

HIGHLIGHTS

- While the overall working hours for Australian academics have increased in the last twenty years, there has been little change in the proportion of time devoted to the core tasks of teaching and research. The additional hours can be attributed largely to an expansion of non-core work, including tasks such as those associated with institutional accountability processes and income-generating activities.
- Academics continue to be exceptionally motivated by the intrinsic interest in their work, and most satisfied when they have the autonomy and opportunity to pursue their own academic interests. However, the growing demands of a range of unrelated tasks has increased to the point where the fragmentation of time and energy is perceived by academics as seriously undermining their work satisfaction and their productivity.
- In addition to the everyday changes in work activities, there has been a marked shift away from the traditional annual work cycles of academics. The distinction between teaching and so-called 'non-teaching' periods is disappearing and has implications for staff deployment.
- There are notable variations in work preferences within the academic profession. From the survey data reported in this paper, a substantial proportion of academics see themselves primarily as researchers or as teachers. These differences in work role orientations are accompanied by marked differences in values, aspirations and satisfaction.
- There is some evidence of a trend towards increasing role specialisation for academics with respect to teaching and research. This is likely to be encouraged within some universities to meet the demands of competition and efficiency. The status and reward differentiation that follows is likely to generate tensions and further divides in work practices within institutions and departments.

REPORT No. 30
January 1998

Change and Continuity in Academic Work

Introduction

Like most workers in comparable occupations, Australian academics are working longer hours than ever. For academics the increase in overall hours is, however, only one element influencing the rapidly changing nature of their work. Indeed, many academics were working well above average hours in the late 1970s and early '80s—particularly those in research universities where in some instances the average working week was as high as 55 hours a week (McInnis 1990).

The current tensions in the workplace for academics derive essentially from the demands of new tasks, and the pressure that places on time and energy devoted to core activities. In recent years academics have been doing more work that they do not regard as central to their training, interests, or satisfaction. They are spending more time on an expanding range of often unrelated tasks. Nevertheless, the time devoted to the major tasks of teaching and research over the last two decades has barely changed.

Changes at the margins of academic work are of considerable importance well beyond the actual time involved. This is largely because they are adding to the fragmentation of work time and their intrusion on core work can have a negatively compounding effect. Additional tasks have been generated, amongst other things, by the demands of institutional competition, accountability, and quality assurance processes. Associated with these changes is the recent acceleration of two trends: a decline in the control academics have over their daily work;

and an increasing segmentation of work, especially according to rank and tenure, with some convergence of work patterns from the former university and college of advanced education sectors.

The data in this paper are based largely on a review of studies of academic activities in Australia from 1973 to 1989 (McInnis 1990), individual interviews, and a 1993 national survey of the roles and values of 1621 academics funded by the Australian Research Council, and conducted by the Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne.*

Job Satisfaction and Work Values

Despite the pressures of change, the work values that have traditionally distinguished academics from other professionals have remained remarkably stable and indeed, are still widely shared across the system. The 1993 survey results indicated that despite the major system changes of the previous five years, the academics we surveyed were still highly satisfied with, and committed to, their work.

Not all the academics we surveyed had experienced major changes to their workload. Almost half (47 per cent) said their workload had not changed substantially from 1988 to 1993. However, a similar proportion (45 per cent) believed their total hours had substantially increased in that period.

Most of the academics were satisfied with their jobs (67 per cent) although 29 per cent felt that their overall job satisfaction had actually deteriorated in the five years prior to the survey. The

level of commitment was high: 53 per cent agreed they subordinated most aspects of their life to their work, and 57 per cent indicated that their work commitments left them very little time to themselves.

A clear majority of academics (80 per cent) agreed that they were more motivated by intrinsic interest in their work than material rewards. Sixty-five per cent were satisfied with the opportunities they had to pursue their own academic interests. Somewhat surprisingly, 44 per cent of the sample believed their level of professional autonomy had actually improved since the 1988 reforms.

When asked to indicate what most affected their level of satisfaction with their jobs, the opportunity to pursue their own academic interests was the most frequently identified factor. Indeed, if they were seeking a position elsewhere, 67 per cent of academics rated 'improved opportunity to pursue own academic interests' as important, ahead of, for example, 61 per cent who would look for 'improved prospects for promotion'.

Changes in Work Activities: 1977–1993

The results of a national survey conducted in 1977 provides the baseline for the analysis of academic time allocation that follows (Williams 1979). Respondents to the national survey by Williams were asked: 'With respect to the current teaching term/semester, etc., please estimate the components of your working week (in hours per week) you expect to have devoted to the following activities.' (1979, p. 607)

In 1993, academics were also asked to consider a typical teaching week, and a typical 'non-teaching' week for the semester, and to estimate the number of hours spent on the activities listed, and also to indicate whether this time had 'substantially increased, decreased or remained the same compared with five years ago.'

Table 1 provides a broad picture of changes in the hours spent on the main work activities of the 1993 sample

against the 1977 national survey (divided into college of advanced education and university sectors). For comparative purposes, the discussion that follows is confined to academics at the rank of lecturer and above. This is, therefore, a somewhat limited view of a profession increasingly 'casualised', with non-tenured staff filling gaps in education programmes.

By 1993, Australian academics were working an average of almost 48 hours per week during teaching periods, an increase of around three hours per week since the 1970s. They divided their time into slightly more than half the total weekly hours on teaching, a fifth on research, and the remaining quarter divided between administration, service and other work.

Needless to say, this disguises substantial variations in working hours across the system and between individuals. The chief difference between the binary sectors in the 1970s and 1980s was the relative emphasis given to teaching and research. University academics then had fewer formal student contact hours, and spent more time on research and writing than their college counterparts.

The current average of 25 hours a week given to teaching activities represents 53 per cent of academic work time. It includes face to face teaching, as well as related activities such as lecture preparation, dealing with student enquiries, marking assignments and

thesis supervision. In percentage terms, this represents a considerable decline in the proportion of hours devoted to teaching in the college of advanced education sector since 1977 when these activities comprised 66 per cent of the weeks' work.

The 1977 survey showed large sector differences on research time, with university academics spending about three times more on research than college academics. By 1993, academics averaged just over 10 hours per week on research activities in teaching semesters, or 21 per cent of their working week. During the non-teaching period when the weekly load reduced to an average of around 45 hours, the average research time rose to 17.5 hours per week—almost 40 per cent of the time.

For academics from both sectors, the time spent on administration was slightly lower in 1993 at 6.4 hours or 13.4 per cent of the total workload than it was for both sectors as reported in 1977. Likewise, it appears from Table 1 that the level of community activity for academics actually declined slightly from 1977 to 1993, to less than two hours per week.

The greatest increase in any category of work indicated in Table 1 has been 'other work' which has more than doubled in absolute terms, from less than two hours per week in 1977, to just over four hours in 1993.

Table 1: Estimated Average Hours per Week Spent on Major Activities by Full-time Academic Staff (Lecturer and Above) in Teaching Semester

	1977 (B. Williams)		1993 (Anwyl, Powles & McInnis)
	CAE	Uni	Unified National System
Teaching	29.4 (65.9%)	23.3 (51.3%)	25.3 (53.0%)
Research	3.8 (8.5%)	11.5 (25.3%)	10.1 (21.2%)
Administration	8.0 (17.9%)	7.0 (15.4%)	6.4 (13.4%)
Community Activity	2.0 (4.4%)	1.9 (4.2%)	1.8 (3.7%)
Other Activity	1.4 (3.1%)	1.7 (3.7%)	4.1 (8.5%)
Total Hours	44.6	45.4	47.7

Growth of Non-Core Work

Despite the apparent lack of change in the actual time reportedly spent on administration for the sample as a whole, 56 per cent of academics believed their administrative work had increased substantially over the previous five years. When asked about the factors that interfered with the quality of their teaching, academics ranked 'administration' ahead of 'too much teaching', and 'too many students', as a hindrance. Likewise, 48 per cent felt that administrative commitments in their departments and faculties interfered with their research activity.

The combined impact of 22 per cent of time spent on administration and other work has been the cause of immense frustration for academics. Peripheral work can too easily be trivialised and dismissed as merely irritating distractions. This overlooks the compounding and cumulative impact the extra tasks have in fragmenting work patterns, forcing academics to give the necessary sustained attention to their research and scholarly work in so-called private time.

The non-core tasks that generate the greatest negative responses amongst the academics surveyed and interviewed have largely been brought about by the demands of institutional accountability and quality assurance processes. These include staff appraisal, student evaluation of teaching, and the growing demand for data concerned with institutional profiles and audit reporting.

The increase in marginal work also includes work associated with the search for research grants, consultancies and course promotion. The demands of marketing, costing, coordinating and evaluating are for most academics add-ons with no reduction in the time required for core work. More academics than ever are spending large amounts of time developing research proposals that fail to attract funds. The pressure on academics to supplement institutional and personal incomes has grown to the point where the search for money often assumes an urgency over the importance of core work.

Given the somewhat confidential nature of private consultancy work undertaken by academics, it is hardly surprising that little is known about the nature and extent of the time involved. The survey data suggest that, on average, academics spend about the same amount of time on consultancies as they do on all other professional activities, such as conference attendance and training.

Although they are still largely voluntary, staff development activities have become firmly entrenched in the calendars of Australian universities, and in the diaries of academics. Fifty-one per cent of the academics surveyed in 1993 had participated in staff development activities in the previous 12 months. In the two years since the survey there has been a rapid increase in the breadth and depth of such programs. A broader agenda for professional development programs for academics beyond teaching or research now includes such matters as time management, consulting skills, and staff supervisory responsibilities.

Closely associated with the growth of non-core work is a change in annual work cycles. Academics have had distinctive annual work cycles and weekly hours give a limited and often misleading picture of how academics work. Unpublished data from the 1993 survey suggest that the difference in hours worked between the teaching and non-teaching periods is now only marginal, especially for senior academics. This is in contrast to data reported in the 1970s which reported a substantial drop in workload over the summer break, somewhere in the order of five to seven hours per week (McInnis 1990).

Diversity of Impact

Shifts in work patterns have not been felt evenly across the academic world: there are divides according to institution, disciplinary background, work preferences and, increasingly, academic rank or classification. The most widely discussed change to work patterns for individuals since the introduction of the Unified National System has concerned the institutional pressure to give more attention to research instead of teaching or vice versa.

While former college of advanced education academics have been under pressure to raise their research profiles, those from the pre-1987 universities are finding demands for improved teaching imposing on research careers. In both instances, significant adjustments have had to be made by individuals as the increase in time required for one set of tasks is perceived to hinder success in the other.

Variations by level of appointment

Analysis of the changes in the patterns of work by the rank or classification of academics presents particular difficulties since it involves comparing pre- and post-binary groups. Nevertheless, Table 2 shows shifts in the amount and proportions of the time spent on major work activities by seniority from 1977 to 1993. The total work hours for professors and associate professors increased somewhat more than for senior lecturers and lecturers.

The proportion of time given to research dropped for all ranks since the amalgamation of the sectors, with the possible exception of professors. Associate professors surveyed in 1993 spent six per cent less of their time on research than their university counterparts in 1977, senior lecturers spent three per cent less, and the proportion for lecturers declined by five per cent. This reduction in research time was roughly matched by the increase in 'other' work for each of the three ranks by about five per cent.

Professors still worked, on average, the longest hours per week (51.2 hours) but the difference between them and associate professors was roughly the same in 1993 as it was in 1977. The pattern of change for professors was in other respects different from the rest: the proportion of time they spent on both teaching and research increased notably (by 12 per cent) while the time on 'other' activities accounted for rather more of their total increase in workload. Somewhat surprisingly, their administration and committee work had declined considerably.

Table 2: Estimated Average Hours per Week Spent on Major Activities in Teaching Semester by Full-time University Academic Staff (Lecturer and Above) 1977 and 1993 by Academic Classification

	<i>Professor</i>		<i>Associate Professor/ Reader</i>		<i>Senior Lecturer</i>		<i>Lecturer</i>	
	<i>1977</i>	<i>1993</i>	<i>1977</i>	<i>1993</i>	<i>1977</i>	<i>1993</i>	<i>1977</i>	<i>1993</i>
Teaching and teaching related duties	16.6 (35%)	19.4 (38%)	20.4 (45%)	22.7 (46%)	24.2 (54%)	25.0 (53%)	27.0 (60%)	28.0 (60%)
Research	10.6 (23%)	12.1 (24%)	13.2 (29%)	11.2 (23%)	10.8 (24%)	10.0 (21%)	11.3 (25%)	9.2 (20%)
Administration and committee work	15.8 (34%)	11.5 (22%)	8.2 (18%)	9.1 (19%)	5.8 (13%)	6.1 (13%)	4.2 (9%)	4.5 (10%)
Community service	2.5 (5%)	2.6 (5%)	1.8 (4%)	1.8 (4%)	2.2 (5%)	1.8 (4%)	1.5 (3%)	1.5 (3%)
Other (inc consulting)	1.5 (3%)	5.6 (11%)	2.2 (5%)	4.2 (9%)	1.9 (4%)	4.1 (9%)	1.3 (3%)	3.7 (8%)
TOTAL HOURS	47.0	51.2	45.8	49.0	44.9	46.9	45.3	46.9

Variations in work preferences: teaching and research

The academics surveyed in 1993 were asked to indicate their preference for teaching or research, or both. Twenty-six per cent of the sample were clearly oriented towards teaching and expressed little or no interest in research. A similar proportion, 28 per cent, saw themselves primarily as researchers.

The teaching oriented group spent most of their time teaching undergraduates, were more likely to be negative about their working conditions, and more likely to identify obstacles to their teaching, as well as to the unlikely possibility (in their case) of research. They were also more likely to aim to balance their work and life, to be less driven by the intrinsic rewards of work, and to value their leisure and free time. Teaching oriented staff were relatively more negative about their careers, which they believed had deteriorated since the introduction of the Unified National System.

The research oriented academics surveyed were more likely to say they subordinated their lives to their work, to be looking for a new job, and to believe their careers had improved in the five years prior to the survey. They were also more ambitious and focused in their work, more individualistic and less interested in collegial work practices. They saw their teaching as hindered by the demands of their current research and the poor quality of students.

Issues for Consideration

- The patterns of change outlined in this paper suggest: the possibility of internal restructuring of academic roles on the basis of performance; the potential for increasing status differentiation on the basis of teaching and research; and the already clear demand for collective effort to improve productivity and efficiency in teaching and research.
- The intrusion of excessive accountability processes, the regulation and codification of work practices associated with teaching and research, and the pressure for compliance to routine management requirements undermine the primary work motives of academics and, paradoxically, put both quality of outcomes and productivity at risk.
- The addition of new roles and tasks is associated with a greater fragmentation of work time and energy. Increasing work at the margins clearly has the potential for undermining the exceptionally high level of satisfaction academics get from their work and the control they have over both the processes and the outcomes. It is likely that, without a major rethinking of staff recruitment and staff deployment strategies, these

changes will contribute to a decline in academic work satisfaction, morale and productivity for many academics.

- The so-called ‘non-teaching’ period when academics were able to fully engage in highly productive research, and scholarly work in preparation for teaching, has increasingly come under pressure from other activities. The annual peaks and troughs of teaching and research have been evened out by demands for involvement in a wide range of income-generating activities, such as summer schools. This incremental shift in the traditional work cycle of academics warrants closer investigation since it has important implications for staff deployment and may require new approaches to leave policy at the institutional level to facilitate academic productivity and work satisfaction.
- There are potential tensions between the two substantial sub-groups of academics with preferences for either research or teaching. To maximise their competitive edge, institutions and departments may be forced to develop stronger divides between those who teach, and those who research. This is particularly likely in smaller departments and

institutions where internal restructuring of roles and changes in recruitment practices can encourage concentrations of effort to meet the pressure for productivity. While there may be benefits for institutional and individual productivity in research, and quite possibly for the quality of teaching, stronger differentiation and restructuring of roles has the potential for creating status distinctions within institutions. It also has the potential for undermining the possible benefit to students of any synergy between the two activities.

- Anecdotal reports suggest that the level of change in work practices since the survey was conducted has accelerated. Considerable career uncertainty and role ambiguity will test the motivation and productivity of academics. There is a clear need for close monitoring over time of the impact of changes to work practices at both system and institutional levels.

Further Reading

Altbach, P. G. (1996) *The international academic profession*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Kogan, M., Moses, I. and El-Khawas, E. (1994) *Staffing higher education*. London: Jessica Kingsley.

McInnis (1990) *Academic staff activities* (Report for the Higher Education Council). Canberra: NBEET.

McInnis, C., Powles, M. and Anwyl, J. (1995) Australian academics' perspectives on quality and accountability. *Journal of Tertiary Education and Management*, 1(2), pp. 131–139.

McInnis, C. (1996) Change and diversity in the work patterns of Australian academics. *Higher Education Management*, 8(2), pp. 105–117.

Sheehan, B. and Welch, A. (1995) *Profile of Australian Academics: Findings from the International Survey of Academic Staff*. Canberra: AGPS.

Williams, B. (1979) *Education, Training and Employment: Report of the Committee of Enquiry into Education and Training*. Canberra: AGPS.

Further Information

*The response rate for the questionnaire survey was 49 per cent; 1621 questionnaires were returned from 3332 distributed. The sample basically matched the national profile on age and discipline with some slight, but acceptable, variations in rank and sex. The 1993 survey questionnaire included:

- demographic characteristics of academics;
- educational backgrounds;
- political and social values;
- the changing nature of academic work;
- views of institutional governance;
- patterns of appointments and promotions; and
- teaching and research roles.

The author of this report is Craig McInnis of the Centre for the Study of Higher Education, University of Melbourne. The Occasional Paper is based partly on a paper published by the author in *Higher Education Management*, July 1996, Vol. 8, No. 2.

Additional copies of this publication and earlier reports in the Higher Education Series are available from the Higher Education Division of the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs by phoning the Research and Communications Section on (02) 6240 9673.

ISSN: 1034-9960

DEFTYA No: 6022HERC97A