

Graduate Teaching Assistant Scheme

Guide to the Graduate Teaching Assistant Scheme for postgraduate research students

1. About the scheme

1.1 Background

Our Graduate Teaching Assistant scheme is a programme designed to support and develop the next generation of highly talented University Lecturers from within our Postgraduate Research Student community.

The Scheme is aligned to the University's strategic aim "to attract increasing numbers of high-quality postgraduate research students and provide them with a stimulating and supportive research environment and training" and is designed to enable research students to gain valuable experience in specific aspects of effective teaching, learning support methods and student learning, with appropriate training and support.

The number of GTA positions offered through a competitive process varies from year to year and opportunities are limited. It is unlikely that positions will be available to every eligible student who applies. Schools try, where possible, to match research areas with available opportunities. There are other opportunities for postgraduate students to be employed to undertake some teaching and learning related activities, as described in the University's [policy statement on the employment of postgraduate research students as demonstrators](#).

1.2 GTA definition

GTA's are postgraduate research students whose primary status is that of a full-time university student, and who are, in conjunction with their registration as a student, appointed with a formal contract of employment from the University for their teaching responsibilities with an associated salary. GTA's will be appointed based on their skills

and capability for undertaking postgraduate research study first with potential to develop as a teacher.

2. Establishing a GTA post

New GTA posts are requested through the annual Sustainable Planning Process. Heads of School should make the case for GTA posts as part of their annual submission in late Autumn. The Planning Group will determine whether to approve the request, with Schools being informed on the outcome by the following March. If approved, Schools will then need to submit an SRF to initiate the appointment process.

GTA roles are offered as a separate contract to PhD students' studentships, and opportunities should be available to a broad range of candidates wherever possible. Thus, the GTA roles may be advertised internally within a School for self- or fully / partly funded students to apply. However, we retain the option for a School to provide funding for both the PhD studentship (fees, stipend and training support grant) and an additional GTA role to attract high calibre candidates, whereupon the usual HR processes of advertising and recruiting apply. A mix of both internally funded and self/other funded GTA roles could be appointed to meet the needs of a School.

The GTA element is additional to a studentship. PhD candidates are given or awarded a studentship to undertake their PhD, whether funded for 3 or 4 years or any variant (full time). The GTA post should be viewed as additional to their PhD studentship – akin to taking external paid employment during their studies.

GTAs are appointed at Grade 6. The Grade 6 role profile developed with UCU in 2020 reflects the expectations of a GTA. This does not conflict with Grade 5 campus jobs roles which are supporting / demonstrating roles. Delivering teaching and marking has been highlighted as a key role for GTAs, reflected in the grading at 6.

For clarity, it should be noted that a student appointed on a GTA contract cannot then additionally secure work through Campus Jobs (e.g. cannot be both a GTA and a Grade 5 demonstrator).

Options are available for the FTE and duration of GTA contracts to allow some flexibility within Schools. The GTA can be appointed at either:

- 0.1FTE
- 0.2 FTE
- 0.25FTE.

A standard 1.0 FTE is equivalent to 1545 hours per year so 0.1 FTE equates to 154 hours or 0.25 FTE is 386 hours per year.

Fractional contracts lower than 0.1 FTE do not give the GTA sufficient experience to develop, reflect and enhance their teaching skills and lead to excessive numbers of small FTE contracts which adds to both School and HR administration.

Appointments should normally be for the duration of the PhD candidate's enrolment, with a maximum of 4 years.

Preferably, the GTA role will extend for the duration of the candidate's PhD studies, again giving time for the student to develop and enhance their skills and meet the requirements for Associate Fellowship of the HEA. However, recognising that some students may wish to focus on their PhD project at the start of their studies or on writing up and submission at the end of their programme, and that scholarships vary between 3 and 4 years, appointments can be for a minimum of 2 years and a maximum of 4 years.

A GTA must not work for more than 20 hours in any given week. This is a rule for all full-time students and a requirement for international students on a student visa.

Some flexibility as to actual weekly working hours will be appropriate and it is not expected that hours will be worked evenly throughout the year. This will be managed locally and recognises the support and development needs of the GTA. The overall working time must not exceed the agreed GTA model or the 20 hour per week limit.

The GTA contracted hours should allow time for preparation, delivery and marking. It is expected that the GTA will also invest time in their own development beyond their contracted hours, for example by taking the *Prepare to Teach* course, working towards AFHEA or joining community of practice events.

The Teaching Assistant element entitles the appointee to the University standard benefits for a grade 6 employee. The "Teaching Assistant" element of the GTA role is a Grade 6 University contract and as such entitles the student to access the usual benefits afforded to all staff on such a grade. This includes, for example, annual leave (pro-rata), the ability to join a pension scheme and access to optional benefits as described on the HR website ([Benefits Grades 6 and above](#)).

3. GTA responsibilities

The training and support for GTAs should provide a scaffolded approach to their autonomy as a teacher and supporter of learning with the assistance of more experienced teachers or mentors. The University, in conjunction with UCU, have agreed a Grade 6 teaching role descriptor. The activities are by no means exhaustive, or intended to be prescriptive, but aims to provide guidance to Schools on the responsibilities GTAs should progressively undertake over the period of their appointment.

REPRESENTATIVE WORK ACTIVITIES

Teaching

- Deliver lectures, seminars and tutorials within an established programme, typically at Foundation and/or undergraduate level, for which other members of academic staff retain overall responsibility;
- Prepare own teaching activity using materials and curriculum provided, within the framework of the module/degree programme;
- Apply effective teaching methods, materials and assessment techniques, recognising cultural, equality and diversity challenges;
- Reflect on student feedback, student performance and peer observation to enhance personal teaching skills;
- Contribute to teaching-related administration such as provision of module descriptions, collating assessment marks, carrying out student evaluations of modules etc;
- Support students' academic, personal and professional development, referring them to appropriate staff or services where necessary for further help and guidance;
- Supervise the work of students on projects, dissertations, field trips or placements.
- Mark and assess student coursework and examinations, providing timely and useful feedback to students;
- Be aware of, and adhere to, the teaching and learning strategy and objectives of the School.

Teaching and learning development

- Reflect on students' learning experience, share information and make suggestions for improvement as appropriate.

Scholarship

- Maintain an appropriate level of subject knowledge in support of core teaching duties, including participation, where appropriate, in external networks to share information and ideas.

Recruitment and Outreach

- To support, where practicable and reasonable, recruitment and widening participation activities linked to core teaching duties

4. Training

GTAs are expected to invest time in their own development beyond the salaried role. They are expected to undertake the “Preparing to Teach” course offered through the Doctoral and Researcher College’s Reading Researcher Development Programmed (RRDP), proactively seek support and mentorship to help them to develop their teaching practice skills and to join local or University based communities of practice to share their experience and learn from others.

GTAs on a 0.25 FTE contract should complete the University’s Advance HE accredited, 20-credit, Level 7 module EDMAPi: Introduction to Academic Practice. Those who successfully complete EDMAPi are eligible for Advance HE recognition at D1, Associate Fellow (AFHEA), which is a portable asset, with UK-wide relevance and increasingly recognised by higher and further education institutions. To successfully complete the EDMAPi module, students will be required to attend in full four (two in person, two online) staff development days, complete assignments and peer-observed teaching alongside self-directed study and reflection. Failure to successfully complete the EDMAPi module within a reasonable timescale and may result in the termination of the GTA position. GTAs should contact flair-app@reading.ac.uk to enquire about their suitability for this programme.

EDMAPi is not appropriate for GTAs holding 2 year or less than 0.25 FTE GTA contracts. However, if eligible, GTAs on a 0.1 or 0.2 FTE contract may be able to apply for Associate Fellow status (AFHEA) via the Doctoral and Researcher College AFHEA route for Doctoral Researchers. GTAs should contact DoctoralandResearcherCollege@reading.ac.uk for further information regarding eligibility for this scheme.

Non-mandatory staff development opportunities will be available to all GTAs through the University’s People Development Open Programme, through the University’s Doctoral and Researcher College and School/Departmental training, meetings and seminars.

5. School support and mentoring

Schools should continue to provide good support to their GTAs. GTAs should be allocated a mentor by their Head of School/Department (this should not be the doctoral supervisor); this mentor will have a central role to play in supporting the GTA through the accredited programme and beyond. In addition, GTAs will receive regular and consistent guidance and support from module conveners who should meet with them regularly. All GTAs must be included in the School/Department peer observation, review and feedback activities.

School/Department Directors of Postgraduate Studies will have overall responsibility for the oversight of the GTA scheme for their School and will ensure that effective and regular communication takes place between GTAs, their doctoral supervisors and module conveners. It is important that any monitoring of overall workload of GTAs who

contribute to teaching includes consideration of preparation and assessment time in addition to student contact hours.

6. Remuneration

Appointments are normally for the duration of the PhD funding, during which the GTA must be a registered as a full-time student.

GTAAs will receive a monthly salary at the agreed FTE (either 0.1, 0.2 or 0.25) and will normally be appointed at the bottom of the University's Grade 6 salary scale (currently spine point 28), with annual incremental progression.

7. Applying to become a GTA

GTA positions will normally start at the beginning of the academic year.

The Head of School should draw up the advertisement for the position and Further Particulars. The advert should include the following information: School, Start Date (normally 1 September), Closing Date for Advert, Interview Date, Reference Number, Post type (Graduate Teaching Assistant Scheme), Payscale (FTE fraction and consequent Grade 6 salary).

The advert and Further Particulars should be sent to HR to be posted on Jobs.ac.uk and the University Jobs webpage. Once the advert has appeared, Schools should send the relevant link for the advert to the Doctoral and Researcher College so that it can also be placed on their website.

Applicants must have a formal offer for admission as a PhD student.

All applications for the GTA role will be considered equally and fairly by a mixed panel from the appointing School or Department and a formal selection process will take place for each appointment, including shortlisting and interview. Applications from underrepresented groups are particularly encouraged.

International students applying for a GTA position must meet the University's UKVI requirements for student registration and ensure that they have the appropriate approval in place to live, study and work in the UK.

Once a student has been appointed to the GTA role, the School will need to arrange the necessary paperwork with HR to instigate the issuing of the necessary contract. In parallel, the School will need to ask the Doctoral and Researcher College to issue a studentship award letter covering the doctoral studentship when this is associated with the GTA role.

8. Termination

All GTA employment contracts will be for a fixed-term period in the first instance and notice of contract expiry will be served from the outset.

The GTA role is dependent on the student remaining registered at the University for their PhD programme. Thus, where a student fails to progress through their confirmation of registration examination or due to failure to engage with their studies, their GTA contract will be terminated. Should there be significant concerns about the performance of a GTA in their teaching role or a failure to successfully complete EDMAP1 within the first two years of appointment, Schools should seek the advice of HR. GTA's have the right to resign from the Teaching Assistant contract, in accord with HR policies, and this will have no impact on their registration as a PhD candidate.

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Dean of Postgraduate Research Studies and Researcher Development

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