Code of Good Practice - Employment of Postgraduate Students

TQA Manual - Introduction and Contents

Effective from the academic year 2018-19

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. It is supplemented by individual College Codes approved by the Faculty Boards.

1.2 Where postgraduate students are undertaking regular/pre-scheduled work as a postgraduate teaching assistant, 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 College or Professional Service

The Student’s Home College 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.

The employing College or Professional Service is responsible:

(b) for employing students in accordance with the requirements of this Code.

(c) 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 College 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 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.

3 Scope

3.1 The most common forms of employment are to support either research activity (Postgraduate Research Assistant) or teaching activity (Postgraduate Teaching Assistant):

(a) Postgraduate Research Assistants (PRAs), providing expert support to research projects and conference organisation;

(b) Postgraduate Teaching Assistants (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 College 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 Fellows.

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, Colleges should ensure that the University’s equal opportunities standards are applied. This will normally involve advertising opportunities to all eligible students in the College and giving them the opportunity to put themselves forward for consideration (see also 4.4 below). Colleges will apply 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 Hours Allocation Template (HAT1), accompanied by the generic role description for a Postgraduate Teaching Assistant.

4.2 The duties that may be asked of the candidate should be included in the Duties and Responsibilities section of the generic role description.

4.3 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.

4.4 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 Hours Allocation Template (HAT1) with hours mapped against it. See the section on how to assign work on the PTA web pages.

5 Appointment

5.1 Colleges should follow guidance for the appointment of postgraduate teaching assistants on the PTA web pages.

6 Maximum Hours of Work

International Students who are 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/College 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 College 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 study\(^{(3)}\) and work hours add up to a maximum of 1830 hours, which is the equivalent total combined study and maximum working 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 College Director of Postgraduate Research, taking into account the view of the supervisory team, some flexibility would be permissible. These limits include hours as specified in the Hours Allocation Template (HAT1), and students should not be expected to undertake any duties not clearly articulated in the Hours Allocation Template (HAT1).

6.4 In giving consideration to the impact of employment on a student’s studies, Colleges 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 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 Hours Allocation Template (HAT1) should state clearly those tasks for which a student will receive payment, and in addition which tasks specified on their Hours Allocation Template (HAT1) 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 listed on the Hours Allocation Template (HAT1) but would not normally contribute towards a student’s maximum hours of work).

7 Teaching Duties

7.1 Where a College employs a postgraduate student for teaching duties, it is the responsibility of the College to provide clear and comprehensive information to enable the student to carry out their duties effectively. This information must be specified in the Hours Allocation Template (HAT1) and include information about:

(a) the module(s) to be taught and any specific module or administrative requirements;
(b) 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;
(c) preparation and marking time;
(d) assessment and feedback;
(e) office hours;
(f) moderation of marking; and
(g) membership of the relevant Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee.

7.2 The College 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 8.3.

7.3 Postgraduate students employed for teaching duties are responsible to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Executive Dean of College or nominee for the delivery of teaching.

7.4 Where Postgraduate Teaching Assistants serve as members of an Assessment, Progression and Awarding Committee, these duties will be clearly indicated in the Hours Allocation Template (HAT1).

7.5 Postgraduate Teaching Assistants 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 Assistants 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 assistants on the PTA webpages. Postgraduate Students engaged on an ad hoc/casual basis should submit claims via the eClaims system for payment at the Occasional Teacher A rate (which is linked to the first point on grade E on the pay spine, and includes a pro-rata allowance for accrued holiday comparable to the entitlement for full time staff on the same grade.)

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 assistants are employed on contracts of employment, Colleges must ensure induction, probation, mandatory training (including LTTE) and
Performance and Development Review (PDR) processes are completed as for other staff within the Education and Scholarship job family. A standard allocation of hours will be paid for these activities and no further hours should be claimed unless there are specialist training requirements.

9.2 In accordance with the University’s Code of Practice for Induction of staff, postgraduate students employed by a College 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 under the ASPIRE framework and by People Development, or specific staff development events organised by the College.

(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 ‘Code of Professional Conduct: relations between staff and students/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 College should also provide a postgraduate student it is employing with appropriate information about the College, 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 Colleges 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 Hours Allocation Template. 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.

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 Learning and Teaching in HE Stage 1 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 Stage 2 or other sessions as defined on their Hours Allocation Template; and

(b) postgraduate students involved in formative and/or summative assessment and feedback are normally expected to undertake Learning and Teaching in HE Stage 2; 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 Hours Allocation Template.

Learning and Teaching in HE Stage 2 is a practice based course, which requires reflection on actual teaching. The College 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 clearly set out in the letter of appointment issued to the postgraduate student specified under paragraph 5.2 above.

9.7 Colleges should supplement the University’s formal training programme with their own College-based training programme.

9.8 Formal accreditation leading to Associate Status of the Higher Education Academy of the Learning and Teaching in HE programme remains optional and/or completion of the ‘Certificate in Advanced Study: Learning and Teaching in Higher Education’ at Master’s level (30 credits).

10 Ongoing Support and Mentoring

10.1 Postgraduate Teaching Assistant Coordinators: Each discipline shall appoint one (or more if appropriate) Postgraduate Teaching Assistant 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. Colleges shall ensure that time is allocated to these roles in SWARM.

10.2 Postgraduate Teaching Assistant Representatives: All Colleges shall appoint an experienced PTA as a Postgraduate Teaching Assistant Representative, following an open process, including inviting nominations from experienced PTAs. It is good practice, where numbers allow, for Postgraduate Teaching Assistant 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 Hours Allocation Template.
10.3 **College Handbooks**: Each College shall supplement this University Code of Good Practice with a College-specific Code of Good Practice, approved by the Faculty Boards, which shall cover in further detail key information, support and training available to students who teach in that College, and reference to which shall be included in relevant student handbooks – see also 9.2 above. The handbook shall also ensure that a named administrative contact, the name of the PTA coordinator, the PTA Representative, and any other key contacts are listed, 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, Colleges 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 Colleges should also have appropriate mechanisms in place, to be established and supervised by the Postgraduate Teaching Assistant Coordinator(s), to enable postgraduate students to provide feedback to Colleges 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 College has concerns that the postgraduate student is not fulfilling their duties effectively, the College 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 College should take advice from the HR Business Partner for the College.


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