6 interviewed	Lack of clear guidelines on role expectations Lack of training or mentoring	Passion for teaching Personal motivation Clear role definition Access to online training modules Mentorship

1 **What are the Facilitators and Barriers Experienced by Sessional**  
2 **Academics during the Process of Onboarding: A Scoping Review**

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24 **What are the Facilitators and Barriers Experienced by Sessional**  
25 **Academics during the Process of Onboarding: A Scoping Review**

27 **Abstract**

28 Sessional academics undertake a large proportion of teaching and marking and are  
29 essential for current university structures and student success. Employment of  
30 sessional academics has primarily been driven by cost savings and flexibility in hiring  
31 practices for employers, in addition to managing academic staffing shortages. Despite  
32 the increase in sessional employment, little is known about the experience of sessional  
33 academics regarding support and processes for integrating them into university  
34 structures. This scoping review focused on identifying the facilitators and barriers  
35 experienced by sessional academics during the onboarding process. Two university  
36 departments that can contribute to improving the onboarding process are identified:  
37 human resources and the individual academic unit. Six subthemes were identified  
38 during the literature analysis to support onboarding: contractual, orientation,  
39 resources, communication, mentoring and belonging. These themes have been  
40 explored and discussed and key recommendations have been made for policymakers  
41 and managers, with further research proposed.

46 **Keywords:** Sessional Academics, Adjunct, Onboarding, Facilitators, Barriers, Higher  
47 Education Policy.

## 49 **Introduction**

50 Sessional academics are increasingly more recognised for their significant contribution to the  
51 quality of teaching and learning that positively enhances student experience and graduate  
52 outcomes (Hamilton et al., 2013). They are considered vital for course delivery, pedagogical  
53 relationships, and student satisfaction (Hattam & Weiler, 2021; Leathwood & Read, 2022).

54 This review focuses on the onboarding process of casual or fixed-term teaching and marking-  
55 only employed academics paid an hourly rate, referred to as ‘Sessional Academics’. Globally,  
56 obtaining precise data on sessional academics proves challenging due to the high turnover  
57 and inferior data collection of universities (May., 2014). For example, the Australian  
58 Government Department of Education (2023) reports a casual academic workforce of 15.7  
59 per cent employed in 2021. In response, Monash University President and Vice-Chancellor  
60 Professor Margaret Gardner (2014 - 2023) estimated that 31 per cent of the academic  
61 workforce is sessional (2023). This significant discrepancy between expert opinions is  
62 evidence of the difficulties in ascertaining accurate data. Secondly, varying naming  
63 conventions and employment arrangements nationally and globally add to the challenge of  
64 comparing this precarious workforce (May., 2014). Cost savings have primarily driven the  
65 employment of sessional academics; however, flexible hiring practices for employers and  
66 academic staffing shortages have also contributed (Santra, 2021; Smith et al., 2022).

67 Globally, the response to calls for improvement for sessional academics in higher education is  
68 seen as challenging institutional policy and practice (Knight, 2007; Crawford & Germov,  
69 2015). With large numbers of sessional academics employed in universities, it is vital to  
70 understand the professional expectations of sessional academics to establish successful  
71 onboarding practices and meet their professional development needs to increase student  
72 satisfaction, organisational commitment and continuity in employment (Peters et al., 2011).

73

## 74 **Background**

75 Onboarding refers to the process through which new employees are integrated into an  
76 organisation. It is defined as ‘the process in which new employees gain the knowledge and  
77 skills they need to become effective members of an organisation’ (Cambridge Dictionary,  
78 2023). It is a comprehensive process that starts with the employment contract and involves an  
79 initial orientation to the role, understanding university structure and reporting lines,  
80 introducing mentors, outlining available resources, and completing required training  
81 programs, including induction into the culture, mission and values of the organisation, and  
82 usually occurs over a set period (The Society for Human Resource Management, 2023).  
83 Sessional academic onboarding practices are essential to encourage staff retention, reduce  
84 sick leave, improve teaching quality, and increase staff commitment and accountability  
85 (Joiner & Bakalis, 2006; Peters et al., 2011; Richardson et al., 2021). Poor onboarding and  
86 orientation practices affect staff motivation, resulting in turnover and poor quality of teaching  
87 outcomes (Knight, 2007; Sokolowich, 2018). Barriers to onboarding include the lack of or  
88 late orientation due to late hiring, insufficient mentoring, and a lack of commitment by the  
89 organisation to fund onboarding programs and mandatory training (Jackson, 1996; McComb  
90 & Eather, 2023; Rodrigues, 2019). This paper aims to explore the barriers and facilitators that  
91 sessional academics experience during onboarding, provide recommendations for  
92 policymakers and managers to meet the onboarding needs of sessional academics that are low  
93 cost but have a high impact and propose areas for further related research to improve these  
94 processes for sessional academics.

## 96 **Methods**

97 A scoping review was selected for this study as a method used to undertake a preliminary  
98 assessment of the available research, report on evidence of practice, and inform future



99 practice. This review type is broad in its research questions and objectives and, whilst seeking  
100 a potentially large and diverse body of literature, is explicit and unbiased in its description of  
101 the scope of literature included to map that evidence (Munn et al., 2018; Peters et al., 2020;  
102 Peters et al., 2021). Sharing similarities with systematic reviews such as the need for  
103 comprehensive, systematic, and transparent conduct and reporting, a key difference is that  
104 systematic reviews address a clearly defined question and attempt to not only collate but sum  
105 up the best available empirical research - most often drawn from randomised controlled trials,  
106 to answer that question. Systematic reviews must furthermore assess and synthesise evidence  
107 for risk of bias, a recommended but optional step for scoping reviews. Narrative literature  
108 reviews offer an evaluation of available evidence; however, they lack a rigorous plan and  
109 strategy and are therefore subject to bias by authors wanting support for their views (Grant &  
110 Booth, 2009). This scoping review adheres to the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic  
111 Reviews and Meta-Analysis Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA-ScR) guidelines  
112 (Tricco et al., 2018).

113

### 114 ***Search strategy***

115 The literature search and study selection process was conducted according to the PRISMA-  
116 ScR guidelines (Tricco et al., 2018). The search strategy was designed to align with the  
117 research question, focusing on the onboarding processes for non-permanent, paid university  
118 academics in the university sector internationally. Initial searches of the World Wide Web and  
119 Education Resource Information Center (ERIC) via EBSCOHost revealed that the literature  
120 illustrated a broad and varied interpretation and naming of these academics. Without a global  
121 definition for ‘sessional academics’, a wide range of terms were confirmed for inclusion in  
122 the search strategy. The final search strategy was conducted in ERIC (EBSCOHost), then  
123 translated to other health and multi-disciplinary databases: MEDLINE (EBSCOHost), the

124 Cumulative Index for Nursing and Allied Health (CINAHL) (EBSCOHost), and Web of  
125 Science. All databases were searched from inception through to March 2023. The detailed  
126 search strategy used in ERIC included keywords, synonyms, and controlled vocabulary, and  
127 can be viewed in Table 1. The database searches resulted in a total of 1409 citations, collated  
128 in Endnote v20.5 (Clarivate Analytics, 2023). These results were then imported into  
129 Covidence (Veritas Health Innovation, 2023) for the removal of duplicates and for screening.

130  
131 **[Insert Table 1 about here]**  
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### 133 *Eligibility criteria and study selection*

134 The population, concept and context framework (PCC) was used to construct this scoping  
135 review's objectives and eligibility criteria (Pollock et al., 2023). All international publications  
136 (peer-reviewed and otherwise) containing quantifiable data were considered relevant and  
137 therefore included if they discussed the experience of onboarding processes by sessional  
138 academics in universities. No date restrictions were applied to ensure a comprehensive  
139 collection of contemporary and historical discussions on the topic. Only English-language  
140 publications were considered in this review. As onboarding processes differ between  
141 community colleges and universities, publications focused on community colleges and non-  
142 tertiary level education, such as secondary high schools and teachers, were excluded.  
143 Literature reviews and other review articles, as well as grey literature sources such as  
144 commentaries, editorials and letters, were also excluded. In Covidence, the title and abstract  
145 of retrieved articles were each screened for inclusion anonymously by at least two of the six  
146 authors (HB, LL, SL, PS, EJ, TR). All authors were involved in the title abstract and full-text  
147 review to determine eligibility. Covidence automatically progresses publications to the next  
148 appropriate stage, when any two authors have voted to accept or reject it according to the

149 above pre-designed criteria. A third author resolved conflicting votes between any two  
150 authors. For final eligibility, three authors (HB, LL, TR) assessed the remaining papers for  
151 inclusion according to the above-outlined criteria, including discussions of the onboarding  
152 process of sessional academics at a university. Figure 1 outlines the PRISMA (Page et al.,  
2021) results and study selection process.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

## Results

A total of 11 articles were eligible for inclusion in this scoping review. Seven of these articles originated from the US (Anderson, 2007; Farakish Negar et al., 2022; Frias, 2010; Jackson, 1996; Rodrigues, 2019; Sandhoff, 2018; Sokolowich, 2018), two from Australia (Brown et al., 2013; Smith & Coombe, 2000), one from the UK (Knight, 2007), and one from Canada (Davidson & Rourke, 2012). The studies were qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods in nature and included surveys, interviews, and focus groups (see Appendix 1). Analysing the 11 articles, the facilitators and barriers raised that impact the onboarding process for sessional academics lay mainly with two organisational departments: human resources and the academic department.

The human resources department is mainly responsible for administrative hiring practises, in particular the provision of contracts, mandatory training, records management, and the management of organisational workplace issues related to sessional academics. The themes related to this area were contractual employment arrangements, orientation and resources.

The theme '*contractual employment arrangements*' refers to the conditions of employment experienced by sessional academics. Issues identified included last-minute hiring (Brown et al., 2013; Frias, 2010; Jackson, 1996; Rodrigues, 2019; Sandhoff, 2018), job insecurity

174 (Jackson, 1996), paid poorly (Jackson, 1996), lack of compensation for preparation and  
175 marking (Jackson, 1996), poor performance management (Knight, 2007; Sandhoff, 2018;  
176 Smith & Coombe, 2000; Sokolowich, 2018), and absence of, inadequate or late onboarding  
177 (Brown et al., 2013; Farakish Negar et al., 2022; Frias, 2010; Jackson, 1996; Rodrigues,  
178 2019; Smith & Coombe, 2000; Sokolowich, 2018).

179 The second theme of human resources is *orientation*, which refers to the process of  
180 introducing sessional academics to organisational expectations. This includes challenges in  
181 understanding role expectations (Anderson, 2007; Brown et al., 2013; Frias, 2010; Rodrigues,  
182 2019; Sokolowich, 2018), access to training modules (Farakish Negar et al., 2022; Knight,  
183 2007; Sandhoff, 2018; Smith & Coombe, 2000; Sokolowich, 2018), attendance at workshops  
184 (Farakish Negar et al., 2022; Knight, 2007), access to policies and procedures (Anderson,  
185 2007; Davidson & Rourke, 2012), understanding the curriculum (Anderson, 2007),  
186 understanding the mission, vision and values of the organisation (Frias, 2010; Rodrigues,  
187 2019) and receiving orientation (Anderson, 2007; Brown et al., 2013; Frias, 2010; Jackson,  
188 1996; Sandhoff, 2018).

189 The third theme under human resources is access to *resources*. This refers to the ability of  
190 staff to access support to facilitate their teaching and inclusion in the teaching unit. Areas  
191 identified under this theme included staff requiring early access to teaching material (Brown  
192 et al., 2013; Farakish Negar et al., 2022; Jackson, 1996; Knight, 2007; Sandhoff, 2018), no  
193 training available and no access to learning systems (Davidson & Rourke, 2012; Farakish  
194 Negar et al., 2022; Knight, 2007), faculty handbook/lack of institutional resources or unaware  
195 of resources available (Anderson, 2007; Farakish Negar et al., 2022; Frias, 2010), IT/no  
196 access to internal information technology (Davidson & Rourke, 2012; Sandhoff, 2018) and  
197 below standard teaching spaces (Farakish Negar et al., 2022; Knight, 2007), access to  
198 mentors/ support systems (Anderson, 2007; Brown et al., 2013; Farakish Negar et al., 2022;

199 Jackson, 1996; Knight, 2007; Rodrigues, 2019; Sandhoff, 2018; Smith & Coombe, 2000;  
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3 200 Sokolowich, 2018).  
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5 201 The individual academic unit was the second area of the university that impacted the  
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8 202 onboarding experiences of sessional academics. The academic area is responsible for  
9  
10 203 managing the educational programs and teaching students. Themes identified in this area  
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13 204 included communication, mentoring and belonging to the school. The first theme,  
14  
15 205 *communication*, referred to the verbal, written and emailed communication between the  
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18 206 sessional academic and staff in the academic department. This theme was discussed in four  
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20 207 papers (Brown et al., 2013; Farakish Negar et al., 2022; Frias, 2010; Smith & Coombe, 2000)  
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22 208 and is considered a facilitator to onboarding when sessional academics receive regular and  
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24  
25 209 effective communication and a barrier if there is a lack of or absence of communication from  
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28 210 the school. The second theme, *mentoring*, referred to the availability of academics to support  
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30 211 and mentor sessional academics. Issues identified included a lack of mentorship/support from  
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32 212 colleagues (Anderson, 2007; Brown et al., 2013; Frias, 2010; Jackson, 1996; Knight, 2007;  
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35 213 Sandhoff, 2018; Smith & Coombe, 2000; Sokolowich, 2018), lack of self-confidence  
36  
37 214 (Knight, 2007), status (Jackson, 1996) and feeling isolated (Anderson, 2007; Brown et al.,  
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40 215 2013; Knight, 2007). The third theme, *belonging*, referred to how well sessional academics  
41  
42 216 felt part of the academic team. This included having a passion for teaching (Brown et al.,  
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45 217 2013; Jackson, 1996; Sokolowich, 2018), strong motivation (Knight, 2007; Sokolowich,  
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47 218 2018), ongoing teaching within the same unit (Jackson, 1996; Knight, 2007) and sense of  
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50 219 connectedness (Anderson, 2007; Farakish Negar et al., 2022; Rodrigues, 2019; Sandhoff,  
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52 220 2018; Smith & Coombe, 2000).  
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## 58 222 **Discussion**

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223 Considering the significant presence of sessional academics in higher education that require  
224 onboarding, it is noteworthy that only 11 articles were analysed as appropriate for inclusion  
225 to answer the question, ‘What are the facilitators and barriers experienced by sessional  
226 academics during the process of onboarding?’. This paper identified several facilitators and  
227 barriers that sessional academic staff experience during the onboarding process. The two  
228 main university departments influencing the onboarding process are the human resources  
229 department and the individual academic department. The practices of the first department, the  
230 human resources department, influence the onboarding process for all sessional academics.  
231 The main influences were the contractual arrangement, orientation process and available  
232 resources. Human resources practices were seen to impact teaching preparation and  
233 employment continuity. Brown et al. (2013), Frias (2010) and Sandhoff (2018) identified that  
234 the successful onboarding of sessional academics increases performance, belonging and  
235 connectedness, overall wellbeing and organisational commitment.

236

237 *a) Contract*

238 Supplying contracts with sufficient time to increase job security and provide early access to  
239 the organisation's systems allows adequate preparation time for teaching classes, the ability to  
240 familiarise with the course material and to timely address students' queries, eliminating  
241 emotions of stress (Brown et al., 2013; Frias, 2010; Sandhoff, 2018). Receiving a contract  
242 early enough has been identified as a major facilitator to create a sense of belonging and  
243 preparedness as it allows access to internal systems to prepare for teaching (Brown et al.,  
244 2013; Frias, 2010; Jackson, 1996; Sandhoff, 2018). Historically, in the US and Australia, it  
245 appears to be common practice to hire staff the week or day before teaching begins, allowing  
246 little time for preparation (Brown et al., 2013; Frias, 2010; Sandhoff, 2018). Ryan et al.,  
247 (2013) and Sandhoff (2018) acknowledge that the tight timeframe between hiring and

1 248 teaching is a difficult obstacle to navigate as it is the nature of insecure employment, referred  
2  
3 249 to as precarious employment and, more recently, a new term ‘gig’ is commonly used to  
4  
5 250 describe this high level of insecure employment (La Montagne et al., 2022). Although the  
6  
7 251 benefits of this type of employment lay mainly with the employers, providing employers with  
8  
9 252 a flexible workforce to manage fluctuations in student numbers and to buffer an already  
10  
11 253 overstretched budget (Ryan et al., 2013), conditions must be favourable for sessional  
12  
13 254 academics to improve job commitment, satisfaction and retention. The Red Report, an  
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15 255 Australian-focused seminal study conducted by Percy and Szorenyi-Reischl (2008),  
16  
17 256 advocates stepping away from the current human resources model, which focuses on full-  
18  
19 257 time academics and advises introducing a more suitable approach that benefits sessional  
20  
21 258 academics, suggesting that the current model is outdated as policy and practice mainly  
22  
23 259 focuses on full-time permanent centrally located teaching/research academics. Santra (2021)  
24  
25 260 indicates that the effective management of sessional academics can be achieved by using  
26  
27 261 value-based practices focused on commitment and characteristics of the nature of  
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29 262 employment instead of the traditional models used.  
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### 36 263 37 38 39 264 ***b) Orientation***

40  
41 265 Orientation is the foundation stone for commencing a new position and building a  
42  
43 266 relationship with the organisation. When done well, it functions as a positive anchor for  
44  
45 267 sessional academics that drives engagement, loyalty, positive attitude and behaviour (Smith et  
46  
47 268 al., 2022). Orientation facilitates a trained workforce and thereby enhances the quality of  
48  
49 269 teaching and learning (Baik et al., 2018) and significantly adds value to the onboarding  
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51 270 experience, instilling organisational commitment and improved performance (Knott, 2018).  
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53 271 Smith et al. (2022) state that orientation works as an ‘anchoring event’, leading to a cost-  
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55 272 neutral outcome as staff turnover is significantly reduced. Lack of orientation or late  
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273 orientation to the university impacts a sessional academic's ability to perform their teaching  
274 duties to the expected level. Consequently, this translates into the classroom and subsequently  
275 detrimentally affects the student's overall learning experience (Brown et al., 2013; Davidson  
& Rourke, 2012; Frias, 2010; Jackson, 1996; Ryan et al., 2013; Santra, 2021). Several papers  
report that sessional academics do not commonly receive orientation when employed  
(Jackson, 1996; Brown et al., 2013). Not receiving orientation particularly impacts novice  
sessional academics with less than three years of teaching experience (Brown et al., 2013).  
When managed well by a high-performing human resource department, orientation fosters  
job engagement, job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Zhong et al., 2016).

### *c) Resources*

283  
284 The resources available to sessional academic staff, such as access to email accounts, learning  
285 systems, information technology, printers, guidelines on teaching and marking, available  
286 training, good facilities and being aware of available resources, influenced their ability to  
287 prepare for teaching. Davidson and Rourke (2012) suggest that access to resources, such as  
288 office areas, printers and online learning systems, is essential to the success of sessional  
289 academics. It supports productivity and efficiency and creates a sense of belonging and  
290 connectedness (Davidson & Rourke, 2012). Knight (2007) reports that the lack of  
291 institutional resources hinders the quality of teaching and creates dissatisfaction among  
292 sessional academics with feelings of being treated as second-class citizens. Continuous access  
293 to resources improves teaching as staff can orientate themselves to teaching material, prepare  
294 class material and feel prepared for teaching (Sandhoff, 2018). New sessional academic staff  
295 must be provided with a network of resources to ensure they understand processes and  
296 policies and feel included and supported (Rodrigues, 2019).



298 The second area that influenced the onboarding experience was that of the individual  
299 academic unit. The main areas of influence were seen as communication, mentoring and  
300 belonging.

301

302 **a) Communication**

303 Communication is vital to enable sessional academics to perform well as it promotes  
304 inclusion, belonging and investment in the organisation. Brown et al. (2013) and Frias  
305 (2010) report that poor or absent communication significantly compromises sessional  
306 academics' understanding of processes, belonging and association with the university  
307 ultimately leading to high staff turnover. Survey respondents reported being isolated and  
308 unaware of who is who and which resources are available (Brown et al., 2013; Frias, 2010).  
309 Frias (2010) suggests a practical guide or a faculty handbook would significantly improve  
310 communication and provide institutional support.

311

312 **b) Mentoring**

313 Mentoring in the form of a buddy, assigned mentor or direct supervisor is recognised as a  
314 positive contribution to the onboarding process (Jackson, 1996; Knight, 2007; Sokolowich,  
315 2018). Providing guidance and mentorship can be informal or formal and promotes  
316 organisational socialisation and a sense of belonging and is part of professional transitional  
317 development in a new role (Frias, 2010). Farakish Negar et al. (2022) found that sessional  
318 academics felt empowered and connected through receiving positive mentorship. The feeling  
319 of being an outsider, low status and lack of confidence are closely associated with lack of  
320 guidance and mentorship (Anderson, 2007; Brown et al., 2013; Jackson, 1996; Knight, 2007;  
321 Sandhoff, 2018; Smith & Coombe, 2000; Sokolowich, 2018). Sokolowich (2018) found that  
322 mentoring was a significant facilitator of onboarding and retention. A lack of support from

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323 colleagues may inhibit the professional development of sessional academics and instil a  
324 negative culture of ‘do-it-yourself apprenticeships’ (Knight (2007). Formal mentoring  
325 programs require an investment of finances and time to produce the desired results of  
326 sessional academics feeling supported, thereby increasing teaching effectiveness (Dahlke et  
327 al., 2021). To implement mentoring programs, individual academic departmental support is  
328 required to ensure that the sessional academic is paid for their time and hours are included in  
329 workload calculations for the mentor. Positively, this could be considered part of professional  
330 development for both mentor and mentee (Dahlke et al., 2021).

331

### 332 *c) Belonging*

333 Feeling connected to an organisation creates a sense of belonging and feeling part of the  
334 culture, promoting staff wellbeing (Rodrigues, 2019). Unfortunately, it is more common for  
335 sessional academics to feel disconnected, isolated, undervalued and an outsider treated as  
336 second-class citizens (Anderson, 2007; Brown et al., 2013; Knight, 2007; McComb & Eather,  
337 2021). To create a sense of belonging, Brown et al. (2013) found that sessional academics  
338 empowered themselves through their passion and commitment to teaching. Personal  
339 motivation and the enjoyment of working with students create a strong sense of belonging,  
340 leading to job satisfaction (Jackson, 1996; Sokolowich, 2018). Sessional academics are  
341 mainly employed at the peripheries of academia, i.e., working directly with students, and they  
342 are well positioned to achieve a sense of belonging, enhancing students’ overall learning  
343 experiences.

344

345 The above discussion highlighted multiple facilitators that can be implemented to improve  
346 onboarding practices and the overall wellbeing of the sessional academics and, in return, the  
347 intent to stay. Further, the enjoyment of working with students, passion for teaching, and

348 hope to advance into a tenured position are strong intrinsic motivators to stay in academia

349 (Brown et al., 2013; Jackson, 1996; Sokolowich, 2018).

350

### 351 **Limitations**

352 This study involved an extensive search and looked at the experiences of sessional academics

353 globally. As with any global research, there may be a lack of nuanced in-depth analysis of

354 staff in any specific jurisdiction. This is particularly the case for this study as significant

355 differences exist in employment and labour hire practices between jurisdictions. A lack of

356 standardised terminology for sessional academics impacted the search and may have resulted

357 in some relevant papers being missed. Moving forward, a standardised definition and

358 understanding of the parameters of who are considered to be sessional academics would be

359 beneficial.

360

### 361 **Recommendations**

362 Policymakers and relevant managers are encouraged to develop organisational workforce

363 strategies and implement new policies and practices that meet the onboarding needs of

364 sessional academics, thereby optimising organisational commitment, continuity in

365 employment and ultimately student satisfaction. Even though previous recommendations

366 have been suggested to improve the onboarding processes for sessional academics (Crawford

367 & Germov, 2015), pushback at an organisational level has hindered this process as the

368 universities are protecting their financial budget (Champlin and Knoedler 2017; Smith et al.,

369 2022). Optimistically, this review has identified multiple strategies that positively contribute

370 to the employment satisfaction of sessional academics during the onboarding process. The

371 scoping review matrix (see Appendix 1) comprehensively outlines all facilitators identified in

372 the 11 articles included in this scoping review. The following recommendations are suggested

1 373 as they may have a high cost benefit ratio and carry a high-value impact utilising evidence-  
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3 374 based facilitators identified in this scoping review to improve the onboarding process for  
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5 375 sessional academics.

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9 377 At a human resource level, under the below themes, it is recommended that managers  
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12 378 influence, develop and advocate for the following implementations:

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17 380 a. **Contracts:**

18  
19 381 Clarify role and responsibilities by simply adding a job description in the employment  
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21  
22 382 contract to support the sessional academic in their role, thereby eliminating emotions of stress  
23  
24 383 due to feeling unprepared and unsure of role expectations as discussed in Anderson (2007),  
25  
26 384 Brown et al. (2013), Frias (2010), Rodriques (2019) and Sokolowich (2018).

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29 385 Secondly, it is recommended to supply a contract or agreement that allows continuous access  
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32 386 to emails and learning systems in between teaching periods to provide uninterrupted email  
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34 387 communications with students and sufficient time for class preparations. Ongoing access to  
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36 388 the organisation systems improves the wellbeing of sessional academics and consequently the  
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39 389 student learning experience (Farakish et al., 2022; Sokolowich, 2018).

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44 391 b. **Orientation:**

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46 392 Based on the findings of this review, it is recommended that orientation includes an overview  
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48  
49 393 of the university's mission, purpose and values, information on policies and procedures and a  
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51 394 curriculum overview. Davidson and Rourke (2012) survey respondents highly rated the need  
52  
53 395 for orientation to policies and procedures and curriculum to better understand how the  
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56 396 policies are linked to the curriculum and relate to the varying student levels. This can be  
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58 397 facilitated by developing an orientation handbook and online modules, as implemented  
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398 successfully by the University of Wollongong as part of their workforce strategy to engage  
399 and support sessional academics (Crawford & Germov, 2015).

400

401 ***c. Resources:***

402 Access to the university's information technology, learning management systems, office areas  
403 and printers significantly increases productivity and job satisfaction among sessional  
404 academics (Davidson & Rourke, 2012). Access to resources is closely linked to the provision  
405 of employment contracts as this allows for access to the organisational facilities, buildings  
406 and internal websites. Therefore, if the recommendation of implementing a contract or  
407 agreement that allows for continuous access is adopted, then there is no cost involved to  
408 improve productivity and create a sense of belonging (Knight, 2007).

409

410 Under the themes below, it is recommended that managers and policymakers implement the  
411 following at the individual academic unit to increase the retention of sessional academic staff,  
412 job satisfaction, and, ultimately, the student learning experience.

413

414 ***a. Communication:***

415 Communication nurtures a sense of belonging with the organisation, the ability to perform a  
416 job efficiently, and improves the overall wellbeing of the sessional academic (Farakish et al.,  
417 2022; Smith & Coombe, 2000). Anderson, (2007) and Frias, (2010) findings suggest that  
418 communication between the department and sessional academics can be improved by  
419 utilising a faculty handbook that outlines practical onboarding information, including a guide  
420 on communication processes and a quick guide summarising who is who and who to contact  
421 for what.

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422 Additionally, the authors of this paper suggest disseminating an electronic newsletter that  
423 provides an overview of interesting topics relevant to sessional academics, such as  
424 information on available resources and a list of professional development opportunities. The  
425 newsletter can function as a vehicle that facilitates open communication, inclusion and  
426 engagement between the departmental levels and sessional academics. From the authors’  
427 experience, once the template has been created, it requires minimal time to compose and  
428 maintain.

430 **b. *Mentoring:***

431 As discussed, mentoring supports professional development and significantly increases job  
432 commitment and retention (Olaniyi, 2016). The authors recommend offering a structured  
433 support system with access to their line manager or a senior academic who can guide  
434 professional development and career advancement (Olaniyi, 2016). Additionally, it is advised  
435 to offer an informal buddy system, whereby the new staff member is paired with another staff  
436 member. This is proven to be highly successful as it provides personable support and  
437 guidance and is a mechanism to share experiences, resulting in increased job satisfaction  
438 through validation and appreciation and can be paid under professional development hours  
439 for both staff members (Knight, 2007; Sandhoff, 2018). The benefits of such an improved  
440 work culture and attrition will significantly outweigh the cost of high staff turnover (Fischer  
441 et al., 2020).

442  
443 **c. *Belonging:***

444 The nature of precarious employment can lead to feelings of isolation within an organisation  
445 compared to staff in tenure positions (Dixon et al., 2015). Creating a sense of belonging is  
446 crucial to fostering a supportive and inclusive environment (Sandhoff, 2018). Belonging can

1 447 be achieved by inviting sessional academics to relevant meetings to ensure they are part of  
2 448 the wider academic community (Farakish et al., 2022). Sessional academics should also be  
3  
4 449 invited to social events to provide networking opportunities and building professional  
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7 450 relationships (Farakish et al., 2022). While these recommendations may carry a cost, the  
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10 451 long-term benefits of this investment are invaluable and outweigh any expenses. Further,  
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12 452 acknowledging sessional academics for their excellence in teaching through teaching awards  
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14 453 and having an open-door policy to ensure their voices are heard can strengthen a sense of  
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17 454 belonging (Farakish et al., 2022).

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22 456 Based on the findings of this study, the authors also recommend further research into two  
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24 457 areas to improve the experience for sessional academics during onboarding. Firstly, a joint  
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26 458 research project with the human resource department to understand the complexities of  
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29 459 precarious employment in universities with a particular focus on contracts, orientation, and  
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31 460 provision of resources to improve onboarding processes. Secondly, research at an academic  
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33 461 department level to understand the current practice of managing sessional academics to  
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36 462 identify areas of practice that can be improved to achieve job satisfaction and ultimately  
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39 463 enhance student experience, the core business of the universities.

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## 42 43 465 **Conclusion**

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46 466 Acknowledging the critical role sessional academics hold in academia, it is evident that  
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48 467 current practices need to be understood to improve onboarding processes and overall  
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51 468 experience for this group. Historically, the onboarding process needs to be improved and  
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53 469 meet expectations for sessional academics. From the 11 studies included, two university  
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56 470 departments were identified as barriers and facilitators to onboarding sessional academics.  
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58 471 The human resources department can assist sessional academics onboarding through good  
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1 472 contractual and orientation processes and the provision of resources. The academic  
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3 473 department can assist with strong communication, mentoring and processes that encourage  
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5 474 belonging of sessional academics.  
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12 **477 Declaration of interest**  
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14 478 The authors declare no financial/personal interest or belief could affect their objectivity.  
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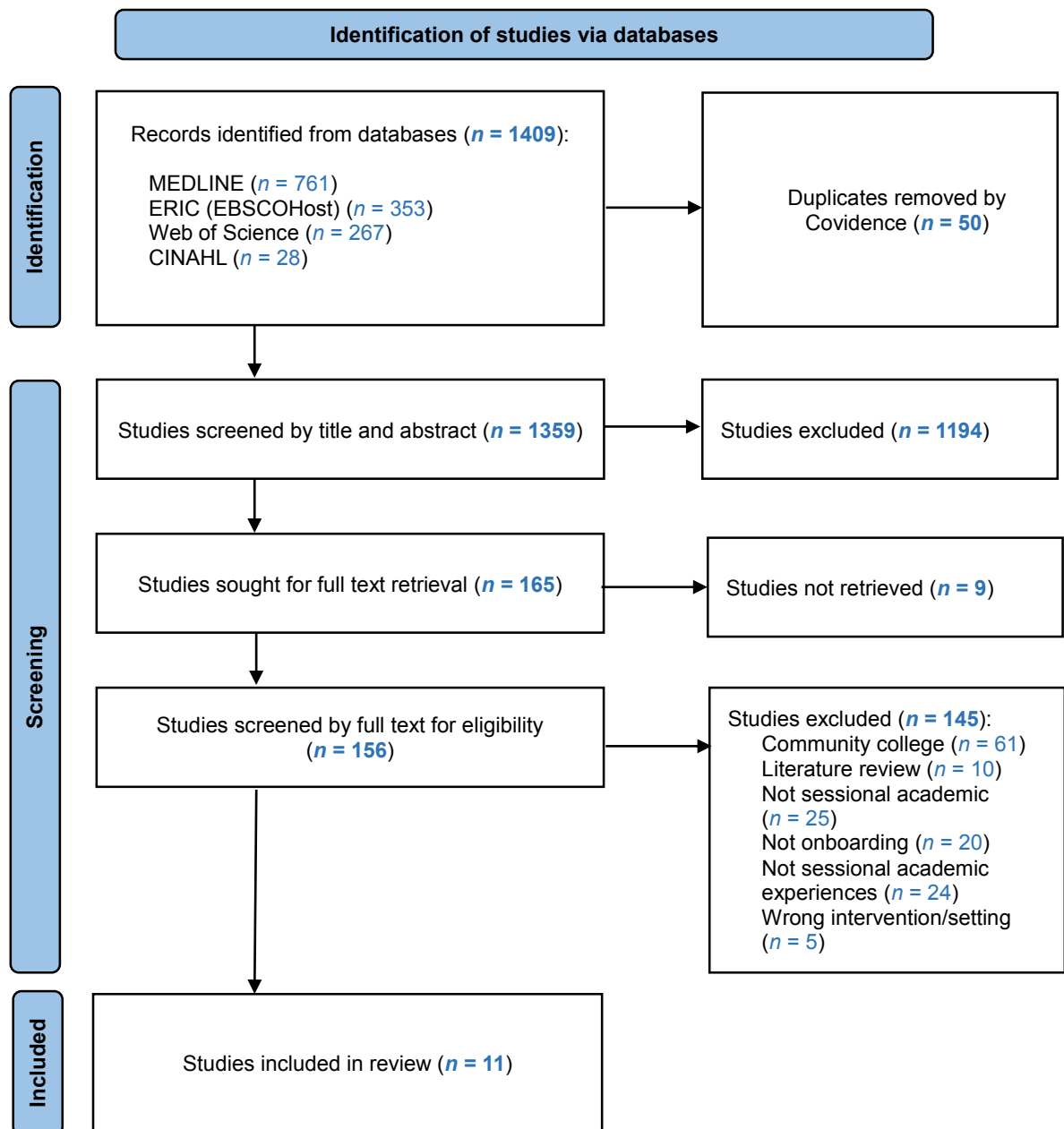
669 Table 1: ERIC (EBSCOHost) Search strategy

Search no.	Query
S1	onboarding OR induction OR orientation OR "initial training"
S2	(DE "Staff Orientation") OR (DE "Teacher Orientation")
S3	S1 OR S2
S4	tertiary OR "higher education" OR universit* OR college OR "post#secondary" OR "polytechnic institut*"
S5	((DE "Postsecondary Education") OR (DE "Higher Education")) OR (DE "Universities") OR (DE "Colleges")
S6	S4 OR S5
S7	(sessional OR casual OR "non-tenure track" OR untenured OR "non-continuing" OR contingent OR associate OR "non-permanent" OR temporary OR adjunct OR visiting OR "off-tenure track" OR "part time") AND (faculty OR academic OR lecturer OR employ* OR teach* OR staff OR contract OR instructor OR professor)
S8	(DE "Nontenured Faculty") OR (DE "Adjunct Faculty") OR DE "Part Time Faculty") OR (DE "Temporary Employment")
S9	S7 OR S8
S10	S3 AND S6 AND S9
S11	S3 AND S6 AND S9 Limiters: Language: English

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672 Figure 1: PRISMA study selection and results



Appendix 1: Scoping review matrix

Author, Year & Country	Study Title	Aim of study	Study design	Barriers	Facilitators
Anderson 2007 United States	Mentoring New Adjunct Faculty to Teach Science Laboratories	To discuss mentoring and training strategies for adjunct faculty to support the development of an adjunct faculty handbook to improve efficiency, collegiality, and retention rate.	Mixed methods 95 surveyed 9 – 12 Interviewed	Isolation Separation between teacher and campus	Orientation Understanding role expectations Policies and procedures Support system with other instructors Adjunct Faculty Handbook
Brown et al. 2013 Australia	A Message from The Chalk Face-- What Casual Teaching Staff Tell Us They Want To Know, Access and Experience	To understand the information needs of casual teaching staff; obtain additional baseline data against which to evaluate the casual teaching staff project and implementation of the Casual Teaching Staff Policy; and make recommendations to improve the experiences of casual teaching staff in line with the benchmarking leadership and advancement of standards for sessional teaching (BLASST) Framework.	Mixed methods 199 surveyed Focus groups (n=46)	Lack of mentorship No orientation and/or induction Poor communication No support system Last minute hiring Feelings of isolation Lack of respect Not being valued and being discriminated against	Understanding of role and responsibilities Passion and commitment to teaching
Davidson & Rourke 2012 Canada	Surveying the Orientation Learning Needs of Clinical Nursing Instructors	To identify the knowledge and skills that part-time clinical nursing instructors need to be successful.	Quantitative Study 44 surveyed	Difficulties with information technology No access to learning management systems (LMS) Lack of understanding of the curriculum, policies and procedures	Training in IT platforms Early access to LMS Understanding the curriculum
Farakish et al. 2022 United States	Faculty Success Initiative: An Innovative Approach to Professional Faculty Onboarding and Development	To describe the design and operationalisation of the New York University Faculty Success Initiative (FSI), an onboarding and professional development program	Mixed methods 77 surveyed 10 interviewed	No onboarding program in place Lack of institutional resources access to IT Buddy and/or peer support LMS	Belonging and connection Regular communication from the school Support – peer - mentor Workshops and networking events Access to educational resources – LMS
Frias 2010 United States	The Socialization of Part-Time Faculty at Comprehensive Public Colleges	To explore the first-person accounts of part-time faculty perceptions of socialisation as it relates to learning their role in comprehensive public colleges.	Qualitative Study 17 interviewed	Lack of faculty socialisation networks The absence of adequate communication from the school Orientation Late hiring	Effective communication Orientation sessions Understanding of the mission, purpose, and expectations of the organisation Handbook

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Jackson 1996 United States	A survey of part-time faculty in baccalaureate schools of nursing and their learning needs	To assess the nursing and teaching educational backgrounds of part-time faculty in baccalaureate nursing programs and examine the learning needs of the respondents	Quantitative Study 239 surveyed	Lack of mentorship, orientation, and status Last-minute hiring No job security Paid poorly and not compensated for preparation and paper-grading time	Teaching in an area in which they had expertise (69.0%) Being hired with adequate time to be oriented (62.7%) Mentoring Enjoyment of working with students
Knight 2007 UK	Enhancing Part-Time Teaching in Higher Education: A Challenge for Institutional Policy and Practice	To enhance the understanding of the processes of teachers' professional formation in higher education by developing a grounded view of how teaching practices develop in universities and by considering the implications for policy and practice that might be derived from that view.	Qualitative Study 32 interviewed	Lack of confidence, knowledge, time and direction Poor resources No access to IT and training Lack of support from colleagues	Buddying and mentoring Courses and workshops Information technology training Teaching the same subjects from the previous year Confidence and motivation Access to teaching resources
Rodrigues 2019 United States	Perceptions and Knowledge of a University Mission and Vision among Faculty Members: A Mixed-Methods Study on the Onboarding for Full-Time and Adjunct Faculty	To explore differences in perceptions of the onboarding process between adjunct and full time faculty and see if there was a difference in the attitudes and understanding regarding the mission and vision of the institution.	Mixed methods/ Focus groups 11 Interviews 29 Surveyed	No onboarding Late onboarding post-teaching Inconsistent onboarding processes	Mentoring Support and instruction from the school Onboarding program Understanding of role expectations Understanding of the mission
Sandhoff 2018 United States	Novice Adjunct Online Faculty: Perceptions of Orientation and Faculty Development	To explore the lived experiences of novice adjunct online faculty in the first year of teaching online.	Qualitative Study 6 interviewed	Late hiring Not being informed of role expectations Lack of guidance on how to teach a course Short time to prepare for teaching	Support (mentors) Orientation to LMS systems Belonging
Smith & Coombe 2000 Australia	Distance Education at Arm's Length: Outsourcing of Distance Education Marking	This project focused on teaching and learning issues and was designed to explore differences between the marking approaches of permanent and sessional staff.	Qualitative Study 8 interviewed	Lack of understanding of the performance management process Insufficient marking time allocated Insufficient guidelines on marking Inadequate training No supervision	Connection with campus and industry
Sokolowich 2018 United States	Adjunct Clinical Nursing Faculty Online/Hybrid Orientation Experience: A Basic Qualitative Study	To describe the experiences of the adjunct clinical nursing faculty who have participated in a hybrid or online faculty orientation program in a Midwestern state.	Qualitative Study 6 interviewed	Lack of clear guidelines on role expectations Lack of training or mentoring	Passion for teaching Personal motivation Clear role definition Access to online training modules Mentorship



**Response to the Editor.**

**RE:** What are the Facilitators and Barriers Experienced by Sessional Academics during the Process of Onboarding: A Scoping Review No. CJHE-2023-0351

Thank you for your thoughtful comments on our manuscript. We have considered and accepted the changes to improve the manuscript. Detailed responses to your feedback are outlined below. Amendments in the manuscript are made in **blue font**.

Reviewer Editor		
Feedback	Response	Amendments
<p><b>Line 26 – 30</b> I suggest that you define the term "sessional" very early on, before citing statistics because the reader does not know what you are referring to in these statistics.</p> <p>For example, you claim that an estimated 15.7% of FTE staff are "sessional" in Australia, but the DoE stats do not have a category for "sessional". The 15.7% you refer to (presumably from Table 1.1 FTE for Full-time, Fractional Full-time and Estimated Casual Staff by Work Contract, 2013 to 2022) is the % of university staff FTE employed on casual contracts. This all casuals, not just academics. Even within the academic staff FTE some casuals are in teaching and research, or research only roles. Presumably these academics are not "sessional".</p>	<p>I have moved the definition of sessional academics used for this manuscript to ensure the reader understands what we are referring to.</p> <p>Thank you for investing the time to delve into the intricacies of the terminology and the crucial significance of accurately reporting data within the manuscript. We greatly appreciate your mention of Robyn’s May thesis (2014), which has indeed provided invaluable insights, particularly from a business sector perspective.</p> <p>Upon revisiting the statistics and naming conventions discussed, we concur that the absence of clear identification of part-time/casual staff within reports necessitates acknowledgment in the manuscript. Ensuring the accuracy of our reporting is paramount, as any inaccuracies would undermine the credibility of this scoping review.</p>	<p><b>Lines 30-31</b> This review focuses on the onboarding process of casual or fixed-term teaching and marking-only employed academics paid an hourly rate, referred to as ‘Sessional Academics’.</p> <p><b>Lines 31-40</b> Globally, obtaining precise data on sessional academics proves challenging due to the high turnover and inferior data collection of universities (May, 2014). For example, the Australian Government Department of Education (2023) reports a casual academic workforce of 15.7 per cent employed in 2021. In response, Monash University President and Vice-Chancellor Professor Margaret Gardner (2014 - 2023) estimated that 31 per cent of the academic workforce is sessional (2023).</p>

Likewise there are some casual teaching-only academics employed for very short periods, like a one-off guest lecture. These are not likely to be sessional either or in need of onboarding, mentoring, etc.

I believe the focus of your manuscript is on a sub-group of teaching-only academics employed on casual contracts for a fixed-term duration. You need to be clear the groups you are excluding from this (research academics, professional/non-academic staff, guest lecturers, etc. and then consider if the term is consistent in other countries that you cite stats from.

For the Australian system Robyn May in her 2014 PhD dissertation "An Investigation of the Casualisation of Academic Work in Australia" (and elsewhere) describes how "sessional" is a sub-group for casuals:

"Casual employment, whilst hourly paid and insecure, paradoxically can be both regular and long term, that is, semester to semester over many years, a feature that has not to date been legally challenged (Briar and Junor

While our primary focus remains on the onboarding process, as such, we have opted to revise the introduction paragraph, removing specific statistics and naming conventions. In their place, we've incorporated text that acknowledges the global inconsistencies and inaccuracies prevalent in reporting practices. This adjustment aims to maintain the integrity of our scoping review while also highlighting the broader challenges faced in this domain. Thank you for your understanding and collaboration in refining our manuscript.

This significant discrepancy between expert opinions is evidence of the difficulties in ascertaining accurate data. Secondly, varying naming conventions and employment arrangements nationally and globally add to the challenge of comparing this precarious workforce (May., 2014).

<p>2012). Many university collective agreements and policies in fact make a distinction between 'occasional' or 'ad-hoc' casual academic staff, and casual academic staff, often referred to as 'sessional' staff who are notionally employed by semester, although their engagement remains on an hourly basis.</p>		
<p><b>Line 32</b> Please be consistent with decimal places, use one decimal</p>	<p>Apologies for the inconsistency, this has now been removed and replaced with above written text.</p>	
<p><b>Line 32 to 35</b> As noted above, I am very doubtful that you are comparing apples with apples, given that the Australian data is including professional staff and is FTE.</p>	<p>Agreed as per above response, this has been removed and replaced with above written text.</p>	
<p><b>Line 226 – 228</b> Some of these references are dated. Perhaps you can say "historically in the US and Australia..."</p>	<p><b>Now line 220</b> Updated.</p>	<p><b>Line 220</b> However replaced with <a href="#">Historically</a></p>
<p><b>Line 354 – 355</b> Can you be clearer in your recommendations <b>below</b> as to whether you are saying casual/sessional staff should be paid for their time attending the functions <b>outlined below</b>?</p>	<p>We have amended two recommendations sections to indicate costs involved: Section b. Mentoring (lines 406 to 417) and Section c. Belonging (lines 419 – 430)</p> <p><b>Line 414</b> Wording to be clearer. Work-loaded replaced with <a href="#">paid</a>.</p>	<p><b>Line 414</b> resulting in increased job satisfaction through validation and appreciation and can be <a href="#">paid</a> under professional development hours for both staff members</p>

<p>"Minimal" is a subjective term, but one barrier to inviting casuals to meetings or "social happenings" is that there may be an expectation to pay the staff for this time, and some enterprise employment agreements stipulate a minimum number of hours for any work request. I am speculating here, but it could be one reason why some of these zero or minimal cost suggestions have not been implemented.</p> <p>This is not a judgment about whether these are good ideas or not, just whether you are suggesting payment because it does potentially increase the costs. There is also the cost for mentors as well. Much academic work is unpaid.</p>	<p><b>Lines 426 - 427</b> added a new sentence to clarify the potential cost associated with the recommendation. "Minimal" deleted.</p>	<p><b>Lines 426 - 427</b> While these recommendations may carry a cost, the long-term benefits of this investment are invaluable and outweigh any expenses.</p>
<p><b>Line 403</b> Strike to repeat wording to contact</p>	<p><b>Now line 396</b> Deleted duplicate wording 'to contact'</p>	
<p><b>Line 644</b> I don't understand this. Should it read "AND"?</p>	<p><b>Now line 645</b> Apologies, updated and corrected to reflect 'AND' as intended.</p>	