

Witness Statement

Linda Kirkman

I Linda Jane Kirkman of

do state as follows:

Background/Experience.

1. I work at La Trobe University in both the College of Science, Technology and Engineering, La Trobe Rural Health School and the University Department of Education (both at the Bendigo Campus).
2. I am a casual lecturer, tutor and facilitator.
3. The Health Science interdisciplinary Core First Year subjects taught by me in the last five years are *Social Determinants of Health, Individual Determinants of Health, Research and Evidence in Practice, Introduction to Professional Practice* and *Perspectives on Health and Wellbeing*. I have also tutored in the online subject *Rural Health*.
4. I have previously taught *Women and Health* to 3rd and 4th year students at Masters Level. I also wrote the curriculum and undertook the assessment and documentation for this course.
5. My lectures are original and based on the research evidence.
6. In Education I taught a mandatory first year subject *Concepts of Wellbeing* for six years. In 2015 I taught health education to third year students (with three days' notice, as the regular teacher unexpectedly went off on leave).
7. I have also taught Sex Education to Diploma and Bachelor of Education students and have lectured in social studies.
8. The students I teach are workers in allied health jobs, nurses and trainee teachers.
9. I am awaiting my contract for 2016, which will be my fourteenth year working as a casual academic.
10. Prior to being engaged by La Trobe University I was a secondary school teacher for around 20 years then a Health Promotion Team Leader in a Women's Health Organisation for 3 years from 2002-05.
11. The original opportunity to teach at La Trobe arose from my experience working in Women's Health.
12. I have a Bachelor of Arts Degree, a Diploma of Education, a Graduate Diploma and Masters of Health Science and a PhD in Health Sciences. My PhD will be formally conferred in April 2016.
13. My PhD was around sexual mores in rural Australia. My PhD was ratified on 12 August 2015.

My experience as a casual in Higher Education

14. I was willing to enter into casual employment when I did due to my life stage and experience. I come from the Australian generation that was educated for free and I had a paid studentship when studying teaching which guaranteed me employment. I subsequently spent 20 years in the secondary school sector.
15. I went directly from secondary teaching to a job in women's health as health promotion team leader, where I worked for three years. I loved the work but left as the actual work environment was not pleasant. So I went from certainty and security into casual teaching as that was what was available.
16. I completed my Masters Degree whilst teaching at La Trobe University (2005-2007).
17. I also spent 18 months while I was teaching an online subject and doing paid examination marking, living at La Trobe Bundoora campus and working in residential services there. This was over 2007/08.
18. I returned to Bendigo and to casual teaching in 2008 and had, and continue to have, around 8-12 teaching contact hours per week during semester.
19. In 2008 I was treated like a staff member. I had an office, a good paid induction, visibility and support. This has now all changed. Inductions are still available but limited.

Preparation, Marking and Consultation

20. Preparation and marking, and of course teaching are paid for under our Enterprise Agreement. However I wish to provide an idea of the work involved in my 'average week' in order to demonstrate the time remaining for discipline currency and professional development.
21. During an 'average week' over the last 5 years I would interrupt my PhD study and writing to plan and prepare for at least 2 or 3 different subjects, sometimes in different faculties (Health Science or Education).
22. This will involve pre-reading, chasing course expectations, watching/attending lectures. In Health now the blended learning teaching style means there are no face-to-face lectures; they have been replaced with short videos to be played in class. Responsible preparation entails watching these in advance, as well as doing all the reading assigned to students. We are given a copy of the text book to enable this preparation.
23. Student assessment periods are peak marking periods for teachers. I find that not only am I doing marking though, but I am also supporting anxious students. I've learnt over the years to use my time appropriately by working out which students have a genuine need and which just want some reassurance.
24. Marking can involve reading 100,000 words or more. We are paid for 4,000 words per hour but it doesn't matter whether we are marking 8 students' work at 500

words each or 4 students at 1,000 words each. This does make a difference to time spent marking as you must download the work, read and comment on and mark it, record the mark in the system and upload the assessment. As a professional educator my preference is to give thorough feedback and each separate 'piece' of work takes time.

25. When I started teaching we were allocated 1 hour per student for marking (and there were approximately 25 students to mark). Now I receive 10 hours allocated to mark each class and there may be up to 30 students. This change has occurred over the last four years or so.
26. The way the subjects have been redesigned means there is less external marking, and more multiple-choice-marked-by-machine tasks. This is not good pedagogy, just cheap to administer. I include tips to pass multiple-choice tests as part of my teaching. In my view though, this form of assessment will not make for better health practitioners; the pedagogical research confirms this view.
27. As I noted above, the form of assessment is not considered in the overall marking rate. Another example is the marking of student presentations. Students may do a 15 minute group or individual presentation in class and then submit a hard copy of their presentation. We are not given any associated marking time to mark this work but are supposed to mark it in class. However, we really need to look back over the hard copy presentation to see if the student met what was required, if we are to be fair to the students. This can only be done outside of class time. This work is expected to be done in the 'preparation' time.
28. In a marking week, I can have 20-30 hours' work *in addition* to classes and class preparation during nights and weekends.
29. I must also keep up to date with on-line materials, student forums, post updates, and share resources on the facilitator forum. It is my professional attitude and my personal nature to share so when I think information or knowledge can assist others, I share it.
30. I also see pastoral care as preparation and support of students. We recently had a student who was a man in his 40s, living in his van on campus. He had all sorts of personal challenges and problems; in such circumstances, you are not just an educator to the student. Though I did not teach this student, I observed my casual academic colleagues supporting him and consulting with each other on the best ways to support his academic progress.
31. I also instigate sessions which support my students in other ways, but for which I am not paid. For example, I have run 'how to' sessions on how to write an essay say at 8am before formal classes start. Students who have focussed on sciences don't always come to University with the skills for essay writing. There are sessions available in Orientation week on such things yet students are not always receptive to it then, and want it when it is directly relevant, and can be applied to a specific task.
32. The evidence I give below in relation to the time I spend on Discipline Currency, Pedagogy and Professional development is about time spent *in addition* to these already substantial time commitment inherent in my job.

Professional induction

33. When I first arrived at the University I was given a paid induction and a hard-copy handbook on the University and the faculty. Now, all of the information is on-line and you must find out about institutional policies and procedures in your own time.

Discipline currency, Pedagogy and Professional development

34. I must do lots of in-depth reading to keep up to date with scholarship and research in my area of expertise in order to inform my teaching content and practice.
35. For health science and sex education – my speciality areas – I devote at least an hour per day every day to keep up to date with research and publications; so I would estimate between 5-7 hours per week, every week of the year. I encourage excellence in myself and my students and I would not be a good academic if I was not up to date in my chosen field.
36. I try to take advantage of professional development opportunities on my campus and others. I would attend 5-10 days of professional development per year. Recent examples include sexual health forums, presentations and workshops such as research skills, public health research, visiting scholar talks and conferences. This is in addition to monthly teaching and learning conferences, PhD presentation seminars and in-services, such as a 3 day in-service on statistics. All of this occurs in my own time, reducing the time I have available to do paid work.
37. I try to present at conferences, to disseminate my work, keep up to date, and network in the field. I apply for scholarships and awards to contribute to costs. An example is I received an award to attend a conference in Manchester in 2014. I agreed to chair some sessions so that my conference fee was waived. I received a small contribution from the university as a post-graduate student and covered the rest of the costs myself. I received no support as an employee for this conference.
38. On average I would attend around 3 public health conferences per year.
39. Some professional development involves me travelling to a Melbourne campus. I pay my own travel costs.
40. I work in a collegial environment. My colleagues and I will teach a subject and give each other feedback on methods used, what worked and didn't and so on. We share our experience and expertise. From my experience I have observed that this professional reflection is important for all teachers and enhances the delivery that students receive, as well as provides support, information exchange and professional development.
41. In terms of pedagogy, I try to have some personal time for reflection on teaching methods and the teaching I do and, as I indicated, discussions with colleagues. Last year I did a formal course on how to teach on-line and I paid to get the Certificate qualification in this. This was a 6 week course that I did in my own time and it required 4-5 hours per week of work in order to meet the requirements. I passed the course.

42. Now that I have finished my PhD, I will somehow seek to maintain collegial relationships. This will be hard as I don't attend staff meetings and have had to push to be included on staff mailing lists. I am likely to have to leave my desk space in the post-graduate laboratory to make room for a new post-graduate student so collegial interaction will be less incidental – I will need to make deliberate time. If a person's main work area is at home this becomes isolating and does not allow for collegial interaction.

Use of technology

43. I use my home computer, internet connection and phone for work at my own expense. I estimate that I would spend at least 10-12 hours per week on the phone and/or computer.
44. I of course claim this work use as deduction on my tax assessment
45. The University supplies software for PhD students, for Microsoft Office and data analysis and bibliographic software. However all other technology expenses, such as home computer and external hard drive to back-up work must be met by the casual staff member.
46. Non-casual staff members are supplied with a laptop.
47. I use my computer at home for reading articles and reports in order to be current in my discipline, to upload and download documents associated with marking and for record keeping. I am not obliged to be on campus unless I am teaching so at times it is more practical to be at home if I will be marking until, say, midnight.
48. My supervisors are well aware that I use and pay for my own technology at home. It is just considered part of the job.
49. I am on a plan for internet and telephone that costs me \$110 per month; costs are higher in regional areas such as Bendigo. I cannot get naked ADSL so pay \$30 per month for a landline phone that I leave unplugged. (The only calls were from telemarketers.) I estimate 50-60% of my home technology use is work-related.
50. When I first moved into my current house in 2013 I could not afford a good computer and fast internet access. However I cannot work effectively or stay up to date without these tools. After a few months my very generous neighbour gave me her Wi-Fi password so that I could access the internet.
51. Before this time I spent 3-4 months walking to another Bendigo campus of La Trobe University which was 10 minutes away, with my laptop computer, and once there I sat outside on the steps working so that I could access the University Wi-Fi. I did this after house; the building was closed at 5pm.
52. My income over the last decade or so has been about \$20,000 per annum.
53. I love teaching and am passionate about learning and helping students, but it is a struggle to survive.
54. As an expert in my field I am called upon for additional unpaid work. For example, I do advocacy and awareness raising in sexual and relationship diversity, I have been interviewed by ABC local and national radio and am called on by journalists from

time to time. I have been invited to be on university panels informing students about sexual health and relationships; this work is unpaid. I have been invited to participate in presentations on sexual health to students by the university counselling team, yet funding is not available to pay me to do this. I participate in order to be visible and to contribute.

55. I am aware that long-term casual work disadvantages me as a professional and, if I wasn't so committed, it could disadvantage students and the quality of teaching. In my case, this doesn't occur through lack of knowledge or discipline currency or poor teaching methods, but it could if I didn't work so hard.

56. I worry about the effect on students from things outside of my control such as having the latest information from the college or missing out as I am a casual.

Linda Kirkman

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