



Postgraduates Who Teach



national union of students



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Foreword

Foreword

It is our pleasure to introduce this report on the results from our survey of postgraduates who teach.

For the first time, we have been able to capture a detailed picture of what our postgraduates experience when they take on teaching responsibilities at their institution.

Teaching in higher education can be as challenging as it is rewarding. Our worry is that, in some cases, the reward does not justify the challenge. The pressures of doctoral study make time a precious resource for postgraduate research students. It is important, then, that when postgraduates devote time to lend their knowledge and skill to the teaching of others, they are appropriately supported and fairly compensated for it.

This report reveals that much of the hard work of postgraduates is woefully undervalued and underpaid by their institutions. Although there are some departments and institutions that should be commended for their good practice, there are far too many cases of postgraduates working long hours without the training and support they need, and being paid for only a small portion of their work.

If a temp in an office or a labourer on a building site were working ten hour shifts but being paid for only five, we'd call it exploitation. This is a reality for many postgraduates. Worst still, some postgraduates are forced into teaching as part of their doctoral funding and receive no wage at all. Unpaid labour is unfair and exploitative and we must work with the sector to stamp it out.

We know how valuable our postgraduate teachers are, to the undergraduates who they teach, and to the institutions who employ them. It is ultimately in the interests of our universities to ensure that postgraduates are treated fairly and given generous training and support. Undergraduates will benefit greatly from highly-skilled inspirational teachers, and many postgraduate teachers will go on to become

inspirational lecturers, making a considerable contribution to academia.

This report will act as guidance for our campaigning to ensure that postgraduates who teach receive fair treatment. We will work closely with students' unions, higher education institutions, sector bodies, and the UCU, to improve the situation, bringing practice into line with legal (and ethical) requirements. We will continue to consult widely on this matter, bringing in the views of our postgraduates at every step.

Rachel Wenstone,
Vice President (Higher Education)

Robin Burrett,
Postgraduate Research Section Officer

Key findings

Key Findings

- The experience of postgraduates who teach differs widely between institutions as well as internally between departments.
- 70 per cent of postgraduates who teach say they took the job to improve their employability.
- 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 postgraduate teachers thought the allocation of teaching was unfair.
- One in five postgraduate teachers receives no training or induction before they started their role.
- The average postgraduate teacher will work almost twice the hours they are paid for.
- Almost one in three postgraduates who teach earn below minimum wage in real terms.
- 43 per cent of postgraduate teachers 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.
- Postgraduates teaching in arts and humanities subjects are the least happy with their pay: they work the longest hours and earn the lowest per hour in real terms.
- Students in STEM subjects work the least hours and receive the most pay per hour in real terms.
- 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.

Introduction

Introduction

A large number of postgraduate research students are making an invaluable contribution to higher education by taking on part-time teaching and demonstrating responsibilities at their institution.

Teaching is a hugely rewarding job, and is a chance for PGR students to gain valuable skills and experience to help them in their future career paths, whether or not they are academic. It is also an important source of income, particularly for self-funded students who may struggle to support themselves financially.

The experiences of postgraduates who teach vary considerably, however. Some postgraduates who teach are treated with great respect by their departments; they are well paid, provided with training, support and feedback. The experience of many other postgraduates who teach falls far from this ideal.

Good practice appears to be sporadic. The processes of recruitment and remuneration can be informal and unclear. Pay may not cover the excess hours invested in teaching. Some postgraduates may have to teach unpaid as a condition of their bursary or scholarship. Others may simply feel isolated and unsupported by their department, not knowing who to turn to when they have a problem.

We may be aware of good and bad practice in the recruitment of postgraduates who teach, but, hitherto, it has been difficult to assess how widespread they are, or to pinpoint any relationships or trends. To our knowledge, this is the first time that a comprehensive survey of the experience of postgraduates who teach has been conducted¹. The results of it, therefore, are of great importance.

NUS have collected and analysed the responses of around 1500 postgraduate students who teach at their institutions. This data has provided us with an overview of how postgraduate teachers are treated in the UK. It has allowed us to pinpoint particular concerns around

pay and conditions, so that we can streamline our campaign to better support the postgraduate sector.

We hope that the evidence collated in this report will be taken up by students' unions and their institutions. It can be used as a benchmark for evaluating the experience of their postgraduate teachers in order to improve, harmonise and share existing practice, and to provide efficient support measures for where teachers highlight concerns.

About the Survey

In November and December 2012, NUS conducted a survey aimed at postgraduate students who teach at their institutions. The survey asked a mixture of quantitative and qualitative questions on a number of aspects of the teacher's experience. 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.

Profile of Respondents

There were a total of 1969 responses to the survey. Of these, 1476 were valid responses on which the results in this report are based.

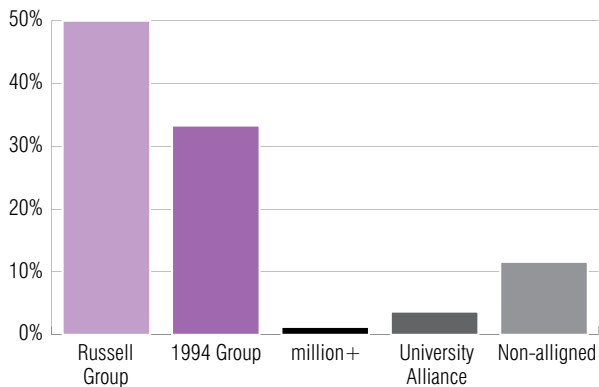
Approximately 55 per cent of respondents were female and 45 per cent were male. This is slightly different to the PGR population as a whole, where there is a small male majority. It is not easy to tell whether this is down to sample bias or whether there are simply more females teaching than males in HE.

The average age of a PG teacher is 29. Ages ranged between 20 and 65. Three-quarters of PG teachers were aged between 20 and 30.

Around 86 per cent of respondents were studying full time, 9 per cent were part time, and a further 5 per cent had completed their studies.

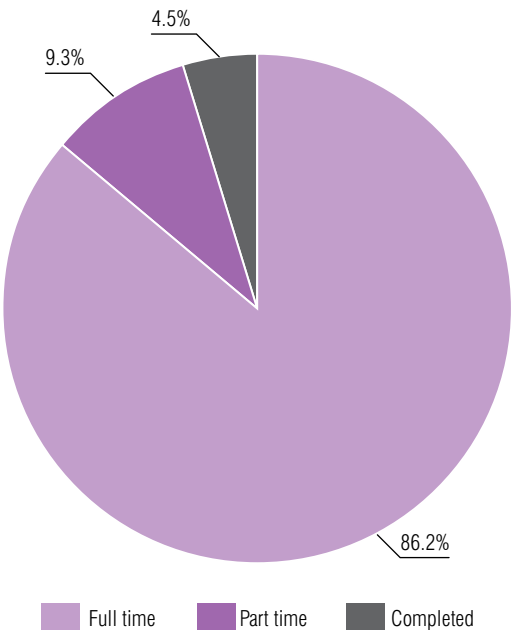
The vast majority of responses (around 90 per cent) came from pre-92 institutions mainly in the Russell Group or 1994 Group. These universities tend to be the most research-intensive and house more PGR students so the result largely reflects the divergence in the real population. Half of respondents taught in Russell Group institutions, a third in 1994 Group institutions².

Responses by Mission Group

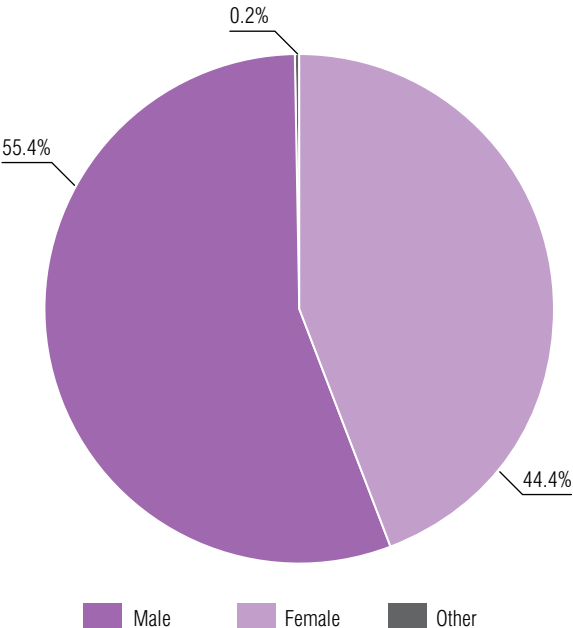


90 per cent of responses came from respondents teaching in English-based institutions. Around 4 per cent of responses came from Scotland, and 5 per cent from Wales. A handful of responses also came from Northern Ireland.

Responses by mode of study



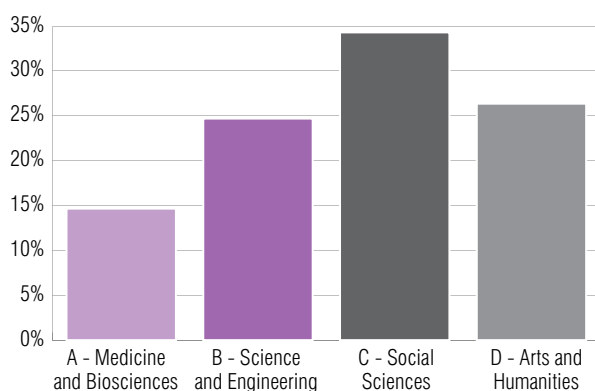
Responses by gender



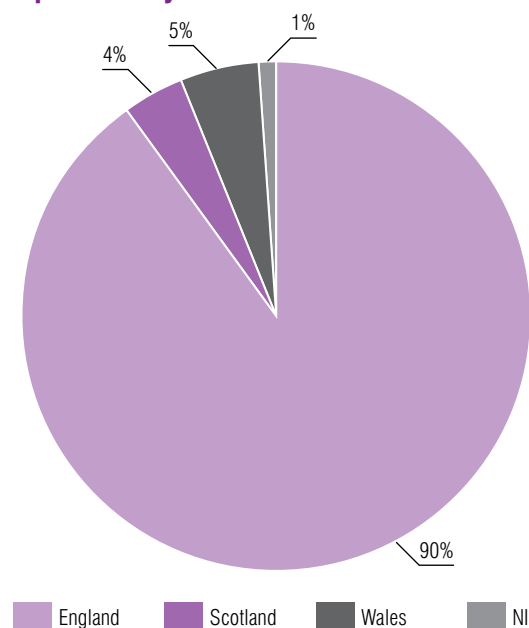
Respondents were asked to give the department they taught in. From this we have categorised responses by the 36 REF units of assessment and the four REF assessment panels. Responses were spread widely across all panels and units. The highest response rate came from the social sciences; politics and international studies was the unit with the highest response rate overall. There were also high response rates in mathematical sciences, English language and literature, business and management, economics, and biological sciences. About 40 per cent of respondents were in STEM subjects and 60 per cent in non-STEM subjects. Overall, the response rates are a good representation of the spread of PGR students across the disciplines.

There are a large number of different job titles for postgraduates who teach. Around half of respondents described themselves as “graduate teaching assistants”, and around one in five as “graduate demonstrators”. There was a mixture of other responses. Some respondents claimed to not have a job title or did not know what their official title was.

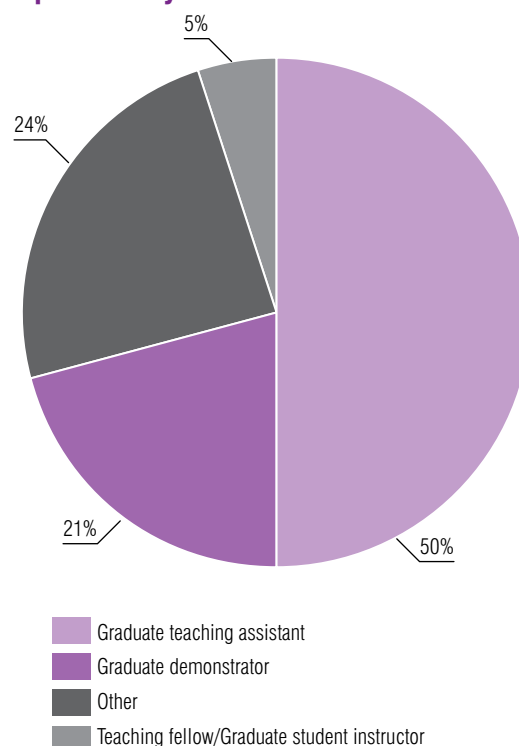
Responses by REF 2014 Panel



Responses by Nation



Responses by Job Title



Motivations for Teaching

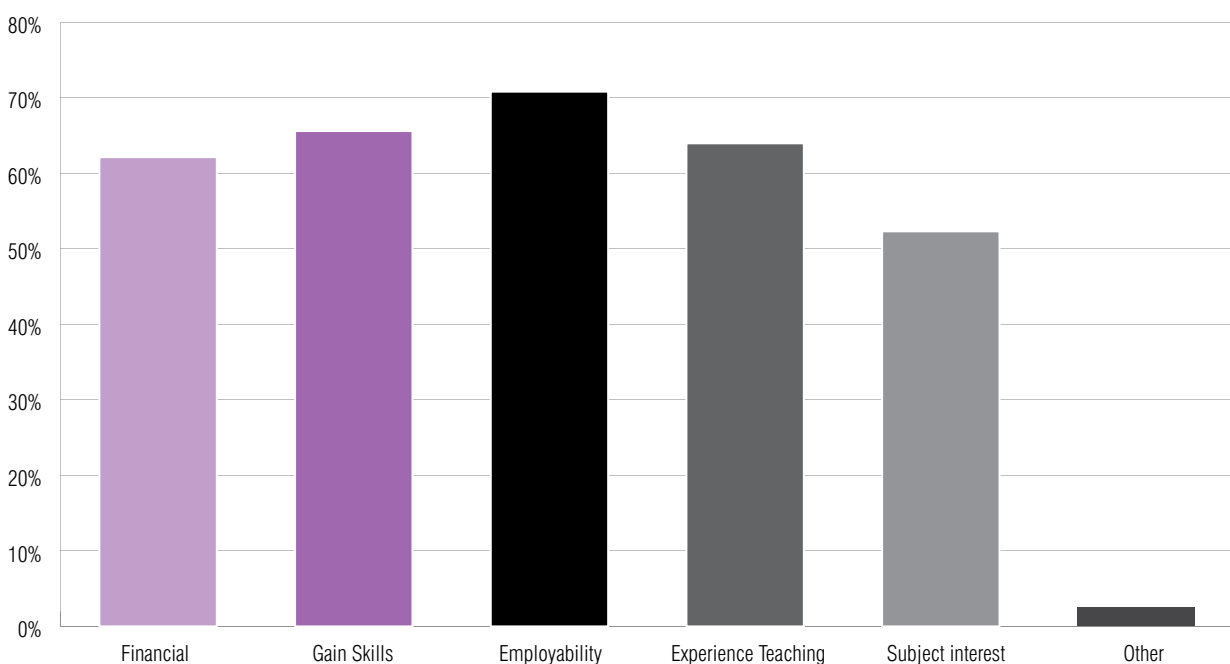
Respondents were asked what the main motivations were for them in applying to teach.

Of the given categories, the most cited motivation for teaching was to improve employability. Approximately 70 per cent of respondents claimed this was one of their motivations. The least cited motivation was having interest in the subject. Just over 50 per cent of respondents cited this as a motivation.

There were a number of other motivations given that were not in the list provided. A fair number of respondents claimed that they applied for teaching because it was fun and enjoyable, or because they had previous experience in teaching.

About 5 per cent of respondents stated that they were required to teach as part of their study, or that their funding was contingent upon taking up a teaching role. This suggests that a number of students teach because it is mandatory, rather than having an individual motivation.

Where were your main motivations in applying to teach?



Application Processes and Contracts

It is important for any job that there is a clear and fair process for applicants. There are also certain legal requirements to prevent discrimination and mistreatment. Formal and standardised practice is necessary to ensure employers are working within the law when employing members of staff.

Results from the survey suggest that many departments follow informal and incomplete procedures for employing postgraduates as casual and part-time teaching staff. This is not only making the employment process unclear to applicants, but is leaving institutions open to legal scrutiny.

Nearly half of respondents claimed that they did not receive a job description when applying for their position. There doesn't seem to be any correlation between the type or location of an institution and whether postgraduates receive a job description. However, a slightly larger proportion of students in the arts and humanities claim not to have had a job description. The opposite is true of science and engineering subjects, where a slightly smaller proportion claim not to have had a job description.

Respondents were asked about the clarity of the application process. More than three quarters thought that their application process had been somewhat clear

"I've always been lucky, and been given teaching positions, but I know several of my friends were very upset last year that they were not emailed to ask if they wanted to teach, and since there is no application process they just don't get a chance to even try. I think if it was known they didn't do it properly, they would be in trouble."

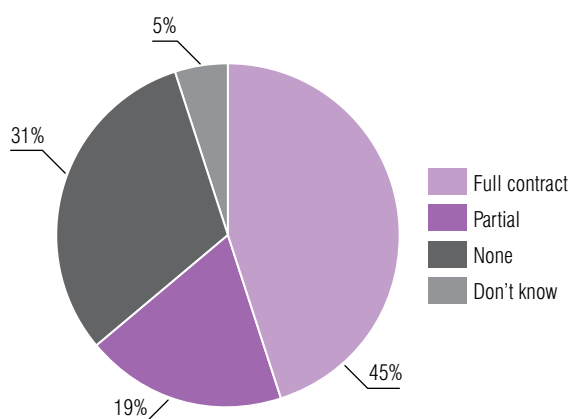
Female PhD Student, 31

or very clear. Around 15 per cent found the process somewhat unclear and 8 per cent very unclear.

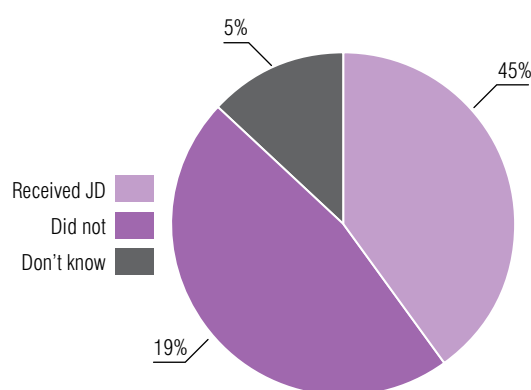
Of those who found the application process unclear, the main reasons given were based on the transparency or informality of the process. A large number stated that there had been no formal process at all, in many cases because teaching was a requirement for the student.

Postgraduates who teach in STEM subjects found their application process clearer on average, compared with non-STEM students. In particular, it was those in science and engineering which found their process the clearest. Postgraduates teaching in the arts and humanities were the least likely to find their process clear.

Receipt of a contract of employment



Receipt of a job description



“Although I am considered a self-funded student, I do not have a contract with the university. Call the tax office and ask if I work at the [university], they will say NO!”

Male PhD Student, 32

“I applied for a PhD, not for teaching. Once I got the PhD position, I was told I had to teach in exchange for my fees being paid.”

Female PhD student, 30

PGs who teach at Russell Group institutions were statistically more likely to find their application process unclear compared to those at other institutions. Around 25 per cent of Russell Group respondents found the process unfair compared to 19 per cent at other institutions.

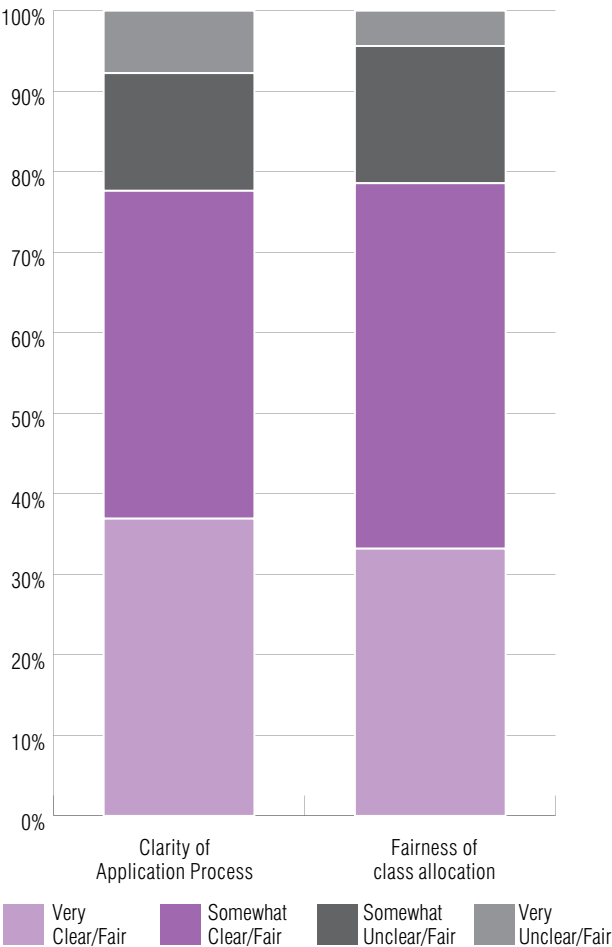
Respondents were asked whether they felt the process by which classes were allocated to teachers was fair. Around 79 per cent of respondents claimed the allocation of classes was either somewhat fair or very fair. 21 per cent claimed the process was unfair, with just 4 per cent believing it was very unfair.

When asked to explain why the process had been unfair, again the most common complaints were about transparency and informality. However, a number of responses alluded to some form of corruption or bias in the procedure. Usually the complaints were about lecturers or heads of department employing ‘favourite’ students or doing favours for some. The cases appeared to be isolated and not systemic to any particular institution or group of institutions.

Students in STEM subjects tended to find the allocation of classes fairer than those in non-STEM subjects. The science and engineering subjects were rated the fairest in allocation, and the arts and humanities the least fair. This echoes the results for clarity of application.

There is no statistically significant difference between mission groups on the fairness of class allocation.

Levels of clarity in application process and fairness of class allocation



Perhaps the most worrying statistic of all in the application process is that 31 per cent of respondents claim not to have been given any form of contract for their teaching role. It is a legal requirement for employers to provide a written statement of terms and conditions within the first two months of employment. There are serious questions to be asked about the practices of some departments and institutions if they are failing to provide their postgraduate teachers with a written contract stating their pay and conditions.

“I did not have any information regarding salary, hours to teach, type of teaching (tutorial, lectures, labs), workshops and seminars I needed to attend.”

Male PhD student, 26

About 45 per cent of respondents claimed to have been given a full written contract of employment by their university. A further 19 per cent were given some form of contract but it didn't contain all of the relevant information about pay and conditions.

Respondents teaching in STEM subjects were much less likely to receive a contract for their teaching. Around 54 per cent of STEM PG teachers claimed not to have had any form of contract.

A larger proportion of students from Russell Group universities did not receive a contract. Around 42 per cent of students at Russell Group institutions were not given written contracts according to the data, compared to only 30 per cent at all other institutions.

"It was all very informal, and by email, which lead to the situation that I didn't even dare ask how much I would earn up until I was in my second week of teaching!"

Female PhD student, 26

"It was a mess. Contract filled in after the work. Roles were only decided a week max before work started."

Male PhD student, 24

Pay and Working Hours

The survey asked a number of questions related to the level of pay received from teaching and demonstrating. Using the data collected, we have been able to approximate the “real hourly pay” of postgraduates who teach. This figure is based on the actual hours a postgraduate must work to fulfil their teaching duties compared to the number of hours they are paid for. Teaching involves a number of responsibilities beyond that of preparing and giving seminars and classes. Marking coursework, attending module lectures, holding office hours and dealing with student queries can take up a considerable amount of time which is often not fully remunerated.

Below are the estimates for pay and “real hourly pay”. These figures have been analysed across a number of sub-categories in an attempt to understand some of the reasons behind the difference in rates of pay.

National figures

Average monthly income for postgraduates from teaching is around £346². Monthly income varies depending on the number of classes being taught as well as the way salaries are worked out. However, the figure gives us a rough idea of what a postgraduate student might expect to earn during term time by taking up teaching.

The average hourly rate of pay is around £19.95³. The rate of pay varies considerably with some postgraduate students claiming to be paid only minimum wage, and others claiming to be paid up to £50 per hour. Some of this variation is down to the specific teaching role. Postgraduates employed as part-time lecturers and other similar positions tend to be paid at a higher rate than graduate teaching assistants and other equivalent roles. Around one in four postgraduates who teach are clustered between £12 and £15 per hour.

The average amount of time spent on work directly relating to a postgraduate's teaching duties is 9.5 hours per week⁴. Again, this figure will differ depending on the number of classes being taught, but is indicative of the amount of time a postgraduate may expect to have to spend on teaching duties.

We have been able to work out a “real hourly rate” for each respondent who gave valid responses to the questions on pay and working hours. The average “real hourly rate” for postgraduates who teach is £10.39. This is almost half the average hourly rate being paid. This means that, on average, postgraduates are working almost twice as many hours per week on teaching than they are actually being paid for. Or, put another way, institutions are getting almost twice the labour than they are actually paying for.

“Working for more hours than you are paid not only leads to unequal pay and unfair treatment but can also adversely affect your work-life balance and lead to stress.”

UCU Guide for hourly-paid staff in FE & HE

This real pay figure is very concerning. Although a small number of postgraduates are receiving generous wages with rate multipliers that can cover all of the hours being worked, the vast majority of postgraduates are finding themselves out of pocket. Particularly concerning is the large number of postgraduates who are being paid less than minimum wage in real terms. Approximately 30 per cent are being paid below the national minimum wage of £6.19 in real terms.

About 38 per cent of PGs who teach do not receive any pay specifically for marking coursework. Marking coursework is merely included as part of their preparation time. Around 26 per cent are paid a lump sum for marking which is included as part of their salary. 28 per cent receive payment for marking which

is determined by the amount of coursework being marked and the time taken to mark it. On average, those who get paid to mark tend to rate their pay as fairer than those who do not.

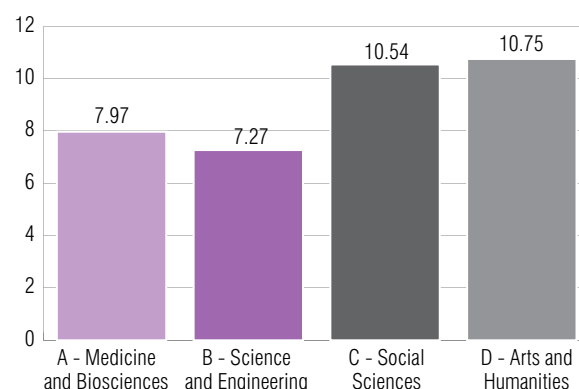
Pay by discipline

When looking at the differences in pay by disciplines, we found that postgraduates teaching in STEM subjects are earning less, on average, compared to those in non-STEM subjects. The average monthly income for STEM subject teachers is £268 per month and £15.08 per hour, compared to £380 per month and £23.08 per hour for non-STEM subjects.

What is interesting, however, is that STEM subject teachers come out with slightly higher rates of real pay because they do not work such long hours for their wage. The STEM subject teacher will work, on average, around 7.5 hours compared to the non-STEM teacher who will work over 10.5 hours. This may be down to the difference in the amount of time spent marking coursework.

PG teachers in the social sciences earn the most money per month (£405 on average) and have the largest real terms returns for their labour, receiving, on average £10.82 real pay per hour. However, because their hourly rate is higher than average (£21.39 per hour

Average hours worked per week



on average), the real terms loss on their earnings is around 50 per cent, or, put another way, they work two hours for every hour they are paid.

Teachers in the arts and humanities are paid the highest per hour for their teaching, but also work the longest hours (10.75 hours per week on average), despite earning less per month (£351 on average) compared with the social sciences. The arts and humanities, therefore, have the lowest real hourly pay at £9.12. The real terms loss in pay is around 64 per cent, meaning students in the arts and humanities are only being paid for one in every three hours they actually work.

PGs who teach in the physical science, technology and engineering subjects work the least hours per week (7.27 hours on average), but are also paid the least

Hourly pay gap by REF 2014 Panel



per hour (£14.99) and earn the least per month (£248). PGs in the medical and biosciences are in a similar position; they work slightly longer hours (7.97) but get paid slightly more for their time (£311 per month, £15.26 per hour). The real terms loss in pay in these subjects is around 30 per cent, meaning two out of every three hours worked are paid.

Pay by mission group

There are no obvious differences in pay by mission group. The average real hourly pay for the Russell Group and the 1994 Group are not statistically different from the national average. Other mission groups are not represented enough to give accurate figures for pay.

However, the variance in pay in the Russell Group is lower than the other mission groups and the sample as a whole, suggesting some greater degree of consistency in pay in the Russell Group.

Hours worked by postgraduates who teach in the Russell Group are statistically lower (about 9) than average, whereas those in 1994 Group are statistically higher (about 10).

There is no significant relationship between teacher pay and levels of research funding at a university. When controlling for other important factors, the level of Quality-Related (QR) funding had no statistically significant effect on levels of pay.

Pay by Gender

There is no difference in pay between male and female PG teachers.

The data suggested that female respondents were more likely to find their pay unfair (see section on pay fairness below). However, this may be the result of a larger volume of female respondents being in non-STEM subjects. Respondents in male-dominated STEM subjects tended to have higher levels of satisfaction with their pay, which is likely to be the reason why females appear less satisfied with their pay.

Pay by Nations

Hourly pay in Scotland is lower, on average, than the rest of the country. The average hourly pay in Scotland is around £14.84⁶. However, there is no difference in real terms pay. This may be because of hourly multipliers being used at some Scottish institutions, meaning PGs are paid less per hour, but are paid for more hours. There is no statistical difference between monthly pay in Scotland and the rest of the country.

There is no statistical difference between pay in Wales and the rest of the country. There is also no difference in real pay.

There is no difference in the hours worked in either Scotland or Wales to the rest of the country.

Pay Fairness

The survey asked postgraduate teachers to rate their pay in terms of fairness. Around 43 per cent of respondents believed their pay was either unfair or grossly unfair. 45 per cent thought their pay was adequate, and less than 12 per cent thought their pay was generous.

As stated above, there was a difference in responses by gender, although it is likely that this is merely following the gender bias in STEM subjects where teachers were on average happier with their pay.

Based on the data on pay and hours above, it isn't that surprising to find that postgraduates teaching in STEM subjects find, on average, their pay to be fairer. Around one in four of postgraduates teaching STEM subjects felt their pay was unfair (19 per cent) or grossly unfair (5 per cent). Over half described their pay as adequate and one in five claimed their pay was generous.

Unsurprisingly, arts and humanities postgraduates had the lowest satisfaction with 57 per cent stating their pay as either unfair (40 per cent) or grossly unfair (17 per cent). Postgraduates in the social sciences had slightly lower rates of dissatisfaction with 53 per cent suggesting their pay was unfair or grossly unfair;

but the result is still statistically higher than the overall average.

Pay fairness ratings correlate with real terms pay, which is related to the number of hours a postgraduate teacher works above that which he or she is paid for. This explains the significant difference in satisfaction between STEM and non-STEM subjects, as STEM subjects tended to have lower levels of working hours and higher real hourly pay compared to non-STEM. Pay fairness is not so clearly related (if at all) to the actual amount being paid per hour, or the amount earned each month.

Part-time students are slightly more likely to be dissatisfied with their pay, although this effect may simply be down to the fact that more part-time students in the sample are based in non-STEM subjects where satisfaction rates are lower on average anyway.

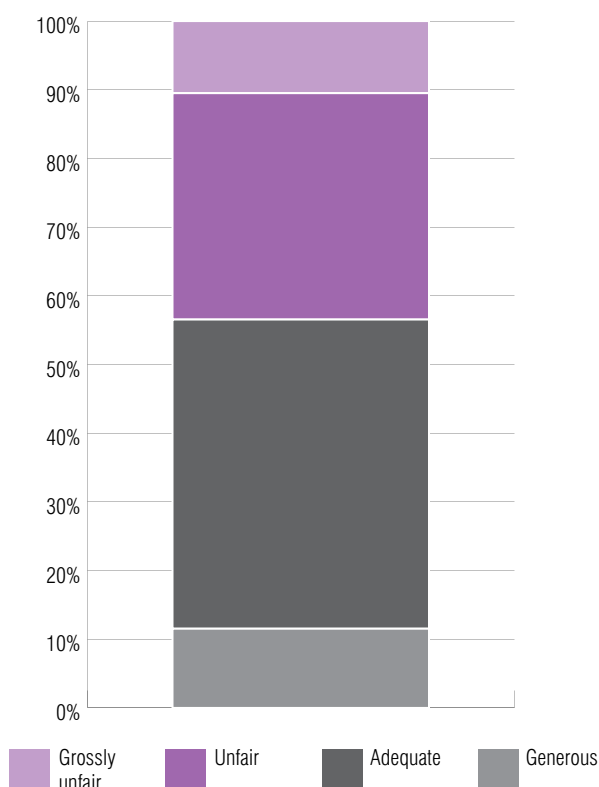
Postgraduate teachers who are also members of a trade union are statistically more likely to be dissatisfied with their pay, although it is not easy to tell causality

from the data. It may be that they joined the union because of their dissatisfaction; but it is also possible that by being in a union the information given to them by their union could make them less satisfied with their pay. Equally, it may be that high levels of unionisation occur in departments and institutions where there are more widespread concerns over pay and conditions.

Students at London-based institutions are statistically more likely to find their pay unfair. Around 60 per cent of PG teachers in London rated their pay as unfair or grossly unfair, compared to around 40 per cent based outside of London. There are no obvious differences in impressions of pay fairness in Scotland and Wales.

There is a statistical relationship between age and pay fairness. The older a PG student is, the more likely they are to find their pay unfair. This is likely because older PG students may have had more experience of work, making them better able to judge the fairness of pay. They may also consider their previous experience to justify higher pay.

How would you rate the amount that you are paid as a graduate teacher?



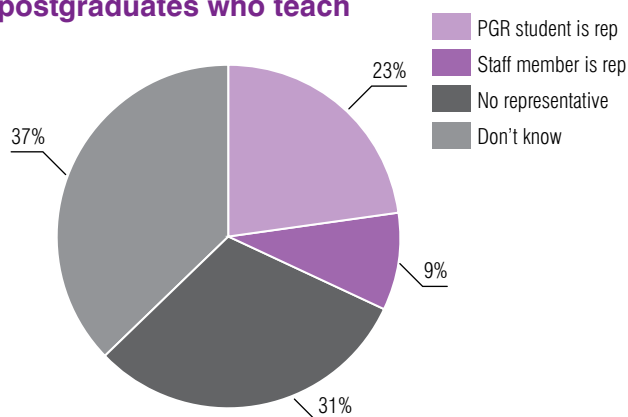
Representation

It is important that postgraduates who teach are able to express their concerns and seek support and advice on their role. There are often a number of different points of contact to go to depending on the nature of the concern. Some institutions have strong democratic structures through which postgraduate teaching is represented and supported. Others lack the structure and coherency to adequately represent postgraduates who teach.

Departmental Representation

We asked postgraduates who teach how they were represented in their departments. Worryingly, over a third of respondents claimed they did not know how they were represented, meaning that there were either no structures for representation or that the existing structures were weak and not made clear to postgraduates.

Departmental representation for postgraduates who teach

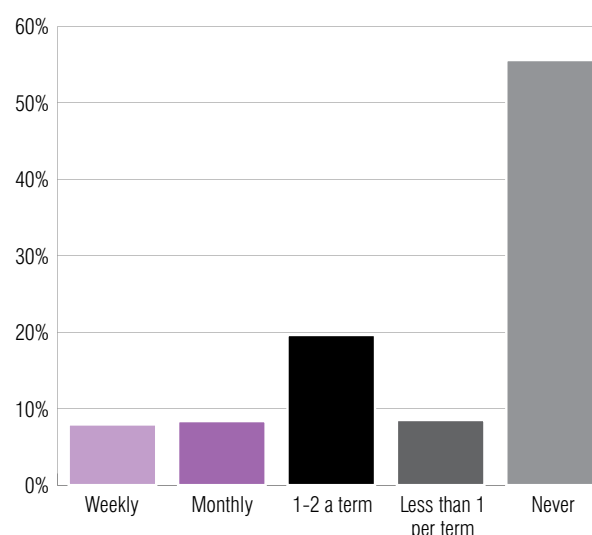


Around a further 30 per cent claimed there was no representation in their department. This means that only one third of respondents were able to say they had representation as postgraduate members of staff in their department.

The most common form of representation was through another postgraduate teacher who is either elected or appointed to represent the department's postgraduates who teach. A number of respondents stated that they used their postgraduate course rep in absence of a specific rep for teaching staff. Others claimed to have either an academic or an administrative staff member in the department to go for help and advice.

Students in non-STEM subjects are more likely to have representatives. 36 per cent of respondents from non-STEM subjects claimed to have some form of representation compared to 27 per cent of STEM respondents. Those in the social sciences appear to have the best representation. This may be down to the willingness of people in these subjects to volunteer or the importance they place on democratic structures.

Level of contact with representative



Although there are no strong relationships between type of institution and representation, the 1994 Group appear to have better levels of representation compared to all other institutions.

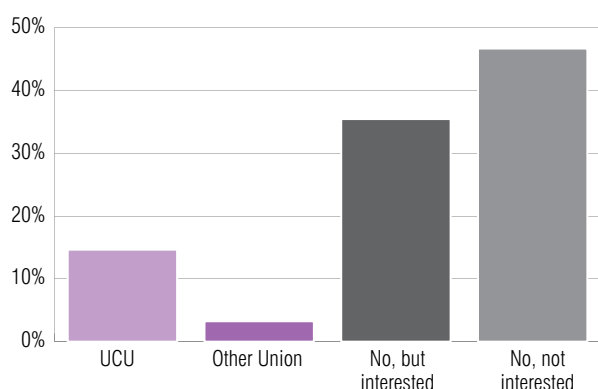
In cases where there is distinguishable representation, over half of postgraduates who teach did not contact their representative. If they did contact their reps, they tended to contact them no more than once or twice a term on average.

Unionisation

Around 18 per cent of respondents claimed to be a member of a trade union; the vast majority of unionised postgraduates are members of UCU.

A further 35 per cent claimed that they were not currently members of a trade union but were interested in joining one.

Level of unionisation among postgraduate teaching staff



Unionisation is strongest in non-STEM subjects, particularly the social sciences. Unionisation is very low in science and engineering subjects.

After controlling for the impact of low unionisation in STEM subjects and other factors, regression analysis suggests that men are statistically more likely to be members of a trade union compared to women. The difference in union membership by gender is not considerable, however.

There is a positive correlation between age and unionisation. The older a PG student is, the more likely he is to be a member of a trade union. Age appears to be the most significant factor in unionisation. This may be down to experience of union membership in

previous employment, as well as cultural factors - older postgraduates may have grown up at a time when union membership was higher and seen as more important.

Part-time students are more likely to be members of trade unions. This is likely because older students are more likely to be studying part-time and we have seen that there is a strong relationship between age and unionisation.

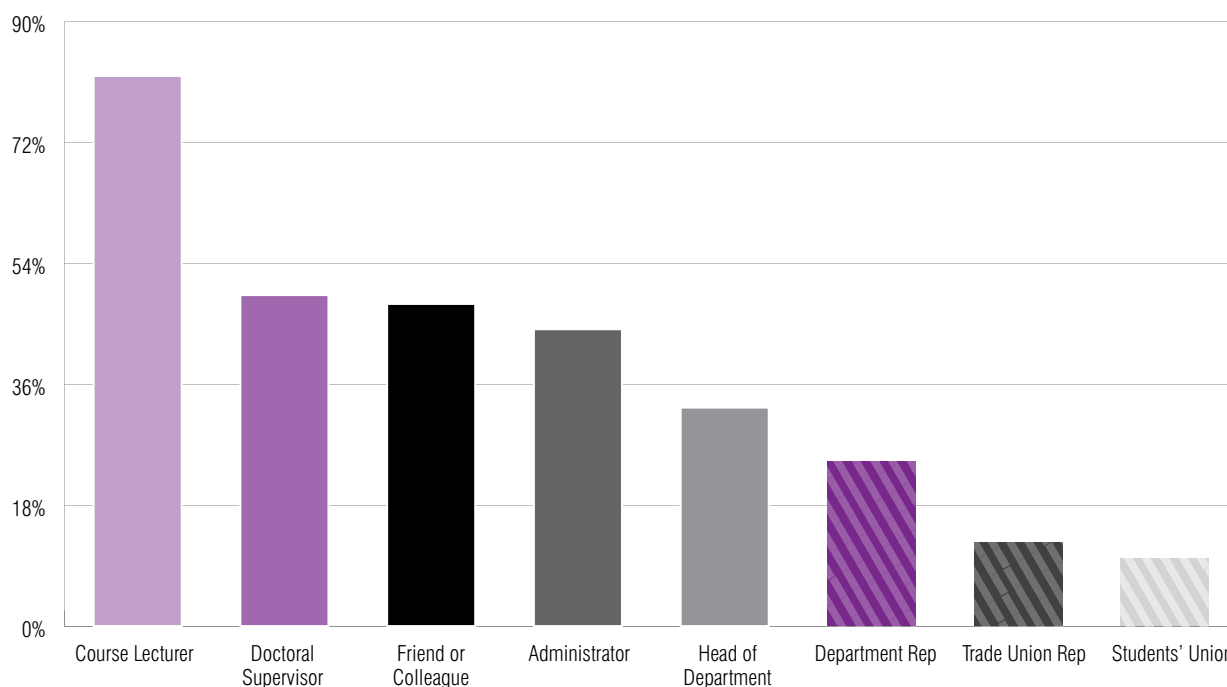
Being at a London-based university also seems to increase the likelihood of PGs being members of a trade union. There are no significant differences in the nations, however.

Who to contact?

When asked whom they would contact if they had an issue with their role as a teacher, by far the most popular answer was the course lecturer (82 per cent). Other popular answers were doctoral supervisor (49 per cent), friend or colleague (48 per cent) and department administrators (44 per cent).

Worryingly, the least popular answer was their students' union. Only 10 per cent of students said they would consider contacting them. Around 13 per cent said they would contact a trade union representative, which makes sense as it is not far off the percentage of students who said they were members of a trade union. The same goes for contacting departmental reps (25 per cent), as only around that figure had claimed to have actually contacted their rep.

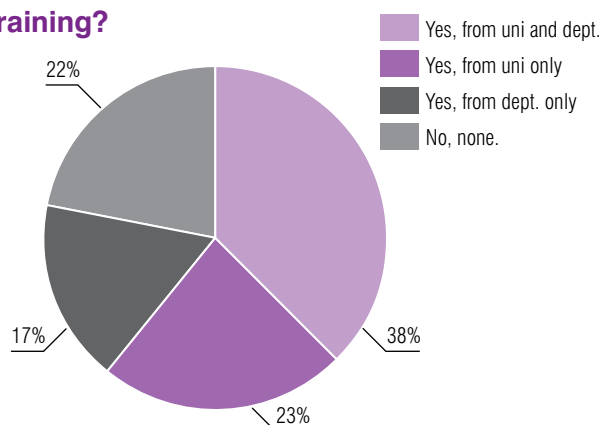
If you had a concern about your job, whom would you consider contacting?



Training and Professional Development

Four out of five respondents said that they had received some form of induction training before starting their teaching role. Around 38 per cent had received training from both their department and the university as a whole. Around 24 per cent received training from their university but not from their department. A further 17 per cent received training from their department only.

Did you receive any formal induction training?



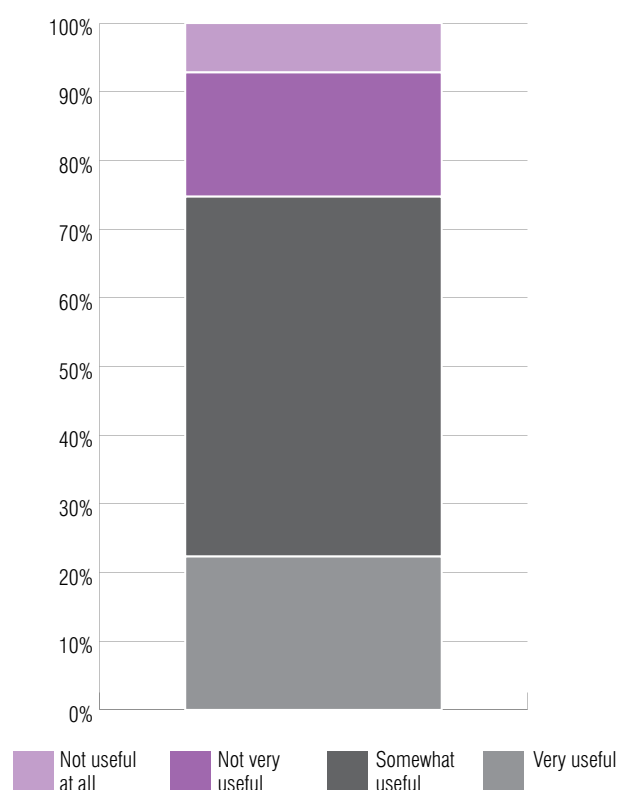
This leaves around one fifth of postgraduates who teach without any form of training at all. Potentially, this means that large group of postgraduates are thrown into teaching without any training or experience. This could make the experience difficult and traumatic. It also likely means that neither the teacher nor the students are getting the best out of the situation.

Those in STEM subjects were, on average, less likely to receive training compared to non-STEM subjects. In particular, the biomedical sciences had the lowest rates of induction training, while the social sciences had the highest.

There were no noticeable differences in the spread of training opportunities by type and location of institution.

Of those who received training, around three quarters found it either useful or very useful. Only 7 per cent found it not useful at all. Those who had training from

How useful was the training you received?



both their university and their department were more likely to find it useful.

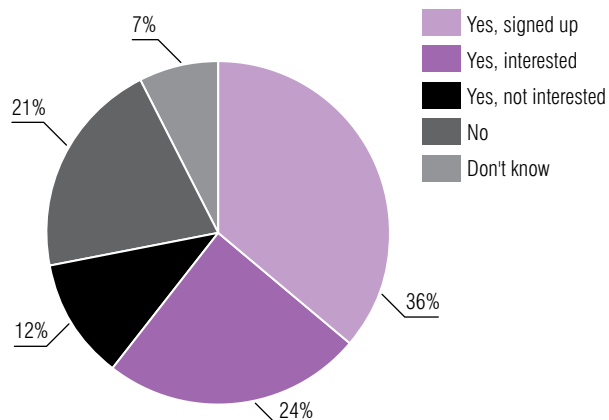
Students who had training in the biomedical sciences were less likely to find it useful, whereas those in the social sciences were more likely to find it useful.

We asked respondents to suggest ways in which training could be improved. The most common suggestion was to make training more specific in regards to the subject area and the type of teaching role, and to provide more guidance on departmental

"It would have been helpful to have a department specific course to go over standards and expectations"

Female PhD student, 27

Opportunities for professional development



procedures, regulations and expectations. A number of PGs asked for more practical “hands on” training, such as exercises, and shadowing and observing existing teachers. A good number of PGs requested more training based on teaching skills, such as presentation, class management and marking coursework and exams. Some PGs asked for improved timing and accessibility for the training events.

Over 70 per cent of respondents said they had access to professional development courses at their institution. Over a third had signed up to a professional development course, and a quarter had not signed up but were interested in doing so. One in five stated they had no access to professional development.

Feedback

Postgraduates want feedback on their teaching. They want to know how they are performing and how they may improve. The overwhelming majority of postgraduates suggested that feedback was helpful to them. 89 per cent found feedback from the module lecturer somewhat or very useful; only 1 per cent found it not useful at all. Similarly, 85 per cent found student feedback useful; just 3 per cent found it not useful at all.

"I'd like to have students formally (and anonymously) assess my teaching, so I can improve the tuition that I give them. As I demonstrate and mark the work of the same students I feel that they would be reluctant to confront me if there was a (serious) problem."

Male PhD student, 25

That said, only around a fifth of postgraduates who teach said they had received formal feedback from the module lecturer. Around half of postgraduates (excluding those new starters who are yet to know whether they will receive feedback) said they had received no feedback at all from the module lecturer.

Student feedback was more forthcoming for postgraduate teachers. Excluding those who were new to teaching, nearly half (48 per cent) of respondents claimed to have had formal feedback from their students, and a further 23 per cent had received informal feedback, leaving around 30 per cent without any feedback from students.

"I was told I wasn't allowed to see the student feedback forms, but I read them anyway, because I think that's wrong. That feedback was very useful."

Female PhD student, 27

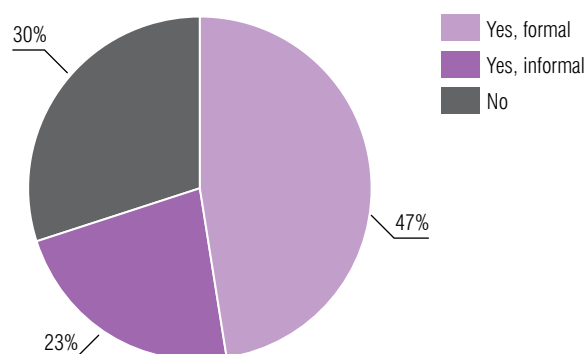
We asked postgraduates who teach to suggest ways of improving feedback. The most prominent point raised was that departments will collect feedback but not show it to their teaching assistants. A large number

of respondents complained about having to collect student feedback without ever benefitting from it. One question was what the point of the feedback is if it is not used to help improve teaching practices.

Many postgraduates suggested that having feedback half way through the year, or at the end of every term, would help improve teaching for the students they are teaching. At the end of the year is too late to impact on the students that are actually providing the feedback.

A number of resourceful postgraduate teachers created their own feedback forms, some collaborating together.

Feedback from students



However, this was often done purely because their department were not providing the mechanisms to formally collect feedback from students.

There were a number of responses asking for more qualitative feedback such as comment boxes/questions. A number of postgraduate teachers also suggested making feedback compulsory.

"Feedback is valuable in whatever form. Important is that the purpose of feedback remains guidance for the teacher, rather than control from third parties over the teacher."

Male PhD student, 32

Where do we go from here?

The experience of postgraduates who teach has long been debated and questioned, but until now, there has not been any clear evidence on how widespread certain problems are. Often bad practice may have gone unchallenged through lack of knowledge over the situation in other institutions.

We hope that the evidence in this report will help reveal to everyone involved what practice is clearly unacceptable, and result in clear and decisive action to improve the position of postgraduate teachers in their departments and institutions.

To help aid the processes through which improvements can be made, NUS make the following comments and recommendations based on the evidence in this report:

- 1. Owing to the complexity of practice across the country, as well as the organic differences between institutions, it seems unwise to prescribe a single model of good practice.** What works at one institution may not be so suitable or desirable at another. Instead, the national focus must be on ensuring that whatever structures and processes are in place, they are ultimately transparent and fair.
- 2. We are concerned by the number of postgraduates who are required to teach by their departments.** Although teaching at university can be a rewarding experience which helps to improve skills and employability, it is not in anyone's interests to force such responsibility on a postgraduate who is dispassionate about teaching or feels unequipped to do the job. Moreover, considering the number of hours many postgraduates find themselves spending on teaching duties, it may be counter-productive to force teaching responsibility on students that feel they need to concentrate more time on their research in order to submit their thesis on time.
- 3. Of even greater concern is the practice of making teaching a requirement for funding.** In some cases this effectively means a postgraduate must work for "free" to receive a fee waiver or bursary. We strongly advise institutions against such practices. Postgraduate research students should receive funding based on their academic ability and their financial needs, not on their willingness to take on unpaid labour.
- 4. It is important for institutions to provide a fair and transparent system of recruiting postgraduates into teaching roles.** Certain standards, such as providing a job description and a contract of employment, are essential to this. Whatever process of recruitment is used, departments must ensure that all applicants are treated equally in the process, which is a requirement by law.
- 5. The majority of postgraduates will teach to improve their skills and employability.** Institutions should take this into account and ensure that the experience helps to prepare postgraduate students for academic as well as non-academic employment. Providing useful and accessible courses for professional development, with the option of working towards a postgraduate certificate in teaching in higher education, will help improve the quality of experience and the confidence and skills of postgraduate teachers.
- 6. Postgraduates are pleading for feedback on their teaching.** This should come both from the academic who acts as their superior and from the students they teach. It is counter-productive of departments to withhold student feedback from postgraduate who teach. Departments that lack formal mechanisms for feedback should consult with their postgraduate teachers and with the student body through their course representatives to find out what form of feedback will work best for

both parties. We recommend that module lecturers, on top of frequent informal discussions, should write a formal written report on the progress of the postgraduates teaching on their module. This will usually require at least one observation of the postgraduate teacher performing their duties.

7. Institutions should provide, where possible, formal induction training for all postgraduates before they commence their teaching duties.

There should be sufficient flexibility to hold sessions that are divided broadly by disciplines. In order to provide more specific training for postgraduates who teach, departments should put on their own induction training, giving guidance on specific departmental rules and practices such as marking criteria and disciplinary procedures.

8. Pay is the most major concern highlighted in this report. The current inequalities in pay are unacceptable and need immediate attention. We need a coordinated effort from students unions, UCU and other trade unions, and the postgraduate student body, to ensure that pressure is put on institutions and departments that don't have a fair and consistent pay policy. We believe that fair pay must take into account each hour worked on teaching and related duties such as preparation, marking, administration, attending lectures and supporting students. UCU consider that for every teaching hour, postgraduates should receive at least 2.5 times the hourly rate. From the evidence in the report, we would suggest that this figure should be supplemented by an additional payment for marking that is based on the individual marking load. Currently, the students that mark the most will work longer hours, but this is seldom taken into account in pay. Whatever metric a department uses, marking must be sufficiently remunerated and this should make significant improvements on the gap between pay and working hours.

9. We are concerned by the lack of representation for postgraduates outside of their department.

Students' unions have a strategic position to influence policy and help standardise good practice across departments, particularly through their representation on various committees that steer institutional policy and in their collective power to campaign on various issues. We actively encourage unions to find effective ways of engaging with postgraduate teachers, which is most likely to involve greater collaboration with graduate teaching representatives and postgraduate representatives that deal with these issues at a departmental level.

10. We acknowledge the important role of trade unions, particularly UCU, in coordinating good practice and negotiating with institutions on behalf of their employees. Postgraduate interest in union membership is promising, and 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. One possibility would be to create a graduate teaching committee with representatives from UCU, students union and graduate teaching reps from university departments. The committee could be a place to discuss various issues and tackle them at various levels within the institution.

Endnotes

- 1.** NUS conducted a Postgraduate Employment Survey in 2010, of which there were 350 respondents had teaching experience. The response rate was not large enough, and the questions not specific enough, to provide an adequate national picture
- 2.** We have included institutions that were members of 1994 Group as of 15 December 2012. This includes the University of Reading, but excludes the University of Bath, the University of Surrey, and the University of St. Andrews, which are coded as “non-aligned”.
- 3.** Data for monthly pay has been truncated at £30 and £1700 to remove unrealistic figures. The 95 per cent confidence interval is from £328 to £364.
- 4.** Data on hourly pay is truncated at £6 and £50 to remove unrealistic or inconsistent figures. The 95 per cent confidence interval is from £19.28 to £20.62.
- 5.** Data on working hours is truncated at 2 and 40 hours to remove unrealistic and inconsistent figures. The 95 per cent confidence interval is from 9.11 hours to 9.89 hours.
- 6.** Due to the smaller sample size, the result for Scotland has a large standard error. This means that the 95 per cent confidence interval ranges from £12.30 to £17.38. Note that the top end of the confidence interval is still considerably lower than the bottom end of the confidence interval for the average hourly rate outside of Scotland.

Notes



