

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Thursday 21 May 2015

Deans of Graduate Studies / Deans of Learning & Teaching: Special Meeting of the to Discuss Graduate Teaching Assistants – 9 April 2015

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Introduction

Academic Standards Committee (ASC) had noted an increase in the number of issues reported in Periodic Subject Reviews (PSR) that related to Graduate Teaching Assistants. The Deans were asked to meet to explore these further and to see if there were any issues that could be addressed at an institutional level. As a starting point for discussion the following questions, taken from the list of PSR Recommendations, were tabled:

- Is the induction, support and training available for students undertaking these roles sufficient (considering the range of activities performed) and consistent? Are there gaps?
- Are students undertaking these roles sufficiently integrated into local processes, committees and/or other fora that might provide additional support or context, a place in which they can raise concerns, or contribute to broader engagement with the students they teach?
- Are there aspects of University policy or processes that are unclear or unwieldy, e.g. earnings caps or the non-contracted status policies?
- Are GTAs hired and paid across the institution in a clear and transparent manner, e.g. number of hours paid for preparation or marking?

1. Training provided to students to teach

The group discussed the training that students were required to receive before teaching, noting that there were two elements to this:

- statutory training - a half day course delivered by the Learning and Teaching Centre;
- additional training, generally 2-3 hours, received at subject / School level and that this may include 'on the job' training.

Subject / school level training was entirely a local matter and therefore could be inconsistent from one area to the next. This seemed like a clear gap and perhaps some broad guidelines about what this training should consist of would be useful. There was agreement, however, that any guidelines shouldn't be too detailed or prescriptive as there would be differences in training required in different subject areas.

2. Responsibility for GTAs

Where responsibility for GTAs should rest was discussed.

- This was a direct learning and teaching matter and subjects and Schools were most directly connected to these matters as they have overall responsibility for quality and course delivery.

- Graduate Schools have a responsibility to make sure that PGRs were well supported and that they did not take on teaching to the detriment of their research and their ability to complete.
- It was agreed that teaching experience could be considered an aspect of skills development for PhD students and involved the development of additional skills, such as time management. Colleagues discussed the amount of teaching that was permissible and noted that this was not something that was generally tracked.

3. College of Arts GTA policy

The College of Arts has been working on a policy for GTAs for the past couple of years and is just now at the point of releasing the agreed policy within the College. This policy is the result of extensive consultation and was heavily influenced by working closely with Human Resources. The document was fairly generic but aimed to set out the requirement for fairness and transparency in hiring, training and supporting GTAs. Colleague noted this with great interest. It was agreed that colleagues would take the Arts document back to their Colleges for discussion and with a view to possibly adapting it into a local version suitable for each College. There were likely to be core elements of the document, especially with regard to HR matters, that would be the same across Colleges. Some core text could also be agreed to add to the PGR Code of Practice.

4. Other Issues

- It was noted that there were perhaps disparities between what would be considered a suitable amount of preparation for teaching in workload model terms and what we were suggesting that students should be doing in terms of what we were willing to pay them for.
- Colleagues noted the language used in some of the PSR recommendations was unfortunate – e.g. that students were ‘utilised’ and had a role in ‘relieving workload issues’. It was agreed that we would neither like to think of our students in such terms nor would we like public documents to reflect this.
- Several questions around what students are paid for, what should be they paid for and how many hours they should work were discussed. Specific issues, such as fieldwork courses where students could be away for several days, were noted. Further, GTAs are likely to spend time answering queries by email or otherwise providing some additional support to their students but that this would be unpaid as well as unmonitored.

5. Next Steps

An additional meeting is being organised which is to include the Deans of Graduate Studies, the Deans of Learning and Teaching and colleagues from the Learning and Teaching Centre, Human Resources and the SRC.