

# Postgraduate research student involvement in teaching and learning at King's College London

<b>Policy Category:</b>	Academic
<b>Subject:</b>	Postgraduate research student involvement in teaching and learning at the university
<b>Approving Authority:</b>	Academic Board (SMT OR College Council)
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	Vice-Principal (Education) and the Executive Director, Students & Education
<b>Delegated Authority:</b>	SED and Adam Fagan
<b>Related Procedures</b>	(Title & URL)
<b>Related College Policies:</b>	<a href="#">R6 Working and Teaching During a Research Degree</a>
<b>Effective Date:</b>	June 2021
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## PURPOSE & SCOPE

Since 2014, there have been significant changes to the Academic Regulations for Research Degrees. A major strategy review of postgraduate research student employment when teaching at King's College London was undertaken in 2019, led by the Vice Principal (Education), culminating in a thorough overhaul of our approach. Intranet pages for the new framework can be found [here](#). A pilot Development Programme has also been delivered by the King's Academy.

This updated policy reflects all these developments, with the aim of providing greater clarity and alignment of practice across the university.

## DEFINITIONS

Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs): the term used for any postgraduate research (PGR) student who is engaged in educational support of some form within the University.

## POLICY

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1. The three guiding principles of the policy are transparency, consistency and operational simplicity.
- 1.2. GTAs should be recognised as having a dual role at the university – as research students and employees. Our approach to GTA employment recognises that their first commitment is to the successful completion of their academic studies, and their work as a GTA should be compatible with that priority.

- 1.3. Across the university various academic faculties, GTAs play a wide range of roles (see 3. Role of Research Students in Educational Support) and wherever possible, GTAs undertaking regular/pre-scheduled work should hold an employment contract with the University.
- 1.4. All faculties should appoint an academic staff member with responsibility for GTAs (the GTA Lead)<sup>1</sup>. See section 11 for further details.
- 1.5. GTAs are expected to maintain standards of quality, professionalism and professional ethics appropriate for any member of academic staff (see Academic Misconduct Policy).

## **2. Benefits**

- 2.1. The primary motivation for the university to employ GTAs is to provide professional developmental experience and training for our community of PGR students. Acquiring teaching experience and skills is an important component of the doctoral experience. It should be encouraged by supervisors where opportunities exist, and where the student is making good progress with their project/thesis.
- 2.2. Faculties, schools and departments should make research students aware of the range of benefits gained from engaging in educational support. These include:
  - gaining teaching experience;
  - enhancing and learning personal, professional and career development skills;
  - interacting with the teaching community within a department;
  - contributing to their own research through improved knowledge of their subject;
  - accruing financial benefits
- 2.3. Faculties, schools and departments should make it clear to undergraduate students (UGs) the benefits they gain from being taught by GTAs. These include:
  - approachability – being taught by those closer to their own age/experience, which can result in UGs being more comfortable with asking questions and seeking advice;
  - flexibility – faculties/schools/departments are better able to deliver small group teaching on a wider scale;

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<sup>1</sup> A list of Faculty GTA leads can be found on the King's Academy [GTA Professional Development](#) One Stop Shop course pages, under: Dashboard > My courses > GTA One Stop > Getting Started > The GTA Role at King's: 2. Faculty Information. [GTA One Stop Shop](#)

- knowledge – GTAs who have engaged in academic practice workshops bring up to date knowledge from their research which informs their teaching;
- role models – GTAs can inspire taught students to pursue research/teaching as a career

### **3. Role of Research Students in Educational Support**

3.1. The central guiding principle is that the primary responsibility, ownership and intellectual leadership of teaching delivery and assessment should always rest with a member of academic staff e.g., programme/module convener. GTAs are there to support delivery. As a result, the following examples of undergraduate educational support could be delivered by GTAs:<sup>2</sup>

- Assisting with lab sessions, other small group work to develop student skills, demonstration for experiments/techniques in lab-based science and computing;
- Delivering research methods tutorials;
- Facilitating ‘problem classes’;
- Leading seminars/small group teaching;
- Holding tutorials;
- Careful and proportionate preparation for teaching activities. In some instances, materials will be provided by departments / schools / faculties;
- If required, marking and assessment (formative and summative) under supervision of module leaders or other appropriate academic staff;
- Provision of timely and useful formative and summative feedback to students, holding weekly office hours or similar to provide students with opportunities for face-to-face meetings, and providing feedback and guidance via e-mail where needed;
- Maintenance of information and resources on KEATS and interaction with students via the virtual learning environment (VLE);
- Attendance at lectures where needed/requested to ensure consistency of module delivery;
- Routine administration and correspondence associated with teaching delivery;
- Liaison with senior colleagues regarding contributions to module development (e.g. course material, content development), planning of teaching and monitoring student progress;
- Input to syllabus development.

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<sup>2</sup> The types of educational support offered by individual faculties may differ. Refer to the relevant faculty guidance documentation for further details.

GTAs will NOT be expected to:

- Lead lectures, unless they have accepted to do so on a very occasional basis, in their specialist field;
- Provide pastoral support to students or act as a personal tutor;
- Supervise Masters research/dissertation projects, although they can contribute in an advisory capacity towards projects;
- Be involved in Open Days or admissions activities;
- Provide students with references;
- Set assessments;
- Be available to students at all times;
- Carry out unremunerated additional work on an *ad hoc* basis.

Variation will exist across academic departments and disciplines in relation to specific requirements of GTAs.

3.2. As a general rule, GTAs should not provide teaching or educational support for postgraduate taught students/programmes. Exceptions to this rule include:

- Delivering a limited number of lectures/sessions where the topic is directly related to the GTA's field of research expertise, or where involvement would enhance their own research project;
- Acting as an advisor to a PGT research project, but not the lead supervisor;
- Delivering tutorials or classes on research methods;
- Assisting as demonstrators for practical classes;

All exceptions should be closely monitored to mitigate against misuse and should be monitored by the Head of Department and Executive Dean.

3.3. First-time GTAs should be given additional guidance and supervision.

3.4. Experience of preparing teaching materials and assessment is part of the learning process for new Lecturers and, where appropriate, may be made available, at the discretion of the relevant faculty / school / department, to GTAs.

## 4. Assessment

- 4.1. All student work must be assessed in accordance with the College Marking Framework.<sup>3</sup>
- 4.2. GTAs can be involved in both formative and summative assessment duties<sup>4</sup> provided that:
  - they receive the appropriate training and guidance from those responsible for the module or piece of work, and;
  - the primary responsibility, ownership and intellectual leadership remains with a member of academic staff.

It should be noted that allowing GTAs to be involved in assessment duties for courses they have taught on provides continuity benefits.

- 4.3. Any piece of summative work marked by GTAs must be marked in accordance with the College Marking Framework [guidance](#) on the use of PhD students.
- 4.4. GTAs should not be involved in the summative assessment of level 7 work. An exception might be made for practitioners with extensive experience but only with prior approval from the Chair of the relevant Assessment Board.

## 5. Eligibility

- 5.1. All research students should first seek the permission of their primary supervisor before starting any involvement in teaching.
- 5.2. Any PGR student is eligible to be employed as a GTA (assuming they fulfil the person specification for the role). Students following a PhD programme are initially registered for a MPhil degree. Normally, full GTA duties should only be assigned after successful completion of the upgrade process (MPhil to PhD). Prior to this, demonstrating in labs or contributing to practical & problem classes or methods tutorials should be permissible. Exceptions to this can be considered where MPhil students can already evidence teaching competency.

## 6. Workload

- 6.1. GTAs should be employed based on a well-designed package of teaching commitments, which offer the GTA a predictable workload and income. We seek to avoid our GTAs being asked to undertake significant duties for which they have not been recruited or remunerated, and also to avoid the proliferation of *ad hoc*

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<sup>3</sup> The Marking Framework offers examination boards seven marking models that can be applied in different instances, and guidance has now been included within the Framework on how GTAs can be employed in the context of each marking model. For full details, refer to the [framework document](#) via the Governance Zone.

<sup>4</sup> As agreed by College Assessment & Standards Committee (CASC)

contracts and additional hours being added to existing contracts during the academic year.

- 6.2. The University's [Academic Regulations](#) describe the time a research student may commit to educational support as six hours per week on average. The normal expectation is that the amount of work over the course of the academic year would usually be no more than 312 hours in total.<sup>5</sup>
- 6.3. For international students studying at the university on a Tier 4 visa, the academic regulations regarding working hours are especially important and could have very serious ramifications if ignored.
- 6.4. Time spent undertaking teaching and educational support must not negatively impact on the submission and completion of the research student's thesis. Therefore, it must be carefully monitored and assessed throughout its duration to ensure the student is on track to submit their thesis within the required timeframe. Workloads should be monitored via the progress monitoring system, with details of hours spent and activities undertaken being included under the 'Any additional comments' section of the report.
- 6.5. Extensions to submission or registration deadlines are unlikely to be granted to research students if lack of progress is due to teaching and educational support duties<sup>6</sup>.

## **7. Opportunities & Recruitment**

- 7.1. GTAs at the university should be current King's College London PGR students. We should seek to reduce and eliminate the employment of GTAs from outside the university, and we should not offer GTA work to individuals who are not registered as PGR students. However, it is acknowledged that in some departments/schools/faculties, there may not be sufficient PGR students available to meet the teaching requirement and therefore it will be necessary to recruit GTAs externally.
- 7.2. Recruitment of GTAs should always involve interviews and an emphasis on quality. Opportunities to apply for a GTA role should be open to all PGRs and follow a fair and transparent process. Where possible, the timing of this process should be designed to give GTAs early notification of the outcome of their application and the work that will be available for them, to assist in their academic and financial planning.

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<sup>5</sup> Includes all activities listed in the tariff table (see section 9. Payment).

<sup>6</sup> [Regs R6.2](#) and [Reg R4.9-R4.13](#).

- 7.3. Ideally recruitment should take place as early in the academic year as possible, so that new GTAs can access training, be inducted into teaching and marking, and observe teaching sessions.
- 7.4. GTAs who are teaching seminars or tutorial groups should have submitted a formal application for their position. This is not necessary for GTAs who are assisting with demonstrations.
- 7.5. GTA contracts should be clear about the rate of pay, the roles to be undertaken, and the terms & conditions, and these must be consistent with the GTA Framework.
- 7.6. The tenure of GTA contracts should be an accurate reflection of the proportion of the year in which they teach (e.g. September to May). A contract may not be issued for work of 6 hours or less (total) in an academic year, however GTAs would still be paid for the work as per the framework.
- 7.7. Schools and departments may not be able to offer teaching experience to all research students who want it but should endeavour to offer some opportunity to gain teaching experience to as many PGR students as possible. Employment of GTAs will be shaped by business need; the university cannot undertake to offer all PGR students the chance to work as a GTA, nor to make any commitments to the same amount or profile of teaching being available to an individual over a period of time. Faculties/schools/departments should take this into account when developing recruitment materials and liaising with students. In some cases, there may be teaching opportunities in other faculties/schools/departments.
- 7.8. The Centre for Doctoral Studies maintains a list of additional [teaching opportunities](#), such as, summer school programmes, the Brilliant Club and Realising Opportunities.

## **8. Training & Development<sup>7</sup>**

- 8.1. GTAs make a formal commitment to undertaking training and professional development. All GTAs are required to undertake designated training provided by their faculty/school/department and King's Academy. GTAs will be paid for the time spent on mandatory training. Faculties/schools/departments will determine the

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<sup>7</sup> The training and support of GTAs is a joint endeavour between the University, faculties, schools and departments. The University, via the King's Academy [KEATS resource](#), provides initial and continuing training/education and offers support for GTAs to work towards accreditation with the Higher Education Academy, while faculties and departments provide more discipline-specific training and support via the King's Academy GTA one stop shop resources on KEATS.

level of training required for their new GTAs as well as those with prior teaching experience.<sup>8</sup>

- 8.2. In conjunction with King's Academy, faculties/schools/departments will review the content of the training courses on a regular basis. PGR GTA reps should be consulted in the design of training and feedback should be sought as to what training needs are required. Participation is recorded so that GTAs can evidence the training and development activities they have undertaken.

The minimum training provision should include guidance/training on assessment (where applicable), ensuring that GTAs understand its alignment with learning outcomes, how to provide consistent marking based on locally set criteria and providing effective feedback.

- 8.3. Faculties are responsible for monitoring training. However, the process for monitoring training should be undertaken at school/departmental level and reported to the faculty, normally via the GTA Lead in liaison with the Faculty Education Committee and, where necessary, the Vice-Dean (Doctoral Studies) for issues relating to student progress. The Centre for Doctoral Studies will monitor GTA training completion on an annual basis<sup>9</sup>.
- 8.4. GTAs are encouraged to pursue Associate Fellowship status of the Higher Education Academy through the [HEA Recognition Programme](#).
- 8.5. King's Academy provides a KEATs resource called the 'GTA One Stop Shop' which houses multiple resources on learning, teaching and assessment to support the GTA experience at the university. GTAs are encouraged to [self-enroll here](#) to access the resources and to receive announcements on further opportunities and developments.
- 8.6. Faculty/school/departmental handbooks should outline the supplementary teaching support offered to newly trained GTAs. For example, all GTAs should:
- Be mentored by a full member of staff, e.g. supervisor or module leader;
  - Have their teaching observed by an appropriate member of staff, based on the type of teaching being undertaken, with a subsequent meeting in which strengths and areas for improvement are discussed;
  - Have a workspace available to them to hold office hours and undertake private student consultations;
  - Meet module convenors/teams in advance of each module starting, each semester in which they teach, and as necessary during the module.

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<sup>8</sup> Departments are encouraged to liaise with King's Academy to develop bespoke training relevant to their particular context.

<sup>9</sup> Faculties must provide an annual report (based on a structured proforma) to the Postgraduate Research Student Subcommittee. The report contains some GTA related issues, including training.



- 8.7. GTAs are responsible for ensuring that they fulfil mandatory training requirements and are recommended to keep a record of their training.

## **9. Payment**

- 9.1. All GTAs should be directly employed by the university and paid through Payroll.
- 9.2. It is a University requirement that all GTAs are paid, irrespective of any other non-monetary benefits derived. Payment comes from departmental budgets.
- 9.3. All GTAs will be paid the same hourly rate (grade 5, spine point 25 on the university's [pay scale](#)<sup>10</sup>). The rate is linked to national pay scales and will therefore rise automatically with national pay settlements keeping the university in line with national practice. All payment will be subject to satisfactory delivery of the activities. Faculties/schools/departments are free to pay more than these minima if market conditions dictate it.
- 9.4. The University has agreed a new framework tariff to take effect from September 2021 onwards for the delivery of different forms of teaching and learning.
- 9.5. Attendance at faculty/school/department training sessions will also incur payment if they are mandatory.
- 9.6. In some disciplines, research students, during the normal course of their studies/research, will find themselves working alongside undergraduate or Masters students as well as more junior research students. They may be asked to provide an oversight or mentoring role, giving advice or support on technical or analytical aspects of a research project. The sharing of such expertise is a reasonable expectation of a member of a functional research group, including research students, and is not considered to attract payment.

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<sup>10</sup> There may be market factors which mean that a pay rate higher than grade 5 is necessary. In such a case, prior agreement to payment at a higher rate based on market evidence may be paid as authorised by the Provost/Senior Vice President (Arts & Sciences) or Provost/Senior Vice President (Health), as appropriate.

## TARIFF TABLE (PAYMENT SCHEDULE)

Activity	Mode	Tariff
<b>Teaching - Preparation Time, Contact Time, Feedback &amp; Support</b>		
<b>Contact time</b>	Classroom-based teaching (based on seminar groups lasting 1 hour)	Number of seminars groups e.g. 10 (teaching weeks per semester)
	Lab-based teaching sessions	Number of Lab sessions per semester x hours per Session
<b>Preparation</b>	Classroom-based teaching where no worksheet <sup>11</sup> is provided, and independent preparation is required	2 hours preparation per 1 hour of contact time
	Classroom-based teaching where a worksheet is provided, and no further independent preparation is required	1 hour preparation per 1 hour of contact time
	Lab-based teaching where no preparation time is required	0 hours
	Lab-based teaching where preparation is required, and no worksheet is provided	2 hours preparation per session
	Lab-based teaching where preparation is required, and a worksheet is provided	1 hour preparation per session
	Lab setup/clear up	1 hour per session
	Lecture attendance or other session (where required by module convenor)	1 hour per lecture
<b>Feedback &amp; Support</b>	For classroom-based teaching, where student feedback and email responses to student enquiries are expected	1 hour per seminar group e.g.10 (teaching weeks per semester)
<b>Marking</b>		
<b>Course work</b>	1 hour per student per 15 credit module	1 hour per student per 15 credit module
<b>Exam Marking</b>	0.5 hours per student per 15 credit module	0.5 hours per student per 15 credit module
<b>SAQ Marking</b>	Short Answer Questionnaire marking where no student feedback is required.	0.25 hours per student with marking rubric
		0.5 per student without marking rubric
<b>Training</b>		
<b>Mandatory Training</b>	Includes any induction or training that is required for a GTA to deliver teaching activity	Typically, 6 hours per academic year to be allowed for training and development activities, with extra provision for new GTAs.

Effective: contracts issued for teaching from academic year 2021/22

<sup>11</sup> A worksheet or any other formal support to prepare the GTA for teaching.

## **10. Feedback**

- 10.1. All GTAs should receive feedback from students via the standard student evaluation procedures. Module leaders are responsible for responding to any issues and liaising with the students as appropriate.
- 10.2. Where a GTA receives significant negative feedback, this should be dealt with sensitively and as part of a performance/employment issue. For example, the student should be given the opportunity and support to improve their performance. However, if the problems persist, then faculties/schools/departments should consider terminating the GTA contract. This should have no impact on the continuation of the student's studies.
- 10.3. The King's Doctoral Students Association (part of KCLSU) has appointed two GTA reps – one for arts, humanities and social sciences and one for natural and health sciences. These reps meet regularly with GTAs from the relevant faculties and feedback on issues which have not been resolved at a local level to the Centre for Doctoral Studies. They also liaise with King's Academy on training issues. When necessary the Centre for Doctoral Studies should work with either the Arts & Sciences Executive Team or the Health Faculties Executive Team to resolve issues.

## **11. Responsibilities of Faculty, School and Department GTA Leads**

- 11.1. All faculties/schools/departments that employ GTAs should appoint an academic staff member with responsibility for their training and support (the GTA Lead). This should normally be for a minimum of 2-3 years, with appropriate recognition in the staff member's job plan. In schools/departments which employ large numbers of GTAs, an additional departmental member of staff or senior GTA may be appointed to facilitate regular communication with the GTA Lead.
- 11.2. In faculties/schools where research student involvement in teaching and learning is undertaken on an ad hoc or very limited basis, a GTA Lead may be appointed at faculty/school level. In faculties with a number of different schools/departments, a Faculty GTA Lead may also be appointed to co-ordinate overall strategy.
- 11.3. The GTA Lead's responsibilities will normally entail:
  - liaising across the faculty and with King's Academy to plan GTA induction and training;
  - making sure that all guidance for GTAs is up-to-date and consistent with University policies and procedures;
  - liaising with departments, programme leads and module convenors to ensure that appropriate mentoring procedures are in place;
  - organising additional development opportunities such as disciplinary specific workshops, microteaching sessions, and regular check-ins or office hours to provide support and development for GTAs.

- 11.4. GTA Leads should support the development of more experienced GTAs, for example by encouraging them to take on more varied roles and to apply for recognition by the Higher Education Academy/Advance HE.
- 11.5. Faculty GTA Leads are responsible for developing faculty strategy on all GTA issues, liaison with School/Departmental GTA Leads and quality assurance of training. They will be supported by the Vice-Dean Education and King's Academy.
- 11.6. School/Department GTA Leads will be supported by the Faculty GTA Lead (if applicable) or Vice-Dean (Education) of their respective faculties and by King's Academy.
- 11.7. School/Departmental and Faculty GTA Leads should sit on appropriate education committees to ensure co-ordination and integration of GTA teaching within the overall education strategy.

## **12. Responsibilities of the Module Convenor**

- 12.1. Module convenors are responsible for ensuring that GTAs are appropriately prepared for and supported in their roles. This may include providing access to curricular information and materials, guidance on the content and format of individual teaching sessions, and opportunities for reflection and feedback on their teaching. The level of support should be tailored to the needs of the individual GTA, taking into account their previous qualifications, training and experience and the demands of the role. Support will normally be greatest at the start of a module, with regular briefings and debriefings, and may reduce over time as the GTA becomes more confident and competent.
- 12.2. Where GTAs are involved in marking, they must receive relevant training/briefing relating to each type of assessment they undertake (e.g. essay, presentation, lab report). Where multiple GTAs, or GTAs/other staff are marking the same assignment/examination, procedures to ensure standardisation must be implemented.
- 12.3. GTAs should be presented as an integral part of the teaching team to ensure they are well received and valued by students.
- 12.4. Module convenors should encourage GTAs to evaluate their teaching and share the results of centrally collected student feedback with them. GTAs can also provide useful feedback to the teaching team regarding student progress and ideas for module development.
- 12.5. Module convenors should observe a teaching session taken by each GTA in order to provide constructive and developmental feedback, ideally within the first term and

at least once a year subsequently. They may also encourage GTAs to peer review each other's teaching.