Policy for the Employment of Postgraduate Research Students in Supporting Teaching and Learning

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Policy on the Employment of Postgraduate Research Students in Supporting Teaching and Learning

1. Introduction

This Policy sets out the University's principles and guidance in relation to the employment and involvement of postgraduate research students to support teaching and learning. It supplements the [Code of Practice for Research Degrees](#).

This Policy should be read in conjunction with the [Procedure for the Employment of Postgraduate Hourly Paid Demonstrators/GTAs](#), which details the process for employing research students as Demonstrators or Graduate Teaching Assistants.

2. Scope

2.1   This policy applies to all postgraduate research students employed by the University to undertake teaching and/or to support learning at the University.

2.2   This policy does not apply to current full or part time members of staff of the University who are concurrently registered on a postgraduate research degree programme at the University.

2.3   This policy applies to teaching and learning support provided by postgraduate research students in the context of the provision of the teaching blocks, assessment blocks and modular blocks delivered by Brunel University London.

2.4   This policy does not apply to support/facilitation delivered in the context of extra-curricular development activities provided by the University (for example the 'Ready' programme) which would, however, fall under the University's general policy regarding its employment of students.

3. Overarching Principles

3.1   The University recognises that undertaking teaching and learning support duties represents an important professional and career development opportunity for postgraduate research students so long as such opportunities are subject to appropriate limits on workload and postgraduate researchers receive adequate training and support to fulfil their role effectively.

3.2   The University recognises that the scope to offer opportunities to undertake teaching and learning support duties will vary between Departments and research students should not rely on such opportunities being available.

3.3 The procedures for the appointment and employment of postgraduate research students for teaching and/or supporting learning should be fair and transparent, and should be consistent across the Colleges and Departments of the University. In order to facilitate this, the University publishes procedures for the appointment of postgraduate research students to hourly paid teaching and/or learning support roles. Departments are required to follow these procedures when making any such appointments.

3.4 There should be clarity and consistency over the nature of the roles to be undertaken by postgraduate research students in relation to teaching and supporting learning. Researchers can normally be employed as either a Demonstrator or a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA). The University publishes generic job descriptions for each of these roles which clarify the nature of the duties associated with the role, the maximum number of hours to be worked and the associated pay scales. The generic job descriptions also include a person specification setting out the criteria to be met by the post holder including the requirements in relation to training.

3.5 Departments may add subject-specific knowledge to the person specification criteria to inform the selection process, but any other proposed changes or additions to the generic job descriptions must be discussed with HR and agreed by the relevant College Education Manager (or their nominee) prior to recruitment to the role.

3.6 Exceptionally where, following the recruitment and selection procedure for hourly paid lecturers, it is proposed to engage a postgraduate research student who has extensive prior professional or specific experience as an hourly paid lecturer, this would be on an exceptional basis and must be approved by the Head of Department. Such appointments are still required to adhere to the 15 hours per week PGR students can be employed by the University (see paragraph 5.4).

3.7 Research students must commence appropriate training in learning and teaching before undertaking any student-facing teaching and/or learning support activities. The University will arrange for such training provision to be available centrally to postgraduate research students who teach and/or support learning.

3.8 Appropriate training in learning and teaching will also be made available to postgraduate research students without current teaching roles who wish to undertake such training as part of their personal and professional development.

4. External Expectations

4.1   The [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#) requires that *'the provider supports all students to achieve successful academic and professional outcomes*.'

4.2   The accompanying *[Advice and Guidance: Research Degrees](#)* highlights the benefits of providing opportunities for supporting learning and teaching, contingent on receiving appropriate training, support and mentoring. Teaching duties should not be so intensive or time consuming as to affect completion.

5. Opportunities for teaching and/or supporting learning

5.1   The University recognises that the involvement of postgraduate research students in teaching and learning has many benefits, including:

- Approachability, being taught by those who are closer to their own experience can result in students being comfortable with asking questions
- Small group teaching can be delivered on a wider scale
- Access to diverse role models

5.2   Students should discuss the opportunity to engage in educational support with their supervisor prior to applying for such work to ensure it is not detrimental to their studies, and is compatible with their research responsibilities and any restrictions included in their funding arrangements (for example as a condition of a scholarship or studentship).

5.3   Normally postgraduate research students should gain experience undertaking a demonstrator role (where available within the discipline) prior to being appointed to a GTA role.

5.4   The maximum amount of teaching activities (inclusive of preparation, delivery and marking) should not exceed 15 hours per week or a total of 180 hours in total across the academic year. The student contact hours should not normally exceed 6 hours per week. This time will contribute to the maximum number of hours that the University may employ postgraduate research students for whilst studying full time (currently 15 hours per week).

5.5   Postgraduate research students who engage in educational support of any sort must receive constructive and regular feedback on their performance by the module convenor/programme lead. They should also receive feedback on their activities from the students they have taught.

6. Forms of educational support to be delivered by postgraduate research students

6.1 The primary responsibility, ownership and intellectual leadership of teaching delivery and assessment always rests with a permanent member of academic staff, with accountability to the Head of Department. The role of postgraduate research students is to support delivery.

6.2 Postgraduate research students can normally be employed as either a Demonstrator or Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA). The types of educational support that can be undertaken by these roles are indicated:

Type of educational support	Demonstrator	GTA
Support workshop/laboratory sessions led by others	✓	✓
Provide feedback and/or formative assessment of practical work	✓	✓
Provide practical support in relation to final year project and masters dissertation projects	✓	✓
Provide administrative support via the University VLE	✓	✓
Provide academic support (e.g. academic advice, formative feedback) via the University VLE	✗	✓
Lead small group teaching sessions (tutorials, seminars)	✗	✓
Provide feedback and/or formative assessment of (non-practical) coursework	✗	✓
Input to course material development	✗	✓
Provide tutorial support to final year project and masters dissertation* students	✗	✓
One-off specialist lectures (UG or PGT*)	✗	✓
Summative assessment (Foundation and level 4 only)	✗	✓

Note that the level of relevant education and experience of the postgraduate research student should always be taken into account in making appointment and work allocation decisions.

*It would normally be expected that a GTA involved in supporting PGT education will have a PGT qualification or significant relevant experience.

6.3 Experience of preparing teaching material and assessment is part of the learning process, and may be made available to GTAs at the discretion of the line manager, usually the module leader. Where teaching materials already exist, it is expected that they are updated as appropriate to ensure that they are not out of date.

6.4   GTAs should **not** be permitted to act as personal tutors or be permitted to supervise masters' research/dissertation projects, although they could contribute in an advisory capacity.

7. Involvement with Assessment

7.1   GTAs can be involved in both formative (all levels) and summative (Foundation and level 4 only) assessment duties on the condition that they receive the appropriate training and guidance from those responsible for the module/piece of work, but the primary responsibility, ownership and intellectual leadership must rest with a permanent member of academic staff. GTAs should not be involved in the summative assessment of work above level 4.

7.2   Any piece of summative work marked by GTAs must be moderated in accordance with University procedures.

7.3   Whilst it should be acknowledged that GTAs play an important role in the teaching and assessment of undergraduate student work, it is important to recognise that they are not members of Boards of Examiners and that their role in the assessment process should be limited and always carried out under the supervision of a named, experienced internal examiner.

8. Training

8.1   It is University Policy that any postgraduate research student supporting learning and teaching must receive appropriate training before they can commence their duties. All research students involved in supporting teaching and learning should attend the Introduction to Learning & Teaching: Initial Training for Demonstrators and GTAs, delivered by the Academic Professional Development Unit, prior to undertaking any teaching responsibilities.

8.2   Any postgraduate research student appointed as a GTA, with regular teaching across the term, may register for the APDU: Higher Education Teaching and Learning programme (HETL) programme. If candidates have substantial teaching responsibilities as a GTA or equivalent, they will be facilitated with submitting a portfolio to achieve AFHEA status after completing this programme.

8.3   This central training should be supplemented by departmental induction and training for GTAs and demonstrators. This should include being given hands-on experience with the equipment they will be using and being familiarised with health and safety issues. (See section 4 of the [Procedure for the Employment of Postgraduate Hourly Paid Demonstrators/GTAs](#)).