UNIVERSITY OF YORK

TEACHING COMMITTEE

University Policy on Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs)

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Introduction

1 Postgraduate research students (PGRs, normally PhD students) who support student learning at the University of York are referred to as Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs). GTAs were formerly (until 2017) known as Postgraduates Who Teach (PGWT).

2 The University believes that the learning experience of its prospective and taught students can be enhanced by the contribution made by properly trained and supported GTAs. With their enthusiasm, creativity, and specialist knowledge, GTAs can ignite excitement and nurture interest in cutting edge research. As both students and early career researchers, GTAs can also help to bridge the gap between taught students and academic staff.

3 The University recognises that exposure to academic practice is an important aspect of a PGR’s professional development. The University has, therefore, adopted a model for GTAs that is based on the idea that GTAs develop the required skills, confidence and experience through a combination of training, working alongside experienced practitioners, enculturation into institutional values around learning and teaching, and staged levels of responsibility. This model is delivered by academic departments, with central support.

4 The University recognises a duty of care to its taught students and to its GTAs. Through the implementation of this policy, the University aims to protect and support both parties, ensuring an excellent experience for all concerned.

Ownership and reference points

5 This policy is owned by University Teaching Committee (UTC, which is responsible for overseeing learning and teaching of taught students), with input from stakeholders which include: GTAs, the departments which use GTAs, the York Graduate Research School (YGRS, which oversees the experience of PGRs), the Graduate Students’ Association, York University Students’ Union, Human Resources (which is responsible for employment policy), and those responsible for providing University training for GTAs.

6 This policy is informed by, and conforms with, the UCU/NUS Postgraduate employment charter.

Application of the policy

7 This policy applies to all GTAs at the University; it does not apply to full or part-time members of academic staff who are enrolled for a research degree.

8 Opportunities for GTAs to support student learning include demonstrating, facilitating small group teaching, and marking. PGRs may also be engaged to invigilate and undertake teaching-related administration (e.g. scheduling seminar groups, or helping to prepare documentation for external review) but these activities do not fall under the scope of this policy.

Eligibility to serve as a GTA

9 Current University of York PGRs (primarily those on PhD programmes but also those on other postgraduate research degree programmes, namely MPhil and Masters by
Research) are eligible to serve as GTAs until they have completed their programme (i.e. until their award has been confirmed by the Standing Committee on Assessment). Postgraduate Taught Students (PGTs, which include MRes students) should not normally be engaged in supporting student learning. In exceptional cases (e.g. where a taught Master’s student has considerable industry experience), permission for an exception to this policy should be sought from the Chair of UTC. Approval will be granted on a named student basis, with approval lasting for a period of up to one academic year.

10 PGRs cannot be engaged as GTAs on any module which contributes to a programme on which they are enrolled. The GTA policy does not apply to PGRs participating in peer supported learning on a programme on which they are enrolled.

Availability of GTA positions

11 Serving as a GTA can be a valuable development opportunity for PGRs, especially those who wish to pursue an academic career, as well as providing additional income. GTA positions are, however, limited and may be offered on a competitive basis. PGRs should, therefore, be aware that a GTA position cannot be guaranteed, even if they meet all the relevant selection criteria. All PGRs are, however, encouraged to access (ideally in their first year) some of the free training in learning and teaching provided by the University as part of their professional development. PGRs are also reminded that some support departments offer opportunities to serve as GTAs (see #12).

Responsibilities of departments towards GTAs

Principle: departments are responsible for ensuring that GTAs are engaged in accordance with University policy.

12 GTAs are used by academic departments to support modules, and also by some support departments (e.g. to present to school parties or to serve as tutors in the Writing Centre and Maths Skills Centre). In the case of support departments, references within this Policy to modules should be applied to other units of learning and teaching activity as appropriate.

13 Departments that engage GTAs are responsible for paying them (and must factor GTA costs into their financial planning), ensuring that they implement the University Policy on Graduate Teaching Assistants and complying with the policies and procedures relating to temporary and casual workers.

Departmental policy on GTAs

14 Departments that engage GTAs should have a policy on GTAs, which explains what activities GTAs can undertake and at what academic level (see #24). The policy should also set out the department’s approach to meeting the requirements of the University Policy on Graduate Teaching Assistants, including details of: how GTAs are to be recruited, trained and supervised, continuing professional development opportunities, and representation and integration into the academic community. In the case of academic departments, the policy should be approved by the Board of Studies and will form part of the evidence base for periodic review. In the case of support departments, the policy
should be approved by the Chair of UTC and would be reviewed by the Chair of UTC on a rolling five-year cycle.

Departmental information for GTAs

15 Departments should provide essential information for GTAs in an easily accessible format (e.g. a webpage, and/or VLE site, and/or handbook). This information should include: the name of the GTA coordinator, the department’s policy on GTAs, GTA role descriptions, training and supervision requirements, continuing professional development opportunities, access to resources and facilities, and how they are represented within the department. It should also include signposts to relevant information, including University and departmental policies and procedures on learning and teaching, assessment, equality and diversity (including disability), student welfare, health and safety, and data protection.

Responsibilities of the GTA coordinator

16 Departments should nominate a member of staff to serve as the GTA coordinator (an academic member of staff or senior member of the professional support staff). The GTA Coordinator is responsible for ensuring that the department implements the University Policy on Graduate Teaching Assistants, including:

- maintaining an overview of the use of GTAs within the department
- acting as a source of advice and support for current and prospective GTAs, and for staff using GTAs to support learning
- ensuring that the department complies with the policies and procedures relating to temporary and casual workers
- overseeing the department’s procedures for the recruitment of GTAs
- overseeing the department’s approach to the training and supervision of GTAs, including ensuring that:
  - appropriate discipline-specific training is provided
  - procedures are in place to ensure that GTAs have undertaken the required University and departmental training
  - GTAs receive appropriate support at module level
- ensuring that GTAs receive feedback on their performance for continuing professional development purposes
- coordinating continuing professional development opportunities and encouraging GTAs to participate
- working with module leaders to ensure that newly appointed GTAs are observed
- working with module leaders to address any performance issues relating to GTAs
- representing the development and other needs of GTAs on departmental committees
- ensuring that departmental policy on GTAs is kept up to date
- ensuring that departmental information on GTAs is kept up to date
- representing the department at meetings of GTA coordinators.

17 Aspects of the GTA coordinator’s role may be delegated to one or more members of the academic or support staff as long as the GTA coordinator retains overall responsibility.
Responsibilities of module leaders (or equivalent in non-academic departments)

18 Module leaders are responsible for:

- the day-to-day supervision, line management and mentoring of GTAs supporting their modules
- providing GTAs with a module-specific induction and any module-specific training
- working with their GTA coordinator to support the continuing professional development of GTAs and to ensure that newly appointed GTAs are observed
- working with their GTA coordinator to address any performance issues relating to GTAs.

19 The GTA responsibilities of a module leader can only be transferred to others, with the agreement of the GTA coordinator, if this is permitted within the department’s policy on GTAs.

Responsibilities of programme leaders

20 In the spirit of the York pedagogy, programme leaders should work with the relevant module leaders to ensure that, where possible, there is a consistent, programme level approach to the use of GTAs. As contributors to a programme’s delivery, GTAs should be included as members of the programme team (see, for example, #86 and #88).

GTA mentors

21 Departments may utilise experienced and high-performing GTAs to serve as GTA mentors, assisting staff in the supervision and mentoring of less-experienced GTAs (for example, to undertake the observation of newly appointed GTAs, see #71). GTA mentors must be supervised and mentored by an academic member of staff, who they can call upon for advice and support and, where necessary, to intervene.

The nature of GTA work

*Principle: departments should ensure that there is a clear rationale for the deployment of GTAs, in terms of the nature and academic level of the activities that GTAs support.*

22 GTAs support student learning in a number of ways, including:

- laboratory and field-work demonstrating
- facilitating small group teaching (e.g. tutorials, seminars, and workshops)
- marking, and giving feedback on, formative and summative assessments
- preparing teaching materials (e.g. digital content).

23 The University has developed generic GTA role descriptors for: (i) tutors, (ii) laboratory demonstrators, and (iii) laboratory leaders, which may be supplemented by more detailed departmental/role-specific information.

What GTAs can do: activities and academic levels

24 The department’s agreed policy (#14) on GTAs should set out what activities GTAs can undertake and at what academic level (noting the restrictions and guidance below), and there should be a clear academic rationale for the decisions taken. Departments are
reminded of the need to ensure an excellent learning experience for taught students, whilst aiming for a positive experience for GTAs too.

25 When deciding what GTAs can do, departments should consider:

- the needs of taught students (including prospective students)
- the expectations of taught students, including any claims made in publicity material
- any professional, statutory or regulatory body restrictions
- the degree of specialist knowledge and skills required for the particular activity and academic level being supported
- the degree of individual GTA responsibility (e.g. whether they are leading or assisting with an activity)
- the level of preparation required of GTAs (e.g. whether they are delivering pre-prepared material or designing their own sessions)
- the nature of the supervision of GTAs provided by academic staff (e.g. whether direct or indirect)
- how experienced the GTAs are.

*Use of GTAs to support undergraduate and Master’s programmes*

26 GTAs are primarily used to support undergraduate programmes (including support for prospective undergraduate students). Typical approaches to the use of GTAs in the arts and humanities, social sciences and sciences are given below as reference points (#28-29).

27 Departments should seek permission from the Chair of UTC if they wish to use GTAs to support Master’s level programmes (including the Master’s level year of Integrated Master’s programmes). Approval, if granted, is in terms of the principle of using GTAs to support Master’s level programmes (not the approval of individual GTAs for this purpose) and may be subject to conditions.

*GTAs in the arts and humanities and social sciences*

28 In the arts, humanities and social sciences, GTAs are often engaged to facilitate small group teaching at first year undergraduate level. Some departments engage GTAs to facilitate small group teaching at second year undergraduate level but often this is limited to experienced GTAs with knowledge of particular relevance to the module they are supporting. In most departments, GTAs are not normally engaged to facilitate small group teaching at third year undergraduate level.

*GTAs in the sciences*

29 In the sciences, GTAs are often engaged as laboratory demonstrators and to support workshops (often under the close supervision of an academic member of staff) at first, second and third year undergraduate levels.

*GTAs and marking*

30 Marking and giving feedback on formative and summative work is a skilled activity and if done poorly can have a serious negative impact on the student experience, and implications for academic standards. Departments should exercise caution in using GTAs to mark and give feedback on summative work, particularly at second year undergraduate
level and above (where marks contribute the calculation of the final degree result), and on work that requires the exercise of considerable academic judgment (e.g. essays and reports where markers cannot be provided with a detailed mark scheme and model answers).

31 Departments should ensure that robust procedures are in place to train GTAs who mark and give feedback on work. GTAs need to have a clear understanding of the standards that the department expects of students at a particular academic level and for a particular type of assessment. GTAs need to have an awareness of academic misconduct and be able to give constructive feedback that helps students to improve their performance. Training should include not only discussion of assessment policy, marking criteria etc. but also, practical exercises in marking and giving feedback.

32 Departments should also ensure that robust procedures are in place to monitor and where necessary, correct, GTA marking and feedback e.g. through the application of double-marking, moderation and table-marking practices.

33 Departments are reminded that, according to the Guide to Assessment, Standards, Marking and Feedback, GTAs can advise an internal examiner for a module on the marks to be awarded but the internal examiner must be in a position to take formal responsibility for the marks awarded.

GTAs and lecturing

34 GTAs should not normally be expected to deliver lectures, or to facilitate large group teaching in place of an academic member of staff. A GTA with specialist knowledge of particular relevance may, however, be invited to give one or more ‘guest lectures’ within a module. This can add vibrancy to a module and be hugely beneficial to a GTA’s professional development. A module leader wishing to use a GTA to deliver a lecture on this basis should seek approval from the department’s GTA coordinator and ensure that the GTAs is given the necessary support (potentially including a trial run through with feedback).

Use of GTAs for more substantive teaching roles

35 On rare occasions, there may be instances (for example where a PGR has considerable professional/industrial experience relevant to a particular module, combined with considerable teaching experience) where it is academically appropriate for a PGR to take on a more substantive teaching role within a department (e.g. co-teaching a module with an academic member of staff who retains overall responsibility for module design, delivery and assessment). In this instance, the department should seek approval from the Chair of UTC and seek advice from Human Resources on how the individual should be engaged.

Use of GTAs in exceptional circumstances

36 In exceptional circumstances only (for example, the sudden illness of an academic member of staff), and having explored other options, a GTA may be asked to take on additional responsibilities on a short term basis (e.g. to deliver a pre-prepared lecture or lead a seminar). Any such decision should be made in consultation with the Chair of the
Board of Studies and/or Head of Department or equivalent and strictly on the basis of what is in the best interests of students, and the department should ensure that the GTA has the necessary expertise, experience and support.

**GTAs and the provision of pastoral support**

37 GTAs should not provide pastoral support or general academic guidance (e.g. on module choices) to students. Departments should ensure that GTAs understand the limits of their role and know what to do if a student raises a pastoral or general academic issue with them.

**GTA access to student records**

38 Departments should ensure that their use of GTAs is in line with University policy on data protection. GTAs should not have access to SITS (the student records system) or other student records.

**Recruitment and selection of GTAs**

*Principles:* recruitment, selection and appointment procedures for GTAs should be fair, transparent, equitable, and in line with University rules and regulations on temporary and casual workers. The selection process should ensure that GTAs have the necessary capabilities for the roles they are being recruited to.

**The nature of the engagement of GTAs and departmental responsibilities**

39 GTAs are subject to the policies and procedures for temporary and casual workers set out by Human Resources. Where GTAs are engaged as casual workers, the recruiting department has particular responsibilities (see #99 for further details).

**Duration of GTA positions**

40 Departments are responsible for deciding on what basis they wish to recruit GTAs, e.g. to support individual modules, groups of modules, or for a fixed duration (subject to performance and conduct). Departments may also recruit a pool of GTAs to draw upon as the need arises, in order to maintain flexibility, but in this case it is vital that there is a transparent system for selecting suitably qualified individuals from the GTA pool when a specific GTA position becomes available.

41 Where demand for GTA positions within a department is high, the department should try to ensure that as many suitably qualified PGRs as possible can benefit from the experience.

**Advertising**

42 All GTA positions should be advertised in advance. To enable all suitably qualified PGRs to apply, GTA positions should be advertised widely, including on departmental webpages and, where appropriate, with cognate departments and (particularly for more generic positions) the central YGRS Teaching Opportunities webpage (requests for the latter should be sent to marketing-support@york.ac.uk).

43 GTA advertisements should include the expected hours of work and rate of pay, the academic level being supported, the purpose and duties of the role, and the required
training, qualifications, knowledge, skills, experience and attributes. The advertisement should include the relevant generic role descriptor (see #23), supplemented (if required) with departmental/role-specific information. The advertisement should also include details of the selection process and selection criteria. A template for the advertisement of GTA opportunities is available.

Selection process

44 There should be a clear and transparent process for GTA selection, which enables departments to identify which applicant is best suited to an advertised GTA position. The selection process can also be used to identify any PGRs who may need particular support or training if they are to meet the GTA selection criteria in future.

45 Prospective GTAs should be invited to submit (by an advertised deadline) a statement (either by letter or email) on how they meet the requirements of the advertised position. Departments may choose to ask for supplementary information such as a CV and references. Applicants should provide evidence that their supervisor(s) supports their application (#94), that they have undertaken the required training (#54-55), and that they have the required English language skills, if applicable (see #49).

46 Where GTA positions require direct interaction with students (whether face-to-face or virtual), the selection process should include a means of judging an applicant’s ability to engage effectively with students e.g. through interview and/or a presentation and/or a mock teaching session. Where a GTA role involves marking and giving qualitative feedback on non-numerical work it is recommended that the selection process includes a practical exercise in which a PGR’s potential to meet the department’s standards, with respect to marking and giving feedback, can be assessed.

47 Applicants should be judged against explicit selection criteria based upon the requirements for the advertised position. All applicants for a GTA position should, where possible, be considered together.

48 In accordance with the Equality Act 2010, all applicants should be asked if there are any particular arrangements or reasonable adjustments that could be made so that they can participate fully in the selection process.

English language skills

49 All GTAs should demonstrate a standard of English language communication skills appropriate to the role. Language competence must be checked by the department as part of the selection process. Where GTA positions require direct interaction with students, and/or marking and giving qualitative feedback on non-numerical work, GTAs who are non-native speakers of English must have IELTS 7 or above or demonstrate performance at this level. For leading tutorials and seminars (and similar) GTAs should, in addition, have IELTS 7 or above in speaking or demonstrate performance at this level. A lower IELTS score can be justified only when GTAs are engaged solely to mark numerical work and this must be approved by the Board of Studies. Departments, through their Board of Studies, may opt to set a higher English language requirement for their GTAs than those specified here. Departments may find it helpful to inform prospective PGR
students where their GTA English language requirements are higher than those set for entry to their PGR programmes to avoid disappointment.

Unsuccessful applicants
50 Unsuccessful applicants should be offered an opportunity for feedback, and signposted to appropriate development opportunities. PGRs who do not meet the English language requirement should be encouraged to improve their English language skills.

Appointment
51 An offer of a GTA position should always be made in writing. For GTAs engaged as casual workers, the offer letter and Statement of Casual Engagement sets out the terms of the relationship between the department and the GTA and should include:

- a brief description of the role
- the duration of the appointment
- the duties of the role
- any required training and/or induction activities
- the hours of work (per week and in total) including, where applicable, the estimated time to be allocated to different responsibilities (e.g. preparation, contact and marking)
- the rate or rates of pay, and the intervals at which remuneration will occur
- details of the academic staff member(s) with responsibility for supervising, line-managing and mentoring the GTA
- details of where the GTA can access the department’s policy on GTAs and departmental information for GTAs
- any legal obligations that work as a GTA in a specific department may entail.

Responsibilities of GTAs
Principle: as trainee academics, GTAs take responsibility for acting in the best interests of the student experience.

52 In accepting a position, a GTA commits to:

- undertaking the required training and induction
- allowing sufficient time to prepare for allocated tasks
- undertaking their responsibilities in a professional manner and to the best of their abilities
- engaging with their GTA supervisor/mentor on an ongoing basis
- seeking support and guidance where necessary, particularly if they have any concerns about their performance
- participating in continuing professional development opportunities
- raising any concerns about the module, or students on the module, with an appropriate member of staff
- participating in programme and/or departmental quality assurance and enhancement activities as required
acting in accordance with relevant University and departmental policies and procedures on learning and teaching, assessment, equality and diversity, student welfare, health and safety, and data protection.

53 A GTA should alert their GTA coordinator to any situation, including a personal relationship with a student, in which there is, or there could be perceived to be, a conflict of interest between their self-interest and their professional responsibility as a GTA. GTAs are bound by the University’s Personal Relationships Policy.

Training and supervision of GTAs
Principle: GTAs should receive the training and supervision they need to undertake their duties effectively.

Mandatory training
54 Before starting work as a GTA, PGRs should have undertaken training that provides them with:

• an understanding of the role of the GTA in supporting learning within the University, and in the department/disciplinary area where they will be working (including the limits of their role)
• the skills they need to undertake the GTA role effectively and with confidence (e.g. for GTAs leading seminars this might include session planning, facilitating discussion, and classroom management, and for GTAs serving as demonstrators this might include supporting learning within a laboratory setting and giving constructive feedback on laboratory reports)
• an introduction to key University and departmental policies and procedures of relevance to the GTA role (learning and teaching, assessment, equality and diversity, student welfare, health and safety, and data protection).

55 In practice, this means that before starting work as a GTA, a PGR should have undertaken:

• the University’s Introduction to Learning and Teaching course and
• appropriate training provided by the department where they will be working.

56 Departments (singly or working together within faculties) are strongly encouraged to offer a formal and comprehensive GTA training course, rather than providing training on a piecemeal or ad hoc basis. The Academic Support Office can provide details of some of the departmental GTA training courses that have been identified as good practice.

Mandatory GTA module inductions
57 In addition to the training provided by the University and department, GTAs should receive a GTA-focused induction for each module that they are supporting, in advance of their contribution to the module. The module induction provides an opportunity for the module team to come together, and includes the module-specific material that GTAs require in order to provide effective support.
58 The induction for a module should be provided by the module leader and is likely to include:

- meeting the module team (academic staff, GTAs, and sometimes support staff)
- an overview of how the module fits into the programme: what purpose the module serves and how it contributes to fulfilling programme learning outcomes
- an overview of the module including how the content, teaching methods, assessment and feedback align to enable the students to meet the module learning outcomes
- an overview of the student cohort (e.g. prior experience, particular needs)
- the specific responsibilities of GTAs within the module
- an introduction to the module VLE site and/or other electronic systems necessary for the role
- any adjustments needed to accommodate students with disabilities
- module-specific training (this is likely to be limited where departments provide a comprehensive GTA training course)
- [for seminar leaders] reading lists, content and learning activities for each seminar session
- [for demonstrators] module-specific health and safety, risks and how these are mitigated, hands on experience of equipment and practical tasks, expected results and common problems
- [for markers] the module’s assessment, marking criteria and expectations for feedback, practical tasks to help calibrate standards.

Exemption from mandatory requirements

59 A department may seek approval, from the Chair of UTC, for PGRs who undertake their departmental training to be exempted (but only if they wish) from undertaking the University’s *Introduction to Learning and Teaching* course\(^1\). The department’s request will be approved if it can provide evidence that it provides a formal and comprehensive GTA training course, that has been carefully structured, is delivered to a high standard, and that it covers the syllabus of the University’s *Introduction to Learning and Teaching* course. Approval may be time-limited and significant changes to the department’s GTA training course may invalidate the approval. Departments granted an exemption will be notified of any changes to the *Introduction to Learning and Teaching* course syllabus and will be required to adapt their training course in response, in order to maintain their exemption.

60 An individual PGR may seek approval from the relevant GTA coordinator to be exempted from undertaking the University’s *Introduction to Learning and Teaching* course and/or departmental training. Approval may be granted if the PGR has an appropriate teaching qualification (e.g. a PGCE in Post Compulsory Education) and/or can provide evidence of having successfully completed equivalent formal training at another UK university. If the qualification/training was completed more than 24 months previously, approval should only be granted where the PGR can provide evidence of recent successful teaching at tertiary level.

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\(^1\) Currently only GTAs in the Department of Chemistry who undertake the department’s GTA training programme are exempt from undertaking the University’s *Introduction to Learning and Teaching* course.
61 GTAs who are new to a module should not be granted an exemption from the module induction. GTAs who have supported a module in a previous year should be present at part of the module induction, to allow them to meet the rest of the module team and to learn what aspects of the module have changed from previous years (but may be exempted from other parts of the module induction with the permission of the module leader).

Payment for training, induction and continuing professional development
62 PGR attendance at the University’s Introduction to Learning and Teaching course and at a formal and comprehensive departmental GTA training course is not paid because such training can be considered an expected part of a PGR’s professional development. In the same way, participation in continuing professional development activities for GTAs (e.g. peer observation) is not paid as it can be considered an expected part of a PGR’s professional development. Attendance at GTA module inductions (see #57) and compulsory attendance at additional programme/module meetings or incidental training should be paid (at the lower marker rate, see #102) because it cannot be considered an expected part of a PGR’s professional development.

Attendance of GTAs at taught sessions
63 Module leaders may wish to encourage GTAs to attend particular taught sessions in preparation for their GTA role (e.g. the lectures linked to the seminars that GTAs are facilitating). If attendance at teaching sessions is required, the details should be made clear at an early stage and the GTAs should be paid (at the lower marker rate, see #102).

Supervision, line-management and mentoring
64 The module leader is normally responsible for the day-to-day supervision, line-management and mentoring of GTAs who are supporting their module. The module leader should meet regularly with the GTAs to offer guidance and support and to provide opportunities for the GTAs to discuss how the module is going and to raise any issues or concerns.

Continuing professional development for GTAs
Principle: GTAs should receive formal and informal feedback on their performance, and support for their continuing professional development.

65 In line with the University’s model for GTAs (#3), GTAs should have access to a range of support for their continuing professional development, including specialist training, feedback on their performance, and facilitated reflection.

Training for GTA continuing professional development
66 GTAs (and PGRs who are not offered or able to take up a GTA position) are encouraged to access training, support and professional development offered for GTAs by the University at no cost as part of the institution’s ‘s commitment to PGR/GTA professional development.
GTAs who are contemplating a career in academia should consider applying for the York Learning and Teaching Award (YLTA) and/or engaging with York Professional and Academic Development scheme (YPAD), both of which enable GTAs to secure transferable recognition for the work they do. Successful completion of the YLTA programme gives GTAs Master’s level credit and HEA Associate Fellowship. YPAD provides a mechanism by which individuals can critically explore ways to improve their teaching and support for student learning, whilst providing an opportunity to secure HEA fellowship at an appropriate level.

Departments are encouraged to provide training to support the continuing professional development of their GTAs, particularly to address needs identified by their GTAs or students (e.g. from module evaluation forms), or relating to discipline-specific practices (see also #88 and #89).

Feedback to GTAs on their performance for continuing professional development

Departments should ensure that GTAs receive feedback on their performance. This feedback may come from observation, evaluation forms, directly from students, and from other forms of monitoring (e.g. moderation or double marking of a GTA’s marking and feedback). Feedback should be prompt to enable GTAs to adjust their approach, if this is necessary, as soon as possible.

Departments should ensure that GTAs are encouraged to reflect upon the feedback they receive and identify how they might improve their performance. To facilitate this reflection, GTAs should have the opportunity to discuss the feedback with a member of the academic staff other than their research supervisor (for example the GTA coordinator, relevant module leader etc.). The academic member of staff should, where applicable, point the GTA towards relevant development opportunities e.g. additional training, pedagogic literature, peer observation/shadowing of academic staff.

Observation of GTAs

Newly appointed GTAs who interact directly with students should be observed by an academic member of staff (or GTA mentor). The timing of the observation should enable any performance issues and development needs to be identified at an early stage (i.e. normally within the first few weeks). The GTA coordinator and module leaders are responsible for working together to ensure that all newly appointed GTAs are observed.

In addition to performance observation, departments should have a scheme for the peer observation of GTAs who interact directly with students. The peer observation scheme may include academic staff and GTAs, or just GTAs. The emphasis of the scheme should be the provision of constructive written and/or oral feedback. GTAs should also be enabled to observe and/or shadow academic staff outside the peer observation scheme where this would aid their continuing professional development.

Evaluation forms

Evaluation forms issued to students (typically module evaluation forms) should enable students to comment on the performance of GTAs and this information should be shared with GTAs and discussed at relevant departmental committees.
Where GTAs play a significant role in supporting students (e.g. as seminar leaders or laboratory demonstrators) the format of evaluation forms should enable feedback to be directed to individual GTAs (i.e. forms should ask students to select, or invite them to name, the GTA(s) that they have interacted with). Feedback on individual GTAs should be anonymised before discussion in departmental committees.

Direct feedback from students

GTDAs who interact directly with students should be encouraged to elicit immediate informal feedback from those students (e.g. at the end of each session). GTAs may need training to help them identify suitable methods for obtaining such feedback.

Peer support for GTAs

Departments are encouraged to facilitate peer support for GTAs, which may include setting up mentor/buddy schemes (linking novice and experienced GTAs), providing the means for GTAs to share teaching materials, and supporting informal GTA groups (e.g. action learning sets, a journal club, an online community of practice) etc.

Career development for GTAs

Recording of training courses

GTA training courses (including the Introduction to Learning and Teaching) offered by the University are recorded in SkillsForge which means that PGRs can produce a record of the training that they have undertaken to share with future employers. Departments should ensure that any in-house GTA training courses are also recorded in SkillsForge so a PGR’s GTA training record is complete. Where a department offers a comprehensive, structured training course it should consider whether it might issue certificates of completion.

References

A GTA should be able to seek a reference from a member of staff (this might be a module leader or the department’s GTA coordinator) who can comment with authority on the GTA’s work in supporting student learning.

Managing GTA performance

Principle: departments must deal effectively with any concerns about GTA performance.

GTAs fall within the scope of the University of York Statement on Teaching Performance Expectations.

Departments are responsible for ensuring a high quality student learning experience and GTA coordinators and module leaders should deal swiftly and robustly with any concerns about a GTA’s performance (whether this arises from student reporting, observation, evaluation forms, or other forms of monitoring).

Where it is felt that there is potential for a GTA to improve their performance to an acceptable standard within an appropriate timeframe, action should be taken to facilitate this (e.g. through the provision of further training, or asking the GTA to team-teach alongside an academic member of staff or more experienced GTA). If it is felt that the GTA
is not in a position to improve their performance to an acceptable standard within an appropriate timeframe, the GTA should be suspended from their position and offered development opportunities.

82 GTAs should only be redeployed if their performance has been judged to be satisfactory.

**Representation of GTAs and integration into the academic community**

*Principles:* GTAs should have appropriate representation within the department and at higher levels within the University, and have the right to be represented by a trade union. GTAs should be integrated into the professional academic culture within their department.

**Departmental representation of GTAs**

83 GTAs should be represented on relevant departmental committees, including the Board of Studies.

**University representation of GTAs**

84 The Graduate Students’ Association is responsible for representing the views of GTAs at University level, including at University Teaching Committee.

85 GTAs have the right to be an active member of a recognised trade union and to be represented by that union to the University.

**Valuing the experience of GTAs**

86 GTAs should be included in programme teams and given opportunities, as valued colleagues, to give feedback to the department on the modules and programmes on which they support learning, with a view to helping the department to improve the student experience.

87 GTAs should also be given opportunities to provide feedback, to the department, on their experience as GTAs, including the quality of the training, supervision, and support provided. Departments should ensure that they take action in response to GTA feedback.

88 GTAs should be involved, as partners, in departmental quality assurance and enhancement processes, including module and programme review, Annual Programme Review and Periodic Review. Where appropriate, GTAs should be invited to participate in a department’s Peer Support for Teaching (PST) scheme.

89 GTAs should be invited to, and encouraged to attend, departmental learning and teaching events, such as away days, conferences, and workshops.

90 GTAs are eligible for University teaching awards and departments are encouraged to recognise GTA excellence alongside that of academic staff.

**Facilities and Resources for GTAs**

*Principle:* GTAs should have free access to the facilities and resources that they require to undertake the role.
91 GTAs should have free access to the facilities and resources that they require to undertake the role, for example:
   • teaching materials
   • relevant VLE/intra-web sites or similar
   • photocopying/printer credit
   • suitable space to meet with students.

The GTA as a PGR: balancing GTA activities and research

Principle: GTAs should be enabled to have an appropriate balance between their GTA activities and their research.

92 GTA work should be undertaken voluntarily and PGRs should not be pressured into undertaking unwelcome GTA commitments. The PGR and their supervisor(s) must ensure that GTA work does not contravene rules relating to hours of work (see #102), nor take precedence over the research project and jeopardise the successful on-time submission of the thesis.

93 At an early stage in a PGR’s research degree programme, the supervisor(s) and Thesis Advisory Panel (TAP) should discuss with the PGR the value of being a GTA, and encourage the PGR to complete the required training in good time. Where teaching opportunities are not available within the department, the PGR should be advised to explore possibilities in other departments and/or centrally.

94 If a PGR wishes to apply for a GTA position they must seek approval from their supervisor(s). Approval should normally be granted if, and only if, the PGR is making good progress with their research degree programme. If a PGR is refused permission and wishes to query that decision they should contact the department’s GTA coordinator for advice in the first instance. If they wish to take the matter further they should contact the Chair of the departmental Graduate School Board.

95 Following appointment as a GTA, supervision and TAP meetings should be used to monitor the PGR’s GTA workload, to ensure that it is manageable. If serving as a GTA is having a negative impact on a PGR’s research degree programme, the supervisor should not approve future applications for GTA positions and, if necessary, should liaise with the PGR and GTA coordinator to agree a course of action for any ongoing GTA appointment.

96 At the start of their research degree programme, PGRs should focus on establishing their research and undertaking any required training (including GTA training). This means that PGRs (unless they have significant teaching experience) should not normally undertake any substantive GTA work (e.g. involving significant preparation) in their first term and possibly their first year. PGRs should be cautioned against relying financially on GTA work towards the end of their research degree programme, when their priority should be the submission of the thesis.

Pay and conditions for GTAs

Principle: GTAs should have a fair rate of pay for all hours worked and their conditions of engagement should be fair, transparent and in line with University policy.
Regulation of GTAs, including in relation to conduct and performance

97 GTAs are engaged as temporary and casual workers and their payment and conditions are subject to the policies and procedures for temporary and casual workers set out by Human Resources.

98 Any concerns regarding the conduct and/or performance of a GTA will be dealt with under the relevant staff policies of the University. Misconduct as a GTA may have implications for a PGR’s student status. A PGR’s conduct as a student may also have implications for their ability to serve as GTA and, for this reason, if a GTA has their PGR student status suspended or terminated for any reason, their GTA role should also be suspended or terminated.

99 GTAs are normally engaged as casual workers. Departments are responsible for complying with the requirements set out by Human Resources with respect to the engagement of casual workers including: (i) checking that a prospective GTA is registered with Human Resources as a casual worker (this will also ensure that Payroll is aware for payment and tax purposes), (ii) issuing each GTA with a Letter of Engagement, (iii) authorising timesheets to enable GTAs to be paid, and (iv) maintaining appropriate records. Additional rules apply to GTAs who are on Tier 4 student visas. Full details on the engagement of casual workers are available from Human Resources (https://www.york.ac.uk/admin/hr/browse/temporary-workers). Responsibilities may change in response to government policy, including rulings from UK Visas and Immigration (UKVI).

100 A PGR on a leave of absence may be engaged as a GTA (subject to any visa restrictions) but the department should ensure that this is in the PGR’s best interests and does not conflict with the reason for which they were granted leave of absence. GTAs on leave of absence are not able to access University training.

101 Reasonable adjustments in working practices (e.g. increasing the time allowed for preparation or marking scripts) should be made for any GTAs with a disability. Advice should be sought from the Department’s HR adviser.

Payment of GTAs

102 Rates of pay for GTAs vary according to the task performed and level of individual responsibility. Rates of pay are set by the University, with reference to the institutional pay scale, and revised on an annual basis. The lower (marker) rate of pay is applicable for GTA training and preparation (where this is paid, see #62-63).

Hours of work for GTAs

103 PGRs must abide by the restrictions on paid work detailed in the Policy on Research Degrees. Full-time PGRs can undertake a maximum of 20 hours of paid work a week but this is subject to supervisor approval and may be further limited by restrictions imposed by the PGR’s sponsor/funding body and/or the UKVI. All GTA hours (i.e. including preparation and marking time) count towards the weekly maximum and departments
should check that GTAs are not going over the weekly limit by undertaking paid work (GTA or otherwise) outside the department.

104 GTAs should be paid for the hours worked. When calculating the amount of time required by GTAs for tasks such as preparation, marking and giving feedback, departments must be reasonable in their expectations and should consult with their GTAs on this point.

105 GTAs are entitled to paid holiday which may not be taken at the times they are required to support learning.

Teaching stipends

106 PGRs should not be expected to work as GTAs without receiving payment. Where a PGR receives a stipend from a department in return for supporting learning, the number of hours of work required per year should be clearly set out and the stipend should provide at least the cash equivalent that the PGR would receive if engaged directly as a GTA. PGRs receiving a stipend for supporting learning should have the same rights and support as other GTAs.

END