

Postgraduate researchers as staff

MANIFESTO 2023

INTRODUCTION

Postgraduate researchers (PGRs) are the backbone of the higher education sector

We are its present and its future. We work on world-changing research that can make a real difference to people's lives. We contribute knowledge and expertise, fresh insights and perspectives, and we do the hard work necessary to bring research ideas to fruition.

We teach and train students. We take ideas out of the university and into the wider world.

We are not valued

We do the same work as university staff, but we are not afforded the same recognition, rights, protections, or pay as staff, because we are considered 'students'. Many of us pay universities to produce data and outputs which we do not own.

We put our lives on hold, without access to funded child care entitlements, parental and adoption leave, state benefits, pensions or housing stability.

We are infantilised and not taken seriously. Our work is minimised, undervalued or ignored. We are overworked, under-supported and significantly more at risk of mental ill health.

We are isolated, and unprotected from toxic research cultures.

We need to be staff

We are worthy of rights, protections and pay. All of us deserve security and a good quality of life without struggle.

We must be staff. We must be sufficiently paid in a currency that is not experience. We must be given reasonable workloads. We must not pay to work. We must have access to state benefits, childcare, parental and adoption leave, and long term sick leave.

We must break down racist, ableist, classist and other oppressive barriers in the higher education sector which exist for current and future researchers.





We must ensure we secure a better deal for all PGRs, by ensuring our campaigns seek out and represent the views and needs of migrant PGRs, disabled, chronically ill and neurodivergent PGRs, those with parental and other caring responsibilities, Black PGRs and other PGRs of colour, unfunded PGRs and other groups.

Research is labour. PGRs work as staff. PGRs must be staff.

THE PGR MANIFESTO

As part of our campaign for full staff rights, we have developed this PGR manifesto as a bargaining tool for UCU branches and activists and anyone interested in improving the working lives of PGRs. We hope that enlightened employers will sign up to this policy statement and work with their PGR community and UCU branch to implement the principles set out in the manifesto. Further, we hope they will work and campaign with us, to make 'PGRs as staff' a reality.

THE CLAIM

Policy statement

The university values and celebrates its postgraduate community and their contribution to the institution's core mission and values.

The university wishes to ensure that postgraduates are supported, trained, and enabled to fully participate in the university community.

The university supports the principle that PGRs should have the same status as staff.

Principles

There will be uniformity across the institution in the way that PGRs are treated both in relation to their research work and any paid teaching work they undertake.

Research

- Postgraduates will be provided with adequate and suitable facilities and support in a timely manner to successfully undertake and complete their research.
- Postgraduates will receive regular formal and informal feedback on progress and, where required, support for improvement.
- PGRs will be recognised for the work they do within departments and will automatically be included in staff mailing lists and staff meetings and included in staff events/projects including those on equality and diversity. PGRs will be paid for their time contributing to staff meetings, projects and initiatives.
- PGRs will have access to comparable terms and conditions as employees irrespective of funding status or source.





These principles are set out in more detail in Appendix 1.

Teaching work

- All PGRs employed to undertake teaching work by the institution should be offered a contract of employment and treated as employees.
- GTA contracts should be built on the principles set out in Appendix 2.
- No PGR scholarship/bursary/stipend provided by the institution should require unpaid teaching duties. Where PGR bursaries do include a teaching component, this must be subject to an employment contract and paid at the same rate as other staff members conducting equivalent work.

The university will take reasonable steps to ensure these principles and guarantees are met, including, but not limited to: monitoring student numbers to ensure adequate facilities and accommodation; dedicating a budget towards any additional financial support required (eg for sick leave); improving feedback systems so postgraduate experiences are properly registered, listened to, and acted upon.





APPENDIX 1: SUPPORT FOR POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH

- 1.** Adequate facilities and resources include: IT hardware and software, printing and photocopying, adequate, accessible and safe work spaces, lab space (where applicable), consumables and equipment, storage facilities on campus, access to on-line learning environments.
- 2.** Adequate support includes access to a dedicated, trained, supervisor and mentor, regular formal and informal feedback and practical support to identify and address any areas that require improvement. Such support should be provided in a non-judgemental way, recognising that being given space to explore and make mistakes should be part of the PGR experience. While supervisor responsibilities should be formalised, academic control of the research project should remain with the PGR.
- 3.** Adequate support also includes being provided with adequate time to complete research, by providing funded extensions where necessary and waiving 'writing up', 'continuation', and equivalent fees.
- 4.** In relation to Covid, funded extensions should be available to any PGR who has been prevented from working as a direct or indirect result on the pandemic. This would include: those unable to access their places of work and unable to work from home (for whatever reason), those with caring responsibilities, those affected by school closures, those required to shield during the pandemic, those who have contracted Covid and those who have suffered a deterioration in their physical or mental health due to the pandemic.
- 5.** PGRs will have access to comparable terms and conditions as employees in relation to sick leave, parental and adoption leave and special leave (including bereavement leave and leave for child care caring leave) irrespective of funding status or source. Such provisions will most likely be provided by means of a funded extension.
- 6.** Where funding is available from external funders to cover the cost of any funded extension (eg to cover a period of sick leave or parental leave) the institution will work with the PGR to access that funding. However, the lack of funding from an external funder will not exclude a PGR having access to these provisions.
- 7.** PGRs will have access to any institutional employee assistance schemes and occupational health.
- 8.** PGRs will have access to the institution's staff grievance and similar procedures to raise any complaints within the workplace including harassment or bullying, and will be entitled to union representation at any such meetings.





9. Complaints procedures must operate in an equitable and timely manner, reflecting the impact of mistreatment on PGRs' lives and careers, and of the compounding impact of racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia and other forms of oppression. Timelines for complaints procedures must take into account visa restrictions for migrant PGRs, and must be completed well within any time limits applied to visas.
10. PGRs will be entitled to paid facility time to undertake trade union duties.





APPENDIX 2: PRINCIPLES FOR THE EMPLOYMENT OF GRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS (GTAS)

1. All GTAs should be provided with a written contract of employment.
2. The contract of employment should include a job description, contracted hours, rates and regularity of pay and other contractual terms and conditions.
3. Contracts should not be zero hours with no obligation to provide work.
4. The rate of pay for GTAs should be determined according to the institution's grading structure and agreed academic role profiles.
5. GTAs should be provided with incremental progression in accordance with institutional provisions.
6. Holiday provision should be in line with other academic staff and other staff on the same grade and should not be included in a rolled up rate of pay.
7. Paid sick leave, maternity, adoption, parental and special leave provisions should be equivalent to other academic staff.
8. GTAs should have access to the appropriate pension scheme, either USS or TPS.
9. GTAs will have access to the institution's grievance and disciplinary procedures and will be advised on how these operate during their induction.
10. GTAs should be paid for all hours worked. The determination of the necessary hours should be consistent across the institution and established in consultation with UCU.
11. Agreed hours and pay should fully reflect the time that is required to perform the duties including:
 - a. Delivery
 - b. Preparation (including attending lectures to understand the content and enable preparation)
 - c. Meetings
 - d. Marking/assessment
 - e. Student support (including online meetings and responding to emails)
 - f. Training and development.





12. If the hours outlined in the contract are exceeded, additional hours' payments will be made.
13. Vacancies should be advertised on a university wide basis.
14. The recruitment process should be formal and transparent and those involved should have undertaken recruitment and selection training.
15. GTAs should be automatically included in staff mailing lists and staff events. GTAs should be paid for their time on working groups and staff meetings, including those on equality and diversity.
16. GTAs should be included into course/module teaching teams for example: including them in information and communication networks, consulting them where appropriate on module development and review, involvement in team meetings etc.
17. GTAs should be included in any rewards and recognition schemes run by the employer.
18. 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, expected preparation, modes of assessment and feedback and student complaint procedures.
19. The role of GTAs in providing pastoral support to students should be recognised and PGRs should be provided with training and support to carry out this role and time spent on this activity reflected in their pay.
20. GTAs should be provided with on-going support and guidance to enable them to carry out their teaching duties. This should include provision of a supervisor and mentor, someone different to their research supervisor, and access to constructive feedback from students.
21. GTAs should be able to regularly discuss their learning and development needs and activity and be given paid time to undertake any identified training or developmental needs.
22. All teaching staff should have the opportunity to undertake relevant training and be able to undertake a nationally accredited course in higher education teaching. They should also be eligible for any internal or external, teaching awards.
23. Where appropriate, GTAs should be provided with opportunities to develop specific teaching skills, such as teaching students with specific support needs; introduction to pedagogic theories, and language support for international students.
24. All reasonable adjustments will be made to enable Disabled GTAs to undertake their role.





25. A full assessment of any adjustments required for Disabled GTAs will be undertaken and required adjustments implemented prior to them starting their duties. Any delays in making any required reasonable adjustments should not result in a financial detriment for the GTA. Disabled GTAs will be provided with regular support and will be offered a review of their needs at regular intervals or on request.
26. GTAs should be provided with office space and equipment to enable them to undertake their role. They should also have access to a staff room and catering facilities. Where GTAs are working from home they should be provided with the necessary equipment to enable them to do so safely.
27. GTAs should not be expected to use their own equipment to carry out their GTA role. They shall be advised of their right to join a trade union with contact details of the local branch of UCU.

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