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| Postgraduate |
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| Guidance on campaigning for postgraduates that teachMany postgraduate research students will end up teaching at their universities in some capacity. This is an important opportunity for them to gain extra money and important experiences that may help them in their future careers. Unfortunately, however, postgraduates who teach are not always treated as fairly as they should be. NUS conducted a national survey of postgraduate teaching and found large disparages in the treatment of postgraduates who teach. The following briefing outlines the main issues observed and gives guidance on how unions can campaign to overcome them and better support their postgraduates.  |

### The Postgraduate Teaching Survey

NUS conducted a survey in November and December 2012 aimed at postgraduates who teach. We received almost 2000 responses to the survey from universities around the UK.

There were six main areas of focus for the survey: motivations for teaching, the application process, pay and conditions, representation, training and professional development, and feedback.

The results of the survey were analysed and collected in a report, ready to be launched in February 2013.

The key results from the survey were:

* Nearly half of respondents claimed that they did not receive a job description when applying for their position.
* Almost one in three postgraduate teachers did not receive a contract.
* One in four thought the allocation of teaching was unfair.
* One in five received no training or induction before they started their role.
* The average postgraduate teacher will work almost twice the hours they are paid for.
* Almost a third of postgraduates who teach earn below minimum wage in real terms.
* 43 per cent claim their pay is unfair.
* Many postgraduates are “forced” to teach, regardless of their interest or ability, as part of their course, or as a prerequisite for funding.
* Half of postgraduate teachers receive no feedback on their teaching from the module lecturer.
* Around 30 per cent of postgraduates who teach do not receive student feedback.
* At least 30 per cent of postgraduate teachers have no departmental representation.
* 18 per cent of postgraduates who teach claim to be members of a trade union.
* The experience of postgraduates who teach differs widely between institutions as well as internally between departments.

### NUS Recommendations

NUS have made a number of recommendations based on the evidence in the report. Those which are most important for union campaigning are:

1. We actively encourage unions to find effective ways of engaging with postgraduate teachers, which is most likely to involve greater collaboration with departmental representatives who deal with these issues.
2. We believe that fair pay must take into account each hour worked on teaching and related
3. duties such as preparation, marking, administration, attending lectures and supporting students.
4. The marking of coursework must be sufficiently remunerated and based on the volume of coursework being marked.
5. We strongly support the unionisation of postgraduate teachers. We hope to see students’ unions building close partnerships with local UCU branches to collaborate and steer policy and campaigns relating to postgraduate teaching.
6. It should not be compulsory for PGRs to teach, and where they do they should be paid. We strongly oppose the use of bursaries which require students to teach unpaid.
7. It is important for institutions to provide a fair
8. and transparent system of recruiting postgraduates into teaching roles. Certain standards, such as providing a job description and a contract of employment, are essential.
9. PGs who teach should receive formal feedback from both the course lecturer and their students. This should be provided mid-year to ensure teachers can use the feedback to improve teaching for those students.

### Gathering your own evidence

The NUS postgraduate teaching survey highlighted the complexity of practice both within and between institutions. In order for unions to find the best methods of campaigning and supporting postgraduate teachers, they must understand the specific practices in their institution.

NUS can support this process initially by providing unions with (where possible) the survey responses that came from their institution. They can then benchmark these responses against the national trends and get a feel for what’s going on across departments.

We strongly recommend that unions gather further qualitative information by engaging directly with postgraduate teachers. The most obvious way of doing this is through well-advertised forums or focus groups.

The more evidence that can be collected, the easier it will be to work out the best methods of support, and it will also give ammunition when negotiating with the university and their departments.

### Setting up a Graduate Teaching Committee

We have noticed that some institutions have very different practices from department to department. This means that good practice is not always being shared.

One way of sharing good practice and resolving disputes effectively is by setting up a graduate teaching committee.

We suggest that, where possible, teaching reps or PGR reps from departments will sit on the committee along with the union’s education officer and postgraduate officer (if you have one) and a member of the local UCU branch.

This committee structure allows issues and practices to be shared across departments in an attempt to find collective solutions and standardise good practice. It also allows union officers and the UCU branch to take matters to higher levels of university management.

This form of representation will not be possible at all institutions. It will require the appointment and training of departmental representatives, which the students’ union and NUS can help to facilitate.

### Working with the UCU

Students’ unions have a role to play in supporting postgraduates who teach. But there are certain issues that may be more appropriately or efficiently dealt with by a trade union, particularly those involving legal support and more serious disputes over pay and conditions.

This is why NUS encourage students’ unions to build links with local UCU branches and deliver campaigns collaboratively; sharing resources and knowledge to ensure the most effective support is in place.

We also suggest that students’ unions work with UCU to increase the unionisation of postgraduate teachers. For just a few pounds a month a postgraduate teacher can have a full membership of UCU, giving them much greater legal protection and a voice in the collective bargaining power of a large trade union.

### UCU day of action – 6 March 2013

UCU are running a day of action to campaign against casualisation and the treatment of part-time and hourly paid staff in educational institutions.

This is a fantastic opportunity for students’ unions to work together with the UCU and, in particular, ensure that issues concerning postgraduates who teach at their institutions are raised.

### Turn teaching bursaries into teaching fellowships

NUS are deeply concerned by the number of PGR students who are forced to take bursaries which stipulate the student must teach unpaid during their study in order to receive the funding. Postgraduate research students should receive funding based on their academic ability and their financial needs, not on their willingness to take on unpaid labour. We strongly advise unions to tackle their institutions on this matter and suggest fairer ways of funding postgraduate research students. NUS suggest unions should encourage institutions to switch from teaching bursaries to teaching fellowships for students in their completion year. This offers students a chance to experience lecturing, providing better professional development and employment prospects when they graduate. This should not preclude the provision of bursaries and financial support for new doctoral students.

Whats next?

* Download and read the NUS postgraduate teaching survey report
* If NUS send you responses from the survey at your institution, look closely at the data, compare it to national trends, and pick out the main issues of concern
* Conduct your own research. Talk to PGR students: find out their concerns and what support they would like
* Contact your local UCU branch and see what you can do together on March 6