

Postgraduate employment charter

1 Fair, transparent and equitable appointment procedures

Postgraduates should be offered employment opportunities at their institution through a formal and transparent process. Positions should be advertised with a job description such that qualified students are equally able to apply for the role and understand the work that is expected of them. Successful applicants should receive a contract stating working hours, amount and regularity of pay, provision for sickness and holiday leave and the recognised trade union.

2 A fair rate of pay for all hours worked

All postgraduates who teach should be paid, and this should include recognition of time spent on preparation, marking, administration, attending lectures and supporting students. UCU recommends 2.5 times the hourly rate for every teaching hour, based on a salary spine point in the university pay scale. It should be clear how payment and taxation processes are managed and, for international students, how National Insurance numbers are obtained.

3 Compulsory teaching and teaching bursaries

A postgraduate student should never be forced to teach without pay as part of their doctoral programme, or as a criteria for receiving a fee waiver or other non-cash bursary. Bursaries or scholarships which require a student to teach should provide at least the cash equivalent a student would receive if they were regularly employed to teach, as well as the same employment rights and support as those on regular employment contracts.

4 Supervision or mentoring, line management, and review of progress provided by a suitably qualified staff member who is not the research supervisor

Postgraduates who teach should be able to raise issues, and seek advice from, a single academic point of contact who is qualified to supervise postgraduate teaching and who is in a position potentially to provide an academic reference in the future.

5 Formal and informal feedback on performance and support for improvement

In the case of postgraduates that teach this should include the feedback of students and that of a more senior academic manager or mentor who has had the opportunity to observe the postgraduate teaching.

6 Induction and initial training, and support for continuing professional development

In addition to standard training provided by their institution, postgraduate teachers should have an induction into discipline-specific teaching practice and an introduction to course materials, teaching methods, modes of assessment and feedback and student complaint procedures. There should be opportunities to develop specific teaching skills such as teaching students with specific support needs, introduction to pedagogic theories and additional language support for international students. All teaching staff should be able to undertake a nationally accredited course in higher education teaching.

7 Representation within the institution and by a trade union

Postgraduates that teach should have representation on teaching and learning committees and/or student-staff liaison groups at department and faculty or school level. Postgraduates have the right to be an active member of a recognised trade union and to be represented by that union to their institution.

8 Integration into the professional academic culture

Postgraduates in employment should be treated on an equal basis with academic colleagues and given opportunities to engage as professionals with the teaching culture in their subject. For example, postgraduates who teach should be eligible for teaching awards.

9 Access to the necessary facilities and resources required to undertake the role

These could include printing and photocopying, use of teaching rooms, stationery and equipment, office space, a storage facility and access to online learning environments.

10 A reasonable balance between employment and research

Postgraduates benefit from professional development opportunities offered by working for their institution, but care should be taken to ensure that employment does not take precedence over research and successful completion of the doctoral thesis.