

University of Glasgow

Academic Standards Committee – Friday 2 October 2015

Deans of Graduate Studies / Deans of Learning and Teaching -
Special Meeting to Discuss Graduate Teaching Assistants

Mary Beth Kneafsey, Research Strategy & Innovation Office

Summary Points: GTA Discussion

1. Academic Standards Committee (ASC) noted an increase in the number of issues reported in Periodic Subject Reviews (PSR) that were related to Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs). Some of these issues were:
 - 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?
 - Are GTAs hired and paid across the institution in a clear and transparent manner, e.g. number of hours paid for preparation or marking?
2. ASC asked that the Deans of Graduate Studies and the Deans of Learning and Teaching meet to explore these issues and possible ways to address them. The Deans have now met twice (April and June 2015), including Human Resources and the Learning and Teaching Centre at the second meeting.
3. At the first meeting in April 2015 it was noted that:
 - There was a diversity of roles that might be described as GTAs, including demonstrators and problem based learning facilitators in addition to more traditional 'teaching assistants'.
 - School / subject level training was managed locally and therefore there was no view on the consistency of this training and that perhaps some guidelines on what this should comprise might address this gap. Some of the training at School level would also be 'on the job' training.
 - The delivery of teaching is clearly a 'learning and teaching' issue although this is not overseen by Graduate Schools. However, the duty of care for PGRs was a Graduate School issue and the development of teaching and related skills through GTA work was quite important.
 - The College of Arts have done a significant amount of work in developing a GTA policy and process and the other Colleges agreed to review this and consider whether it might be appropriate to adapt this within their Colleges.
4. At the second meeting in Jun 2015 it was noted that:
 - All three colleges (other than Arts where the policy was agreed) had or were going to consider the implementation and/or adaptation of the Arts' policy at

their College Management Groups or other relevant Committees. Broadly, there was support for this development although concerns remained about the potential workload implications of conducting P&DRs for GTAs. COSE in particular raised issues of scale due to the very high numbers of students employed as demonstrators. However, they were open to considering the policy with this in mind.

- It was discussed whether it might be useful to conduct P&DRs for teaching duties during Annual Progress Review meetings. Colleges would consider this although it was agreed that performance as a GTA should not be conflated with PhD progress. It may also be advisable for supervisors to recommend against continued GTA work if there are issues with progress.

5. A number of HR issues were raised:

- Students may have limitations on how many hours a week they can work based on funder or visa terms and conditions.
- There is tension between good hiring practice (in which case there would be a preference for hiring someone with experience and good feedback) and seeing GTA work as a training / development opportunity (in which case there would be a preference for hiring inexperienced students in order to make sure that as many as possible are able to gain some experience).
- Recommendations as to how much time students are paid, e.g. for preparation, is covered in the Extended Workforce Policy. These recommendations should be applied sensibly so that students are paid for their actual time. This actual time should also include any teaching related staff meetings to which they contribute. There may be cost implications to this but it should be explored.

6. Several training-related issues were discussed:

- The use of a training needs assessment is one way to link agreed training needs to the annual review cycle. It was however acknowledged that supervisors may not be fully aware of the workshops on offer through the Learning and Teaching Centre.
- Students report that they would like more support from Schools and that this is a piece that is missing / underdeveloped in terms of student support.
 - Schools should be giving the message that individual staff have a responsibility to make sure that their GTAs are appropriately trained and supported.
 - Schools should consider producing a template for what they think are minimum standards for training locally. This could be drafted and agreed at the level of College L&T Committee and passed down to School L&T Committees for further development locally.
 - The LTC would be happy to work with schools on developing their training.
- Difficulties with assessment were noted as a persistent problem. This is a specific area where more training might be very beneficial but which, for the most part, is difficult to do generically / centrally. Schools that invested more effort in this would be likely to reap benefits.

7. In view of our duty of care to our students, two key principles were agreed within this discussion:

- Undertaking work as a GTA is an important training and development opportunity but it should not impede progress on the PhD.
- A change in culture is required and staff should be encouraged to see GTAs as valuable and integral members of the teaching team who should be encouraged to participate more fully.