

POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH HANDBOOK

Chapter 19 - Employment of postgraduate students: code of good practice

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1. Introduction

- 1.1. This Code sets out the generic requirements with regard to the employment of postgraduate students and covers employment in any capacity. Employment in a teaching or research related capacity provides an excellent opportunity for postgraduate students to develop valuable personal and transferable skills and this Code is primarily concerned with employment in these capacities.

- 1.2. Where postgraduate students are undertaking regular/pre-scheduled work as a postgraduate teaching associate, they **should** be engaged on contracts of employment within the Education and Scholarship job family. Further information can be found on the [PTA webpages](#) which **should** be read in conjunction with the guidance set out in this Code of Good Practice.

2. Responsibilities

2.1. University

The University is responsible:

- a. to the postgraduate student, to ensure that their ability to complete their postgraduate degree programme successfully within the maximum permitted period is not put at risk;
- b. for not knowingly employing someone over the University's stated hourly limits in any capacity (inclusive of work outside the duties specifically referred to in this Code), but cannot take responsibility where a student has failed to properly declare the hours they are working;
- c. for providing postgraduate students with appropriate teaching and professional development opportunities, consistent with its responsibilities to support postgraduate students and to maintain teaching quality and academic standards.
- d. towards the students being taught, to ensure that the quality of teaching and learning is safeguarded.
- e. to protect the health and safety of the postgraduate student as an employee of the University and as an enrolled student, for which the University has a particular responsibility in caring for the welfare of the individual.

2.2. Faculty or Professional Service

The Student's Home Faculty is responsible:

- a. for keeping a record of the number of hours for which a student has declared that they are being employed, and monitoring this to ensure it remains within the University's stated hourly limits, although they cannot take responsibility where a student has failed to properly declare the hours they are working.
- b. For giving advance notice of working requirements in the assignment schedule, in sufficient detail for the student to understand the time commitment and what they will be paid for.

The employing Faculty or Professional Service is responsible:

- c. for employing students in accordance with the requirements of this Code.

- d. for providing role-discipline-specific training and support for students consistent with their duties.

2.3. Student

The student is responsible:

- a. for informing their home Faculty of the number of hours they are employed across the University in any capacity.
- b. for ensuring that their ability to complete their degree programme is not put at risk by any employment they undertake, as such students are recommended to give consideration to the maximum hours of employment specified in this Code as inclusive of all employment, including with external employers. In this regard it **should** be noted that the University of Exeter Students' Guild (the SU) and INTO are external to the University and it is not a responsibility of the University of Exeter Students' Guild or INTO to monitor the number of hours students they employ are working.
- c. for taking advantage of available development opportunities consistent with their employment in order to keep their skills updated.
- d. for meeting the requirements of their funding body, where applicable, with regard to any employment.
- e. for complying with instructions issued by People Services regarding employment and payment.

3. Scope

- 3.1. The most common forms of employment are to support either research activity (Postgraduate Research Assistant) or teaching activity (Postgraduate Teaching Associate):
 - a. Postgraduate Research Assistants (PRAs), providing expert support to research projects and conference organisation;

- b. Postgraduate Teaching Associates (PTAs), providing support for teaching and learning, assessment and feedback, demonstrating (applying subject knowledge to assist undergraduates in problem solving), and 1:1 student support sessions.

These role titles will be used to refer to all students undertaking employment that falls into either category (a) or (b) above, the arrangements for which are encompassed in this Code.

- 3.2. For the avoidance of doubt, an employment relationship also arises where a postgraduate student agrees to undertake specified duties as a condition of grant by a Faculty of a bursary, studentship or similar award.
- 3.3. The Code applies only to individuals whose primary relationship with the University is as a postgraduate student. The Code does not apply to those postgraduate students who are primarily employees of the University and who are permitted to register, on a full-time or part-time basis, for a postgraduate degree. For this purpose, University employees include Knowledge Transfer Partnership (KTP) Associates, who are governed by different arrangements, and Research appointments.

4. Advertising, Recruitment and Selection

- 4.1. The University is committed to a policy of equal opportunity in respect to employment. In selecting postgraduate students for work opportunities, such as demonstrating and teaching, Faculties **should** ensure that the University's equal opportunities standards are applied. This will normally involve advertising opportunities to all eligible students in the Faculty; giving them the opportunity to put themselves forward for consideration (see also 4.4 below) and applying a fair and transparent selection policy. Further information can be found on the [Equality and Diversity and Recruitment and Selection web pages](#). The mechanism for specifying details of the role shall be through the advertisement of a job description using the [PTA generic role description](#) for a Postgraduate Teaching Associate and Faculties are expected to use the assignment schedule template to confirm the allocation and hours of work.

- 4.2. There **may** be circumstances where work is genuinely ad hoc in which case it might not be possible to advertise that opportunity in the normal manner, and where it would be acceptable to pay on an hourly basis (e.g. if someone was being brought in to cover for staff sickness on a short term basis): it is still important, however, to ensure that the student is clear about what is expected of them and whether they require training. If, however, the use of a postgraduate student in teaching is planned in advance of the module commencing then it needs to have an assignment schedule with hours mapped against it. See the section on how to assign work on the [PTA web pages](#).
- 4.3. The duties that **may** be asked of the candidate **should** be included in the Duties and Responsibilities section of the [PTA generic role description](#).
- 4.4. As applying for employment opportunities during their studies **may** form part of a postgraduate student's development, unsuccessful candidates **should** be given the opportunity to request feedback on their application.

5. Appointment

- 5.1. The employment by the University of postgraduate students is subject to the normal provisions of employment law. Faculties **should** follow guidance for the appointment of postgraduate teaching associates as outlined on the [PTA webpages](#).

6. Maximum Hours of Work

International Students who are Student/Tier 4 visa holders only: International students **may** have other working limits on the amount of paid or unpaid work which can be undertaken specified on their visa. These limits apply in addition to those specified below. Where visa conditions limit the number of hours worked per week this cannot be averaged over a longer period. Postgraduate Students on Tier 4 visas **must** not work more than the weekly working limit specified on their visa (this includes additional ad hoc hours, voluntary work and/or any work undertaken for another discipline/Faculty or employer). More information on working during your studies is available on the [International Student Support webpages](#).

- 6.1. The University **should** ensure that any employment it offers, whether through a Faculty or Professional Service, will not endanger the student's ability to complete a postgraduate degree programme within the time set by both the University and the student's funding agency (where applicable), and as such a student's lead supervisor **should** confirm that the employment was appropriate and would not be detrimental to

the student's studies. Funding agencies **may** also have more stringent requirements with regard to the maximum hours for which a student **may** be employed and these limits **should** also be consulted.

- 6.2. Employment of a full-time student **should** not normally exceed 6 hours per week in total (exceptions to this **may** occur, with the support of a student's lead supervisor when a student is employed, for example, to support field work, exam invigilation or Grand Challenges) and in all cases **must** not exceed 180 hours per year in total averaged over the course of the academic year. For part-time students, employment **may** be offered where the combined expected study¹ and work hours add up to a maximum of 1830 hours, which is the equivalent total combined study and maximum work hours permitted of a full-time student.
- 6.3. These relevant limits apply for a student until award of their programme, however, after submission of the thesis/dissertation for examination, if a case is approved by the Dean of Postgraduate Research (or nominee), taking into account the view of the supervisory team, some flexibility would be permissible. These limits include hours as specified in the assignment schedule, and students **should** not be expected to undertake any duties not clearly articulated in the schedule.
- 6.4. In giving consideration to the impact of employment on a student's studies, Faculties are advised that it is particularly important to ensure that students are not overloaded at the beginning of their programme of studies.
- 6.5. These limits apply to all employment offered by the University (or Universities at which a student is studying) in any capacity. Furthermore, students are responsible for ensuring that *any* employment undertaken is not detrimental to their studies (see also [2.3\(b\) above](#)) and advised to limit their *total* employment to the number of hours specified in this Code. Where some flexibility in the number of hours post-submission is granted (see 6.3 above) this does not diminish a student's responsibility for completing

¹ See the TQA PGR Handbook, Chapter 5: Statement of Procedures: Periods of Registration and Changes to Registration Status for Graduate Research Students, section 2 for further information.

amendments/ a resubmission on time as pressures of work would not normally be sufficient reason to justify lack of progress in a student's study or failure to submit on time.

- 6.6. The assignment schedule **should** state clearly those tasks for which a student will receive payment, and in addition which tasks fall under the guidance with regard to the maximum number of hours a student **may** work (for example, attending the LTHE programme **may** constitute a training requirement but would not normally contribute towards a student's maximum hours of work).

7. Teaching Duties

- 7.1. Where a Faculty employs a postgraduate student for teaching duties, it is the responsibility of the Faculty to provide clear and comprehensive information to enable the student to carry out their duties effectively. This information **must** be specified in the assignment schedule, and include information about:
- the module(s) to be taught and any specific module or administrative requirements.
 - the form of teaching and learning support required, e.g. lectures, seminars, tutorials, workshops, demonstrations, field trips/fieldwork, 1:1 student support sessions, ELE support.
 - preparation and marking time.
 - student assessment and feedback
 - office hours.
 - moderation of marking.
 - membership of the relevant Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee.
- 7.2. The Faculty is responsible for ensuring that postgraduate students are provided with training, support and facilities appropriate to the level and extent of teaching for which they are being employed. Subject to completion of appropriate and necessary training, a postgraduate student **may** be employed to teach on a module at any level and **may** mark formative and summative assessment and provide feedback but **should** not set summative assessments. See also paragraph 8.2.

- 7.3. Postgraduate students employed for teaching duties are responsible to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Executive Dean of Faculty or nominee for the delivery of teaching.
- 7.4. Where Postgraduate Teaching Associates serve as members of an Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee, these duties will be clearly indicated in the assignment schedule.
- 7.5. Postgraduate Teaching Associates **must** not be required to take overall responsibility for a module. Every module **must** have a member of academic staff identified as the module convenor with whom responsibility for the overall content, co-ordination, setting of and conducting of assessment of remains. The module convenor will determine how collaboration with the student over content will work and will also give guidance and advice to the postgraduate student throughout the process of preparation, teaching and assessment and feedback, as necessary and appropriate.
- 7.6. Postgraduate Teaching Associates are subject to the 'Code of Professional Conduct: relations between staff and students/between staff' and as such are responsible for making appropriate declarations about any personal relationships which exist between themselves and students whom they are involved in teaching, as any relationship **may** effect the nature and scope of the duties which it is appropriate for them to carry out.

8. Salary and Payment

- 8.1. Postgraduate students **must** be employed on approved University rates of pay, following guidance for the payment of postgraduate teaching associates on the [PTA webpages](#).
- 8.2. There **may** be occasions upon which postgraduate students **may** wish to volunteer in an unpaid capacity to assist with PTA duties where this would further their own development. Students are able to undertake a limited number of teaching sessions (which **may** involve, for example, support for lectures, tutorials, seminars, workshops, fieldtrips or lab practicals) where this is in furtherance of their own development, (up to the equivalent of 4 sessions). Students **may** not substantially contribute towards

teaching or be involved in assessment and feedback without being in receipt of a formal contract and payment.

9. Induction, Training and Support

- 9.1. Where postgraduate teaching associates are employed on contracts of employment, Faculties **must** ensure induction, probation, mandatory training (including LTHE) and Performance and Development Review (PDR) processes are completed as for other staff within the Education and Scholarship job family. Postgraduate students are entitled to claim and be paid for these mandatory activities.
- 9.2. In accordance with the [University's Code of Practice for Induction of staff](#), postgraduate students employed by a Faculty **should** receive an appropriate formal induction to their role, which is distinct from their general induction as a student to the University that:
- a. helps to develop an understanding of their role, and the aims and objectives to which they will be working;
 - b. details what knowledge, skills and standards are required to perform their specified duties;
 - c. provides guidance as to how they can continue their personal development whilst carrying out their role, e.g. by attendance on appropriate programmes offered by the Educator Development Team and by People Development, or specific staff development events organised by the Faculty.
 - d. provides essential training which meets legal obligations e.g. Health and Safety, Equality and Diversity.
 - e. provides reference to key Human Resources policies, including the [‘Codes of Professional Conduct: Relations between Staff and Students and between Staff’](#)
 - f. meets requirements of professional, statutory or regulatory bodies, where relevant.

- g. provides discipline-specific training on teaching, learning, assessment and feedback.
- 9.3. A Faculty **should** also provide a postgraduate student it is employing with appropriate information about the Faculty, its ethos, policy and procedures, health and safety, equality and diversity etc. as well as information about the facilities available to the student by virtue of their employment, including access to printing facilities, where applicable (which shall be funded separately from their personal student printing allowances), see also [10.3 below](#).
- 9.4. Faculties employing postgraduate students as teachers **must** arrange for the student to receive appropriate formally-documented training for the purpose, taking into account the level and nature of their teaching responsibilities and any prior relevant experience or training. Required training needs will be specified on their assignment schedule. Training needs **should** be assessed and recorded and any training provided both monitored and evaluated. These requirements apply to all forms of teaching activity undertaken, including:
- a. formal lecturing, seminars, tutorials and group work.
 - b. Workshops.
 - c. laboratory classes and other practicals.
 - d. Projects.
 - e. assessment strategies, marking and feedback.
 - f. 1:1 student support sessions.
 - g. Support **may** also take the form of shadowing experienced members of staff before taking responsibility for teaching.
- 9.5. All postgraduate students employed as teachers will be required to undertake the online module for [Learning and Teaching in HE](#) or equivalent. In addition:
- a. postgraduate students who have responsibility for organising and planning their own teaching and/or support sessions are expected to undertake Learning and Teaching in HE unit 2 or other sessions as defined on their assignment schedule; and

- b. postgraduate students involved in formative and/or summative assessment and feedback are normally expected to undertake [Learning and Teaching in HE unit 3](#); and
- c. postgraduate students involved in a support role in the teaching activity **may** be required to undertake other appropriate units as defined on their assignment schedule.

[Learning and Teaching in HE](#) is a practice-based course, which requires reflection on actual teaching. The Faculty is responsible for supporting and monitoring the work of the PTA in any interim period before the PTA can access the programme.

- 9.6. These requirements for formal training **should** only normally be varied where an individual's previous competence in teaching can be clearly documented. Where these requirements are varied, this variation and the reasons for it **should** be recorded in the assignment schedule.
- 9.7. Faculties **should** supplement the University's formal training programme with their own Faculty-based training programme.
- 9.8. The Learning and Teaching in Higher Education assessment, successful completion of which leads to formal [accreditation](#) leading to Associate Fellow of the Higher Education Academy and the ASPIRE Framework, as well as conferral of a '[Certificate in Advanced Study: Learning and Teaching in Higher Education](#)' (worth 30 credits) at Master's level is optional.

10. Ongoing Support and Mentoring

- 10.1. **Postgraduate Teaching Associate Coordinators:** Each discipline shall appoint one (or more if appropriate) Postgraduate Teaching Associate Coordinators (who could also be the Director of Education), who have undertaken recruitment and selection training, to coordinate teaching or other employment activities of postgraduate students, and to coordinate the necessary induction, training, monitoring and support of the students

and to ensure that any problems and issues are resolved promptly. Faculties shall ensure that time is allocated to these roles in SWARM.

10.2. **Postgraduate Teaching Associate Representatives:** All Faculties shall appoint an experienced PTA as a Postgraduate Teaching Associate Representative, following an open process, including inviting nominations from experienced PTAs. It is good practice, where numbers allow, for Postgraduate Teaching Associate Representatives to be appointed at discipline-level. The PTA Representative shall coordinate any concerns arising from PTAs in that discipline and **may** support the PTA Coordinator in mentoring less experienced PTAs. The duties of PTA Representatives will be specified on their assignment schedule.

10.3. **Faculty Information:** Each Faculty shall make available in an accessible format information to supplement this University Code of Good Practice, which shall cover in further detail key information, support and training available to students who teach in that Faculty. This shall include a named administrative contact, the name of the PTA coordinator, the PTA Representative, and any other key contacts, along with reference to their key responsibilities, and those of module convenors.

11. Monitoring

11.1. As part of the overall monitoring and teaching quality assurance, Faculties will need to ensure that mechanisms are in place to provide postgraduate students with feedback on their teaching-related activity. This **should** include feedback from the module convenor or another appropriate member of staff on their performance along with Accelerate feedback from the students on the modules a student has taught. Performance issues **should** be managed in accordance with [section 12](#) below.

11.2. Faculties **should** also have appropriate mechanisms in place, to be established and supervised by the Postgraduate Teaching Associate Coordinator(s), to enable postgraduate students to provide feedback to Faculties on issues related to employment, training and support.

12. Grievance, Performance and Conduct Procedures

12.1. Any concerns that the postgraduate student **may** have relating to their employment by the University - including the termination of employment - will be managed in accordance with procedures issued by People Services.

12.2. Where the Faculty has concerns that the postgraduate student is not fulfilling their duties effectively, the Faculty will make arrangements to discuss its concerns and agree appropriate remedies. Where, following such meetings, the student's performance does not improve to the required standard, the Faculty **should** take advice from the HR Business Partner for the Faculty.