Smart Casual
Towards excellence in sessional teaching in law

LEAD INSTITUTION
Flinders University

PARTNER INSTITUTIONS
The University of Adelaide, UNSW, UWA, James Cook University

PROJECT LEADER
Associate Professor Mary Heath, Flinders University

PROJECT TEAM
Associate Professor Anne Hewitt, The University of Adelaide
Assistant Professor Kate Galloway, James Cook University and Bond University
Professor Mark Israel, Flinders University and The University of Western Australia
Associate Professor Natalie Skead, The University of Western Australia
Professor Alex Steel, The University of New South Wales

WEBSITE
www.smartlawteacher.org.au

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR AND BY AUSTRALIAN LAW TEACHERS

Smart Casual has responded to a recognised national need for a law-specific professional development program for sessional teachers. Sessional staff deliver half of Australian tertiary teaching, rendering the quality of that teaching crucial to student learning, retention and progress. Yet national research suggests that support and training for sessional teachers remain inadequate.

Law confronts specific barriers in responding to this challenge. Discipline-specific skills and content form substantial components of law curricula. Sessional law teachers are often time-poor legal practitioners or postgraduate researchers – they bring vital experience and networks to their teaching but are weakly connected to the tertiary sector. This distinctive context demanded discipline-specific sessional staff training.

Law schools across Australia vary widely in size and resources, use of online and blended learning, rural and urban settings, the nature of courses offered, and student demographics. To ensure our program meets the needs of sessional staff within these diverse settings, we established a project team with members from diverse institutional types and settings, and recruited an expert review group comprised of leading Australian and international legal educators with knowledge of a range of institutional settings inside and outside Australia and expertise in the strategic themes embedded throughout the resources. The modules have been trialled by sessional teachers at a range of Australian institutions and have been strengthened by their feedback.

In response, Smart Casual has:
- created and evaluated a program of nine interactive teaching development modules
- integrated strategic themes of crucial importance to both justice and education, and hence to the law curriculum and law teaching, across all modules
- made the modules freely available online and promoted them to sessional staff, their supervisors, key stakeholder bodies, all Australian law schools and internationally
- designed resources and delivered workshops to support best practice use of the modules
- engaged in a wide range of dissemination activities, nationally and internationally.

The topics were chosen in response to the existing literature on legal education as well as the disciplinary environment in which legal education takes place: a context in which the profession, the judiciary and admitting authorities are all active stakeholders. The approach and proposed content were endorsed by Council of Australian Law Deans (CALD) and Legal Education Associate Deans Network (LEAD). They reflect the ALTC Threshold Learning Outcomes for law.

The Smart Casual modules integrate strategic themes of crucial importance to legal education:
- diversity
- gender
- digital literacy
- internationalisation.

Support for this project was provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. The views expressed do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.