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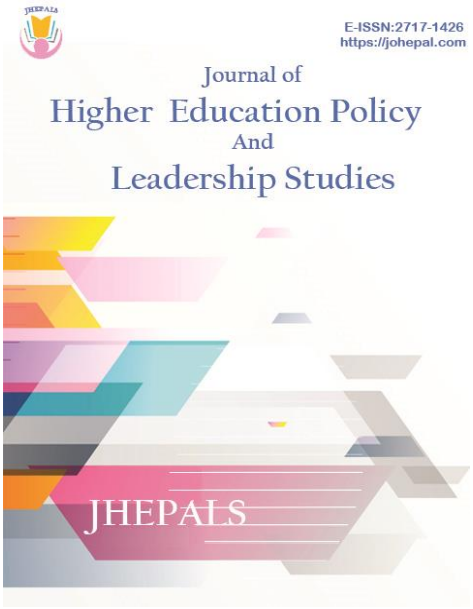
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Conveyance as the Missing Links in Onboarding Models: The Case of Higher Education

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Conveyance as the Missing Links in Onboarding Models: The Case of Higher Education

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Abstract

To allow new employees to better settle into a new job, the management and/ or HR departments of organisations implement onboarding of newcomers. In context of higher education, aacademics must be aware of the 'home' institutions regulatory requirements and organisational processes and receive realistic job expectations regardless of where the academic is situated before joining the 'home' university. Successful onboarding of newly recruited academic staff allows them to become familiar with the regulations of the higher education industry; to understand the organisational culture and the way of operation and quality assurance in their new university. As result, successful onboarding improves the experience and job satisfaction of new academic staff and talent retention at universities. This article critically examines the onboarding process of new academics in a large university in Australia. It reports what new academics expect after accepting their job offer and the onboarding process. It discusses how the onboarding experience impacts the overall experience of new academics at the university and provides recommendations for policy makers and university management.

Keywords: Induction; Higher Education; New Academics; Onboarding; University

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Introduction

To allow new employees to overcome possible anxiety and uncertainty and better settle into a new job, the management and/ or HR departments of organisations implement onboarding of newcomers. Onboarding refers to formal and informal practices, programs, and procedures used to transition newcomers from outsider to insider status. Onboarding efforts are related to creating a successful process to assimilate newcomers to the organisational culture, values, ethics, procedures, laws, and regulations. Onboarding is a strategic part of the recruitment and hiring success and requires long-term measures for success, including the time that new employees take to get up to speed and how long they stay.

In context of higher education, academics must be aware of the 'home' institutions regulatory requirements and organisational processes and receive realistic job expectations regardless of where the academic is situated before joining the 'home' university. Both early career stage and senior academics require understanding of their new roles and knowledge of the organisational environment. Successful onboarding of newly recruited academic staff allows them to become familiar with the regulations of the higher education industry; to understand the organisational culture and the way of operation and quality assurance in their new university. As result, successful onboarding improves the experience and job satisfaction of new academic staff and talent retention at universities.

A failure to recognise the individual needs of diverse new academics, such as teaching- and research-focused academics, industry professionals transferring from a non-academic career, post-doctoral students, and international recruits result in the lack of organisation-wide consistent systems and an inadequate onboarding. Unsuccessful onboarding leads to new academics' struggling with the assumed knowledge, unfamiliar organisational processes, and cultural norms, creates serious implications for academic workload, and, in some cases, deviant workplace behaviour. This, in turn, increases job dissatisfaction and academic staff turnover.

This study examines the onboarding processes through the experience of new academics in different discipline, schools, and faculties of a large Australian university (referred thereafter the university). The overarching research question addressed by this study was: *What was the onboarding experience of new academics?* Specifically, we address the following research questions: *What did new academics expect after accepting their job offer? What did new academics expect out of the onboarding process and how it should be carried out? How does the onboarding experience impact the overall experience of new academics* at the university? This paper is structured as follows: it begins with the literature review, introduces the methodology, presents data analysis on the insights gained out of onboarding experience of new academics and offers recommendations on creating a successful onboarding process. The received insights were analysed and explained by consulting with the extant literature on onboarding. The study extends the literature on onboarding by proposing the new – fifth- element to the 4Cs onboarding model (Bauer, 2010), namely – conveyance. It offers specific recommendations to policy makers and management of the higher education sector on successful onboarding process.

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Understanding Onboarding: Literature Review

The purpose of this literature review was twofold: at the start of the study, the purpose was to gain an understanding of the subject of onboarding, especially in context of higher education; when the data was gathered and analysed, the literature was used to make sense and discuss the findings and prepare recommendations. The main driver of this review was to understand what support organisations should offer to their newcomers and what activities are involved in successful onboarding. The extant academic and professional literature on onboarding informs readers on theory and methods of practice, procedures, and interpretations of onboarding. This study focuses the literature on onboarding around the following main three themes: (1) benefits of organisations from their successful onboarding programs and the implications of not having the right onboarding process in place, (2) the most influential models of onboarding that can be adopted by organisations in establishing or revamping their existing onboarding, and (3) activities should be included in successful onboarding?

Onboarding is defined as "all formal and informal practices, programs, and policies enacted or engaged in by an organisation or its agents to facilitate newcomer adjustment" (Klein & Polin, 2012, p. 267). The literature on onboarding consistently recognises that it is both a formal and informal process. Onboarding is viewed as "an essential program during which new hires are often *formally* welcomed and supported with necessary information and resources, as well as *informally* guided and helped by their co-workers to settle down and perform effectively" (Ibrahim et al., 2022, p. 986). Initially, the term "onboarding" was used to describe the process of incorporating new managers into the organisation, not new employees (Clouse, 2020). Rather, the term "orientation" was used in relation to integrating new employees into the organisation. Employee orientation is implemented by organisations to allow new employees to familiarise the organisation's "philosophy, job requirements, customs, ethics, values, laws, and regulations" (Ibrahim et al., 2022, p. 987). The orientation programs introduce new employees to the people who they will be working with as well as the broader organisation. Orientation sessions commonly address topics, such as organisational culture, policies, structure, values, and ethics (Becker & Bish, 2021; Klein & Weaver, 2000). The term "induction" is commonly used in relation to programs, such as orientation (Antonacopoulou & Güttel, 2010). While the literature on human resource management uses the terms onboarding, orientation, and induction interchangeably, for the purpose of this report the terms 'orientation' and 'induction' are considered as the main gears of the onboarding process. This view is consistent with Bauer (2010) and Sharma and Stol (2020) who consider the term 'onboarding' as the most comprehensive.

The literature discusses two main outcomes of onboarding: immediate and remote (Becker & Bish, 2021). The immediate onboarding outcomes include role clarification, perceived organisational fit and social integration (Clouse, 2020; Klein et al., 2015), political awareness and workshop integration (Bauer, 2010). The remote onboarding outcomes have been associated with job satisfaction, intention to leave, and withdrawal behaviours (Elting, 2015; King et al., 2018; Meyer & Bartels, 2017; Sharma & Stol, 2020).

The main *benefits* of a well-planned and structured onboarding include the following: costs saving associated with new recruitment, greater employee engagement and contribution to the organisation. Onboarding is used by organisations to encourage certain

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attitude, establish, modify, and shape the employee behaviour, promote knowledge in the new employee. This results in more efficient contribution of the new employees to the organisation, reduces turnover and absenteeism. Effective and structured onboarding "can increase the retention rate of employees by over 52%" (Singh et al., 2022, p. 781) and this, in turn, will allow organisations to save costs on new recruitment and keep talent in the organisation. More active and more effective onboarding allow organisations to achieve "2.5 times as great revenue growth and 1.9 times as great profit margin when compared to organisations that are less active and effective in relation to onboarding" (Frögéli et al., 2023, p. 2). Onboarding is reported (Strack et al., 2012) as one of the key six HR practices that distinguish high performance companies. Yet, many management consultants argue that onboarding is not only a function of HR, rather the management and senior staff should be actively involved in this process. Several scholars link high performance in organisations to their ability to acquire and retain human capital resources (Meizlish et al., 2018; Frögéli et al., 2023; Saltmarsh & Swirski, 2010).

Several onboarding models address what organisations do or should do to implement successful onboarding. The best known, empirically tested, and influential models are the Inform-Welcome-Guide (IWG) model (Klein & Heuser, 2008), the Four C's (inter-related four components, such as compliance, clarification, culture, and connection) model (Bauer, 2010), and the socialisation tactics model (Van Maanen & Schein, 1979). The IWG model includes three categories: *Inform* (communicate to newcomers, provide them with resources and training), *Welcome* (welcoming newcomers, e.g., through a morning tea with senior colleagues, facilitating their socialization in the organisation) and *Guide* (assist newcomers with transitioning from outsider to insider through mentoring them or allocating them a buddy who guides newcomers into their new experiences). Figure 1 below presents the alignment of both these onboarding models.

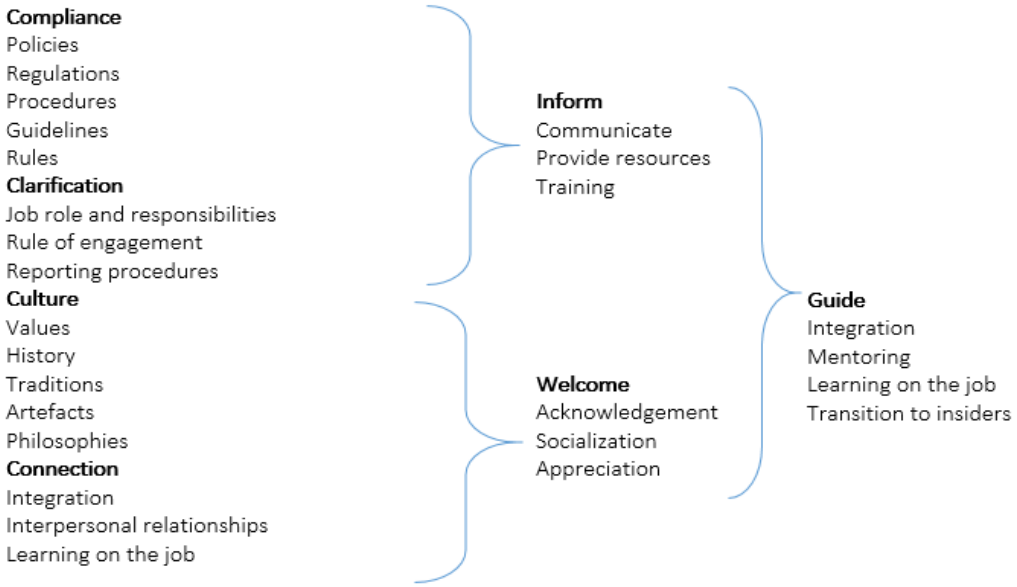


Figure 1. The alignment of the Four C's and the IWG models (adopted from Bauer (2010); Klein & Heuser (2008)

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Research Methodology

This study was performed as qualitative research to allow interpretation of insights from newly recruited academics and understand the subjective and socially created meanings of academic onboarding. Indeed, reality is socially built by a person or people, and this socially constructed reality cannot be quantified but may be understood through the interpretation of data (Melnikovas, 2018). As opposite to positivist research methods (Roberson & Perry, 2022), interpretivist studies seek to access more profound understandings; to learn more about how people make sense of their past and present to sustain their own realities (Gioia et al., 2013: Gioia & Pitre, 1990). This interpretivist study will comprehend and demystify the mystery of individual perception and experience that represent the onboarding processes. This study uses an inductive method for discovering patterns, concepts, and connections (Gioia et al., 2013: Gioia & Pitre, 1990). The inductive method of this study allows to generate findings from important, frequent or dominating themes emerging from raw data (Roberson & Perry, 2022).

The raw data was generated through interviews with newly recruited academics. The data on new academics recruited during the two years before the start of the study was provided by the HR Department of the university. The following criteria were established to define what the term 'new academic' means:

(1) Brand new to the university (never worked at the university before and have been appointed to an academic role) – external to the university,
(2) Previously worked at the university, left the university more than one month from previous engagement, and return to the university for a new academic role – external to the university,
(3) Current employee of the university who recently started a new academic role (not as result of academic promotions, rather, as a second job or a subsequent job) – internal to the university,
(4) Previously worked at the university, left the university, and return to it for a new academic role within one month from previous engagement – internal to the university.

The interview protocol was developed based on the literature on onboarding. It was fine-tuned based on the data from university *Exit interviews* to ensure that certain questions were asked, and certain experiences were discussed. The interview protocol was further fine-tuned after the first 25 pilot interviews were conducted and certain consistent themes started to emerge from these first pilot interviews. When interviews were arranged, the respondents provided very positive feedback on the fact that such study was performed, e.g. "*this is very important*," "*the questions make sense*"; "*we get many e-mails and are asked to provide feedback; I am often annoyed by these requests, but this is really useful*", *"It is good to know that the university try to understand the experience of new academics".*

Interviews were conducted with 54 new academics appointed at academic levels, from Lecturer, Senior Lecturer to Associate Professor and Professor. The academic roles of the interviewees were distributed between Teaching academics (24%), Research academics (20%), and Teaching and Research Academics (56%). Most new academics who were invited

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for an interview responded positively and agreed to be interviewed promptly. In some cases, interviews were scheduled in a few weeks after an initial contact was made, based on the availability of the respondent. Most interviews were conducted face-to-face and some interviews were conducted online. All interviewees, except two, agreed to have their interviews recorded. When recording was permitted, interviews were recorded using the Ooter software. Written notes undertaking during all recorded interviews were used to check and, if required, correct the text of recordings. In addition to new academics, interviews were conducted with management, namely with Business Managers and with portfolio leaders of the university. Total number of interviews – 67. These additional interviews were used to gain additional insights about the required information that should be shared with new academics and the possible implications of not doing it right. The interviews were conducted during the six months of one academic year.

Recruitment of Participants

Before the data on new academics from the HR department was obtained, respondents were recruited ad-hoc, for instance, some interviewees were recommended to researchers via the university network for early and middle career scholars, others volunteered to be interviewed after learning about the current study. After receiving and analyzing the data on new academics from the HR Department, respondents were recruited based on the numbers of new academic appointments in their schools, starting with the schools with the higher numbers and finishing with the schools with the lower numbers of new academic appointments. Interviewees were invited to ensure their diversity, e.g. from different discipline groups within the school, different time of appointments, e.g. within last two month before the data was received, within a year and two years; gender, level of appointment and teaching and research academics. Interviewees were recruited based on the following criteria:

(1) diversity of academic levels of appointment,
(2) representation of academic roles: teaching, teaching and research, and research academics,
(3) being part of different discipline group within the school; and
(4) timing of appointments between January 2021 and July 2023.

Data Analysis and Findings

The data allowed us to understand what was working in the onboarding process and what were the main challenges experienced by the respondents. Many new academics highlighted that they were happy to join a large university and emphasized resourcefulness and access to certain research tools, for instance, software, subscriptions and data bases which were not available to them and/or had limited availability at their previous universities. All respondents, except one, said that they have felt “welcomed” at the university.

The onboarding process is inconsistent between faculties, schools, and discipline groups withing the same school. One school with a high number of new academic appointments has a comprehensive welcome package for new staff with names, responsibilities, and contact details of the administrative staff. Many respondents reported that they were welcomed by their Head of School who provided initial guidance and sent

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relevant information. Other respondents shared that they have worked closely with their Discipline Leaders, Campus Director and Course Coordinator who assisted them to settle in. Some respondents shared that learning about a job offer from the university made them very happy, one respondent compared it with receiving a marriage proposal and other significant events in their life. Yet, settling into the job has not been as positive as their initial reaction to receiving a job offer. Many respondents commented that onboarding is unstructured, there is a lot of useful information, but it takes a lot of time and frustration to find it. New academics have different experience in terms of settling into the role, having (in)sufficient time to prepare the teaching materials and publish the document about their subjects on time for the start of the study period. Some new academics had to learn and teach themselves a new course and gain the required professional accreditation while teaching that course. The problems were identified by respondents were analyzed and grouped at the three distinct stages, as presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1.
Distinct stages of academic appointments and experienced problems

Stages	Experienced Problems
Conveyance: accepting the job offer, signing the contract visa application and relocation	Waiting for the contract and responses to inquiries in relation to certain clauses in the contract
	Clarity regarding the starting date
	Uncertainty with getting Australian visa and lack of continuous communication and visa support due to staff turnover or changes of staff roles at the International/ Visa department
	Inconsistent experience with relocation, most respondents were happy with the relocation and temporary accommodation but many of them experiences difficulties to find accommodation in the new city
	Difficulties finding accommodation for rent or for buying were mostly reported by staff who arrived alone and/or as a single parent
Arriving on campus/ between first few days to the first four weeks on the job	No one in the office to talk to
	Not being paid after the first fortnight due to a contract was not processed
	Lack of understanding what is expected to do on second and the following days
	Being disconnected from the rest of the team due to issues with office allocation
	Problems with after-hours access to the office, printing, receiving the right IT and telephone
	Being under pressure to coordinate and teach units during the week following the arrival on campus
	Having to figure out everything rather then being taught
Between the first month and first 18 months on the job	Lack of clarity about the role of the unit coordinator, e.g., assessment extension system and boundaries of the role
	Difficulties to locate certain required resources to do the job of the unit coordinator
	Insufficient time to prepare the unit prior coordinating and teaching
	Lack of understanding research expectations and research profiles
	Difficulties registering for HDR supervision
	Lack of certainty and understanding of the requirements for continuous appointment (this was highlighted by academics on fixed term contracts).
	Being reactive about learning, e.g., in response to something went wrong, after being told that something was not right.

Initially, the data was analyzed according to the four inter-related elements of the Four C's model (Bauer, 2010), the most used onboarding model: compliance, clarification, culture, and connection. However, the data consistently highlighted the importance of

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another component - ***Conveyance***. This is understandable considering that the university as well as the higher education sector promotes staff mobility and international/inter-state recruitment. As one of respondents stated: *"onboarding starts well before the first day in the office".* This additional to the FourC's model component is included in the following report of findings. The data clearly extends the "clarification" component of the Four C's model by highlighting the ***boundaries*** of the academic role. Table 2 below presents main challenges experienced by new academics.

Table 2.
Main challenges of new academics presented according to the Four C's model (Bauer, 2010)

Conveyance*
33% of respondents experienced delays in their contract being prepared by HR Department with minimum two weeks and maximum 24 weeks to issue a contract
Inadequate support in getting an Australian visa: 16% of respondents have to relocate from overseas and 50% of them experienced problems with their Australian visa. 2 out of 8 respondents who experienced problems with their visa reported that they did not receive adequate support from the university to obtain a visa.
Difficulties to find a rental accommodation or accommodation to purchase, especially for respondents who came to the university on their own or as a single parent.
Lack of introduction to a relevant staff: 23% of survey respondents were not welcomed on their first day in the office
Lack or delay in getting a computer (e.g., over a month), access to the office (e.g., from one to three weeks)
Difficulties to use/find information on Staff portal
Limited information about staff benefits and campus facilities
Compliance
Compulsory online training is often perceived as a hurdle rather than as an opportunity to learn about the university and about the academic role.
Online training is perceived as time consuming, stressful, compliance driven.
Some online modules (e.g., on indigenous matters) are viewed as very informative and useful.
Some content of online modules is irrelevant to certain academic roles.
The amount of online training and the time frame are overwhelming. Some new academics tend to jump to the quizzes.
Training should be done in stages so that people have time to reflect and ask questions.
Overreliance on online training, multiple links to policies and documents as opposite to "human touch", opportunities to ask questions, gain *tacit knowledge from experienced colleagues.*
Complexity of the Ethics system, lack of differentiation between research projects with high and low risks in terms of the required details
Clarification
Difficulties locating the required resources online: the Subject Document Builder, certain functions of Blackboard, Student Progression Policies, Assessment Moderation. As one respondent commented: "*If you need to find something on University Websites, just Google it". "I have to learn about 12 different systems".*
The role of the unit coordinator is not clear despite academics' awareness of the Handbook of the Unit coordinator and its multiple online links.
The information about the role of the Unit Coordinator is viewed as "fragmented," "very uncertain", having 'various pieces there and then", a lot of things to "figure out", "find out". This creates serious implications for the *workload* of new academics.
Lack of training in and clarity of interaction with global campuses
The boundaries of the academic role are not clear. New academics tend to say "Yes" to everything, so that they do not miss an opportunity. Many respondents reported that they do not know when it is appropriate to say "No". They tend to "*agree to everything and be a problem-solver*." Many respondents reported that they feel overcommitted, overwhelmed, work after hours and during their own time. This creates serious implications for the *workload* of new academics.
Learning occurs in a reactive way: when something is wrong, new academics learn how to address a problem.
The assessment extension system is unclear: there are multiple applications based on students' self-assessment which was introduced during the COVID-19 time and remains in place. Dealing with multiple applications for assessment extensions causes "a of stress" for new academics and increase their *workload*.
Unclear Grade Centre system, Blackboard functions and the Unit Outline Builder system

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Problems with encouraging students to attend classes: there are cultural expectations in some professions that students can learn everything online. This creates "empty spots" in students' learning and increase academic *workload in* responding to individual students' inquiries about assessments.
Insufficient time to prepare the subject and its materials before teaching it
Being allocated to teach a unit outside of one's competency and now being informed about this allocation on time.
Culture
Inconsistent views and experience on the University Welcome Day. Some academics were very happy to learn about university's history and have a tour around campus. Other respondents reported that they were either not invited or do not recall being invited. Some respondents wanted to hear about university's competitive strategy and working with global campuses.
Being reactive in learning: learning in response to something went wrong rather than being prepared to deal with problems in advance
A lot of assumed knowledge about what new academics should know
Having to learn different systems online. As one respondent commented, *"I had to spend a lot of time having to find all those things again because the university webpage is so dreadful, so hard to navigate".*
Cultural expectations to accommodate all students' requests, e.g., on assessment extension based on self-assessment, which increases academic workload.
Arm-length relationships, limited opportunities to find a mentor or a buddy
Connection
Inconsistent connection between new academics and their experienced colleagues across different schools: in some schools, new academics are invited to join ongoing research projects, whereas in other schools, new academics are frustrated on not receiving the expected guidance or not having collaborative research opportunities
Lack of guidance regarding research expectations for new members of the research programs, having to make up for unperforming team members.
Awareness about limited time among colleagues and being considered when to ask questions. Many respondents commented that they do not want to be a *"burden*", *"there is no one to talk to", "people are very nice but they are time poor", "everyone is very busy."*
Hard to understand what colleagues teach, what research they do, who to collaborate on a grant application.
Limited visibility of the key personal related to research commercialization
Limited opportunity for cross-school and cross-faculty collaboration
Hard to get in touch with staff in the ROC's office, everything is online
Interested to connect with other researchers at the university, talk to people about research, share the experience but were not aware of Network for early and middle career scholars

*****Conveyance is not part of the Four C's model (Bauer, 2010). Rather it emerged from the data

The Role of Senior Leadership in Onboarding of New Academics

The initial interview protocol did not include specific questions about the role of leadership and Heads of Schools in the onboarding experience of new academics. Rather, questions were asked: "Do you feel welcomed?" "Who welcomed you on your first day in the office?" "What did you find useful?" Responses to these questions were common in highlighting the importance of being welcomed and acknowledged by Head of School (and in some cases by the PVC or Campus Director). This is consistent among all respondents, regardless of their academic level, from Lecturer A to Lecturer E.

One respondent stated that he was grateful to the Head of School for his special support during a challenging personal situation. Another respondent shared that their Discipline Leader opened her house to this interviewee and his family when they arrived in the new city and could not find suitable accommodation. One respondent shared that the Head of School walked this academic to arrange a staff ID card on their first day in the office. Another respondent highlighted his appreciation of several check-in meetings organised by the Head of School to discuss how this academic was settling in:

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> "Head of School initiated the first couple of first meetings, and I probably initiated the next couple. I always felt that I was welcome addition to his time. Every time I had booked something he said, I am so glad to see you put something in the calendar for us … I just I did not feel like I was wasting anyone's time because you can feel like you are asking too much. I felt encouraged to keep asking for more meetings whenever I needed to."

Similarly, respondents highlighted their appreciation of being welcomed by their senior colleagues, Discipline Leaders, Course Coordinator, or a Campus Director. Below are some quotes to illustrate this:

> "My senior colleague came to my house and brought me on campus. She introduced me to the admin team and other colleagues. She walked with me to the administrative department where my staff ID was made."

> "My head of School sent me all the documents to allow me to plan my work for the next three years, e.g. ACF."

> "Many people in other universities cannot believe how lucky I was here. My Discipline Leader was so supportive. He guided me through the whole process before I started working on my own."

Some new academics were appreciative of informal relationships with their line managers:

> "Everyone knows each other here. When I walk to the supermarket after work, I see my project leader there."

> "I met my Line Manager, and he did not start talking to me about the project. First, he explained where things are on campus. He told me that this town has a lot of things to offer. He introduced me to other people."

> "Our campus director was very supportive. We were lucky to use the accommodation and other resources here."

Some respondents shared that they appreciate some guidance rather than being told that they did something wrong or being reported to their line managers/Head of school/Deputy Head of School that they did not attend certain matters. For example, one academic commented:

> "Shortly after my arrival here, I received a note from my Head of School. The tone of this note was unfriendly "It came to my attention…" I was notified that I did not follow the univeristy's travel protocol. I did not know about this protocol. My travel was paid by the host university and was related to my job."

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Onboarding Models & HE

> When regular meetings with Head of School/Deputy were not in place, academics highlighted such meetings as highly desirable. Not being acknowledged by a Head of School was viewed by a new academic as being "undervalued": My head of School does not know who I am. I think it is because I am undervalued here. I teach the same course, but I am paid least."

Some respondents highlighted that it would be good if meetings with Head of Schools were set by the system (university, faculty) rather than being requested or facilitated by the new staff member who does not want to take time and be a "burden" to their managers.

Respondents highlighted the role of their Head of School in their decision to stay*: "If you do not like colleagues, you spend your time with others. If you do not get support from your leader, who signs your work etc., you must leave."*

What Works Well during the Onboarding Process:

1. Being welcomed by their Head of School, Discipline Leader, a colleague who they have known before joining the university, or a colleague in their working group and/or shared office. The importance of being welcomed and acknowledged by Head of School is very high and consistent among all respondents, regarding their academic level.
2. Having a good mentor (e.g., a Course Coordinator, A Discipline Leader or a Senior Researcher, a research project leader, former supervisor of a PhD study of new academics) guiding new academics in their job.
3. Having a buddy in the discipline group or working in a small close discipline group where it is easy to ask questions.
4. Having an opportunity to meet and connect with senior leaders at the faculty events, e.g. morning tea sessions for new staff members arranged by the PVC of their Faculty and opportunities to meet other new and senior staff members.
5. Proactive role of new [senior] academics. One respondent (senior academic) proactively started working with colleagues, relevant university services (all were very approachable) and PhD students before arriving on campus.
6. Cross-institutional collaboration through events organised by the university, e.g. several research, T&R and teaching academics shared that they successfully joined colleagues from different faculties after attending an ISOLT hackathon.
7. Selected informative online modules, e.g. on indigenous matters.
8. University Welcome Day and an opportunity to learn about university's history.

Research Findings

The onboarding process should be consistent and structured across different faculties, schools, and discipline groups. The onboarding process should have an explicit plan and clear timeline with milestones to be discussed with line managers. Progress should be monitored with regular check-ins during the first year. Onboarding program should be formal and participatory. It is important to communicate its objectives, timeline, role and responsibilities and development opportunities. New academics must be clearly distinguished from other, more senior academics. The onboarding program should go

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beyond the HR department. Senior academics should be engaged in the onboarding process and function as role models. The following 12 key steps allocated in the five clusters (conveyance, compliance, clarification, culture, and connection) are recommended for a structured onboarding of new academics:

Conveyance

1. Ensure timely issue of contracts for new academics and include the details regarding the starting date, campus facilities and parking, employee benefits.

The minimum number of weeks taken to receive a contract was 2 weeks, the maximum -24 weeks and the average was 7.2 weeks. Some academics received a job offer but the contract was delayed. Without a contract, some respondents were unable to inform their previous employers about the upcoming departure. They informed their previous employers at short notice, and this caused additional stress and compromised their relationships with previous colleagues. The university might consider allowing some of the new recruits to rent accommodation on campus if they are unable to find rental accommodation elsewhere. Respondents who arrived to the university on their own or as a single parent reported most difficulties to find accommodation in the new city.

2. Provide continuous and uninterrupted visa support to academics who is relocated from overseas.

16% of respondents were international recruits and 50% of them experienced problems with their Australian visa. 2 out of 8 respondents who experienced problems with their visa reported that they did not receive adequate support from the university to obtain visa while 6 respondents to this question positively. While these numbers might not look alarming, having *"a broken chain"* visa (in words of one of the interviewees) between relevant staff members who assisted upcoming academics with their application for an Australian visa.

Compliance

3 Tailor the online training modules to specific academic roles and ensure that academics undertake their online training in stages.

The proposed "staged" training has the following advantages: (1) ensure that the learning is current and relevant (undertaken when needed and appreciated); (2) reduce the amount of compulsory training during a short period of time and allow to build knowledge in line with academic roles, e.g., one might not start HDR supervision for the new year and relevant training might not be relevant during the first couple of months on the job or one might not be involved in teaching for the first four months and relevant trainings should be postponed till the most suitable time. Compulsory online training in general is perceived as a hurdle rather than as an opportunity to learn about the university and about the academic role. When asked about the experience of undertaking online training modules, respondents commented that these training sessions were time consuming, stressful, compliance driven. Many respondents received warnings that their training was overdue whereas they were unable to complete their training online due to some access issues. Many respondents commented that online training could be useful if there was no time pressure to complete it by certain due dates. Some respondents said that they were planning to revisit the completed modules when time permits and spend more time to learn the relevant content.

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Clarification

4. Prepare and regularly update "Get ready to start your academic job at the university" package: starting date (many respondents were unclear about it), how to get a staff ID, access to e-mail and staff portal information about campus life, parking, finding the building etc.

This package should include relevant university services and contacts (names and contact details should be supported by colorful photographs of the key stakeholders), e.g. how to apply for leave, basic services, such as employee salary sacrifice and other benefits, location of training facilities, storage of bikes, showers facilities.

Ensure that a structured onboarding program is implemented for all new academics, including those who have previously worked at the university as a sessional academic or left the university and returning in a new academic role. Many respondents commented that their onboarding was probably impacted by the fact that they had previously worked at the university or have had a contract with the university as sessional academics. There were assumptions that these academics know their way around the university and its procedures, for example, in the words of our respondents:

> "some things may have been missed because they were assumed to have already been done"; "I returned to the university but the place is now different, the management, admin people, procedures are different, there was so much for me to learn"; "I felt there was a lot of assumed knowledge that I did not have which significantly slowed my productivity initially".

5. Consolidate from different university websites the essential teaching and unit/course coordination resources into an introduction package for new academics with all working weblinks, ensure that these links are regularly updated when the changes are made.

The list of essential resources for new academics should include the weblinks to the unit outline builder, functions of Blackboard, Dixon, Assessment and Student Progression Policies and Procedures, Assessment Moderation Update this information at least every six months to ensure that all weblinks are active and the information is regularly updated. In addition to the university introduction packages, schools can prepare their information regarding "go to people" with the names of relevant teaching and research support officers, admin team and their contact details. To prepare a check list for new academics and their line managers to ensure consistency across different schools of the university. Structure induction program for the first month.

6. Clarify the role of new researchers and research expectations for their roles.

A training on the following is recommended: Research integrity, Ethics, HDR Supervision, Elements, Australian research funding framework, major research centers, Foreign Risk.

While research expectations and outcomes are different in different discipline groups, it would be good to support new to an academic position staff. As one of respondents shared:

> "I would have liked to have an opportunity to sit down with my line manager 1:1 to discuss their idea of what my role was (particularly as I was starting a role that

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> I had never done before at that level) and how the team could work together. Due to another team member not meeting expectations of their role, I (and another team member) took on more workload to ensure the project did not fall behind leading to increased workload pressure and stress."

Culture

7. Restructure the content of the university "Welcome Day."

The university "Welcome Day" is very important to most respondents, although many respondents were unable to attend, and some respondents have not been invited. Non-invited (or those who do not recall being invited) new academics had previous contracts with the university. Respondents would appreciate the following content as part of the Welcome Day: the information about history of the university, international campuses, competitive strategy, structure of the university, leadership roles and academic titles, responsibility of leaders and their personal drives and stories. All respondents who attended the Welcome Day, except one, commented positively on their experience. One respondent was exposed to many people in different roles from different backgrounds and did not feel that his time was used right [to be in the room with all the staff from diverse backgrounds]. Most respondents appreciated the opportunity to see and hear from the university leaders, have a campus tour and lunch together with other new staff. It would be good to have a half day introduction plus Cultural Tour around campus, indigenous awareness, and interactive social activity.

8. Make introductions and arrange opportunities to meet staff, including outside of school and faculty.

Send e-mails to all staff to introduce new staff members. Arrange school/ faculty morning tea sessions to allow new academics to meet other staff in their schools and faculty. Some academics had opportunities to meet colleagues outside of their discipline group; others communicate predominantly within their discipline group. Several academics stated that it is hard to know who the people in their school are: "it is easy to see SLT, but I did not know who other people in my discipline group were; there was not much information about them on the school web page. What do they teach? Who shall I work with on a grant application?"

Connections

9. Arrange comprehensive training on the role of the unit coordinator, including unit coordination in global campuses, and provide monthly drop-in sessions for asking questions when they arise.

All respondents who have teaching responsibilities shared the lack of clarity in relation to the role of the unit coordinator. While there is the Unit Coordination and Delivery Handbook prepared by the Institute of Learning Excellence, this online resource is not enough to address all the needs of new academics. In words of one respondent:

> "This is all explained in writing, but there are nuances and aspects not covered in the onboarding and it has been a struggle to understand when and how things are done and who to ask when the resources do not cover a question. Everyone is over worked and busy without the time to help new staff - and I certainly so

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> not like imposing on others' time. Regular drop-in sessions for new academics to ask questions about the logistics of unit delivery would be fabulous."

This is in line with other respondents who shared:

> "I learnt everything myself through my own research, trial and error but anyone who has less initiative (or is not a previous student of the university so familiar with processes etc.) would really struggle."

All respondents shared that the role of the subject coordinator is unclear to them, e.g., respondents used words, such as "*fragmented," "various pieces there and then," very uncertain."*

One academic, an early career researcher, shared:

> "I do not know when it is appropriate to say "No." I tend to agree to everything and be a problem-solver. I feel I overcommit myself…"

Other respondents stated

> 'it is clear when to publish the unit outline and submit exams but there were so many somewhat unexpected responsibilities, e.g., supporting students experiencing domestic violence, addressing conflicts in students' teams etc.'

Several respondents stated:

> "We seem to be very reactive. When a problem occurs, we search for a solution. Why cannot we learn before that."

As one respondent shared:

> "There is very little support to develop the skills to unit coordinate. I have been a sessional tutor for several years, stepping into unit coordination was a huge jump. I did not know how to utilise many of the functions on Blackboard, I was not aware of student appeals processes (again, unless I asked a peer because an issue arose), a lot of my learning was reactive- only when an issue arose and I sought out my peers to support me to provide direction. This was not my line manager, rather it was other lecturers that I felt comfortable talking to given some of the issues felt 'silly' or rather that I felt I should know the answer."

Some respondents said that they are guided by their former colleagues who have left the university to write responses to the line managers regarding being overloaded and asked to accept additional responsibilities.

Some schools allow four to six months to settle into the new role, other schools require to start coordinating units and teaching immediately. For example, one academic commented:

> 'I arrived to the university from overseas at the end of one week and next week I had to be in front of my class.

Similarly, another academic commented:

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> "I was given two new units to coordinate and teach and had to spend several weekends doing lecture recordings for one of these units because iLectures had to be made ready before the start of semester."

The recommended training regarding the role of the Unit Coordinator should guide academics on what they should know to coordinate the unit: the unit outline builder, Blackboard, Dixon, Assessment and Student Progression Policies and Procedures, Assessment Moderation, Interaction with Global Campuses. Experienced academics (unit coordinators) should be invited to share their practical experience.

10. Allocate a buddy to all new academics. Buddies should be trained to ensure consistency across different schools and create a community of new academics and their buddies, implement several joint training sessions both for new academics and their buddies.

It is important that a buddy has certain time allocated to their workload or is given another form of recognition. Many respondents stated that they do not wish to be a burden to their "already time poor colleagues" nor want they look "silly in front of their line managers." It would be helpful to provide opportunities to ask questions outside the formal discipline area and school so that new academics do not feel that their questions are judged by their colleagues and managers.

Some respondents credited their positive onboarding experience to having a buddy, either formally allocated or a staff member informally assumed such a role. Many respondents referred to having a buddy in their previous universities as an opportunity to learn better than on his or her own or online. In the words of one of respondents:

> "I met with [buddy] weekly and she guided me through all the processes. I have the units also taught with other staff, and they have also been very helpful and supportive. I watched every video possible during my onboarding process; however, I do not think you can underestimate the power of mentoring in person."

While some respondents said that they had a mentor, e.g., a discipline Leader, another academic who shares the same office or works in the same discipline group. Other respondents did not have a '*go to person*' and found that the university has arm-length relationships compared to their previous university and stated, "*I had to rely on the procedures, policies rather than on people*."

11. Acknowledge the importance and establish the expected input of line manager in the onboarding process and provide line managers with relevant training and support.

According to all respondents, regardless of their level of appointment, the attention of their Head of School and/or Director of Campus is crucial to the positive onboarding experience. In the words of Regular meetings, opportunities to have one on one communication are critically important to all our respondents:

> "My senior colleague came to my house and brought me on campus. She introduced me to the admin team and other colleagues. She walked with me to the Student Connect where my staff ID was made."

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Onboarding Models & HE

> *"My head of School sent me all the documents to allow me to plan my work for the next three years, e.g. ACF."*

One academic stated that he was grateful to his Head of School for a special support during a challenging personal situation. Another respondent shared that his discipline leader opened her house to this respondent and his family when they arrived to the new city and could not find any suitable accommodation. This was different from the experience of another respondent who said: "everyone is busy. Most of the time there is no one to talk to."

Some academics said that they had a welcome meeting when they joined but did not see their welcoming person for another six months. There was no opportunity to follow up.

12. Recognise the role and establish the input and responsibilities of teaching support officers in the onboarding process.

Most respondents highlighted the importance of the teaching support officers but what they do differs not only among different schools but also from unit to unit and from different course/area/unit coordinators.

In addition to these 12 steps, it would be useful to review the program of conveying new academics, especially if these academics are not in the location of the main campus. While there is a comprehensive relocation package provided by an external agent, many newcomers experience difficulties with visa support and finding accommodation in the new city. As one respondent stated, "*onboarding started before my arrival on campus, but it sent a message about my future experience in the university*." To reduce possible frustration with difficulties in finding accommodation in the new city, especially experienced by single parents and people who are coming solo, the university might consider providing an opportunity to new academics to rent accommodation on campus. When a new academic is identified as the right candidate for the job at the university for his industry experience, perhaps, a payment for the required by the university recognition of his overseas qualifications can be paid by the university rather than by the academic.

Conclusion

Many organisations include in their onboarding practices only compliance and clarification activities, however, this study shows that in context of the University new academics expect that compliance and clarification are supported by conveyance, learning about the university culture, and making connections with relevant stakeholders. Many of the participants of this project were very enthusiastic about the fact that the University is examining the onboarding experience of new academics and wanted to share their experience and suggestions for improvements. This report provides the recommendations on further improvement of the onboarding process at the university. These recommendations were formulated in response to common concerns shared by and suggestions made by new academics. The recommended changes to the onboarding processes can be used to address not only the needs of new academics but also streamline and optimise university's academic procedures highlighted as problematic by the newcomers. Recommended improvements in onboarding

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processes can be used as a strategic tool to respond to the challenges that the University experiencing with regards to high bureaucracy and complexity of the academic workload. Onboarding of new academics, if it is implemented properly, can become an integral part of creating a comprehensive university-wide training and mentoring system, including training of unit coordinators and course coordinators. It can be used to facilitate teaching and research networks, enhance academic and leadership capacity building and cross-disciplinary collaboration.

Limitations of the Study

Some of the limitations create opportunities for future projects:

1. This project identified the onboarding championing areas based on the excellent onboarding experience of new academics. Each identified champion, such as discipline groups, a group of academics working on the same course, a school, a campus deserves a case study dedicated to their onboarding efforts resulting in excellent onboarding experience of their new academics. It would be good to examine staff retention in these champion areas.
2. The focus of this project was on the experience of new academics as the recipients of onboarding processes, and it would be good to extend this study by examining the experience of line managers and School Business Managers, especially in schools with high volume of newly appointed academics.
3. Some of the respondents started their new role at the university during hard or closed national or state boarders and/or university shutdowns due to COVID-19 and this impacted the initial onboarding experience of these respondents.

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Human Participants

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Originality Note

It is the author's original work and proper citations are included where others' works are used.

Use of Generative AI/ AI-assisted Technologies Statement

The author claimed that there is "No Use of Generative AI/ AI-assisted Technologies" in preparing this research.

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