

Letter to the editor

The power of collective tactics: response to Peters and Turner

Dear Editor

Peters and Turner (2014) raise a set of very important issues concerning the use of teaching-focused staff in higher education and how these staff navigate the situations they find themselves in. As their sensitive treatment demonstrates, these are issues that are tied to, but not identical with, wider concerns about casualisation in academic labour markets. We welcome the authors' brave and insightful use of autobiography to make this important contribution.

One of the most powerful strategies they demonstrate is their collaborative response to what can feel like individual predicaments. The chance to discuss the experiences of being employed in precarious circumstances engenders a feeling of recognition and the possibility of exploring how one might belong. It also facilitates the development of those projects, such as grant writing and paper writing, which make finding more permanent jobs possible. Collaboration is an invaluable mechanism for managing to survive on temporary teaching contracts. Their paper makes as good a case as any of the importance of collegiality and solidarity with and between teaching-focused academics. It seems to be becoming normal for early career and those on nonstandard contracts to be used instrumentally (ESRC, 2012). Whilst it is a structural problem, it is something all geographers are able to challenge in our everyday working practices and relationships.

There are also networks for teaching-focused staff which aim to provide collegial space outside of departments. THE GEES network (Teaching-focused in Higher Education in Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences) is one example. A LinkedIn group enables people to share information and debate about teaching and being a teacher in higher education. The network also has an annual professional development workshop. The INLT (International Network for Learning and Teaching) facilitates academics and postgraduates geographers in conversation about policy and practice in geography higher education. It is an international group that meets face to face for writing retreats and at conferences, as well as providing professional support through e-mail and sharing good practice. The Higher Education Research Group of the Royal Geographical Society (with the Institute of British Geographers) (RGS-IBG) provides another forum for discussing issues concerning higher education and geography, connecting those with interests in research, teaching, and learning through events and other activities.

These networks facilitate teaching-focused staff in the positive contributions they make to the discipline. Moreover, these networks can provide a lifeline for people isolated in their departments. We would encourage all teaching-focused staff to become involved with these networks as a means to support, and be supported by, the community. In addition, we call on heads of departments and others to ensure that those on teaching-focused contracts are supported (financially and with time in their workload) to attend these sorts of meetings, as well as wider disciplinary meetings.

We would like to thank *Environment and Planning A* for publishing the Peters and Turner paper, an important step in raising the issues that impact on short-term teaching-focused staff within universities, providing a valuable impetus to develop our networks and collaborations.

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