UNIVERSITY OF SURREY

# Code of practice for postgraduate researchers who support teaching

Academic year 2026/27

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## Context

1. This *Code of practice* applies to any postgraduate researcher involved in supporting teaching or demonstrating. This includes those students who initially study on an MRes programme that is linked to a research degree programme; such students can undertake the teaching duties listed in paragraph 5 below in the MRes year. The *Code* has been developed with reference to the QAA *UK Quality Code for Higher Education*.

2. Use of the term "teaching" in this document includes any of the teaching support activities listed under paragraph 5, plus the exception noted under paragraph 6, below.

## Purpose

3. The University recognises that postgraduate researchers make a very important contribution to the learning and teaching and overall experience of undergraduate and postgraduate taught students at Surrey. Equally, postgraduate researcher engagement in supporting the learning and teaching of others can provide them with an opportunities to develop a range of personal and academic skills, and can help to reinforce knowledge of their subject area.

4. The primary purpose of this *Code of practice* is to establish the principles on which postgraduate researchers support the teaching and learning of taught students. The *Code of practice* seeks to ensure that, wherever postgraduate researchers are involved in teaching, appropriate measures are in place to safeguard their experience and that of the students they teach.

5. Postgraduate researchers can be involved in the following types of teaching support activity, unless supervisors raise significant concerns that are supported by the relevant Associate Dean Doctoral College, subject to meeting any additional conditions as specified below and completing the relevant training prior to undertaking these activities:

   (i) Demonstrating at FHEQ[1] Levels 3, 4, 5, and 6: This activity is typically centred on facilitating workshops (including performance workshops)/laboratory sessions and demonstrating the use of practical equipment and processes (including computer equipment/software packages) and experimental design/statistical analysis.

   (ii) Demonstrating at FHEQ Level 7: This activity is only available to postgraduate researchers who have completed the first semester of their programme, unless an exception has been approved by the relevant Associate Dean (Doctoral College).

   (iii) Seminars/tutorials at FHEQ Levels 3, 4, 5, 6, and (with the agreement of the HoS) 7: This is typically centred on supporting student tutorials and seminars with specified learning outcomes and fostering/stimulating discussion and debate amongst students. In order to be eligible for seminar/tutorial opportunities, postgraduate researchers must normally have completed the first semester of their programme, unless an exception has been approved by the relevant Associate Dean (Doctoral College).

   (iv) Co-supervision of project or dissertation work at any level: This activity is typically centred on supporting students on an independent project directed by the student. This may involve supervision within a laboratory environment. In order to be eligible for project of dissertation co-supervision, postgraduate researchers must receive the agreement of the project's primary supervisor.

[1] QAA Framework for Higher Education Qualifications

(v) Formative assessment: A formative assessment contributes to the learning process by providing feedback, either written or verbal, to students on the strengths and weaknesses of their work, but the outcomes do not contribute to any (aggregate) mark used for progression or award purposes.

(vi) Summative assessment: A summative assessment provides a mark or grade that is recorded and will contribute to the overall mark for a module and to the requirements for progression. Postgraduate researchers can mark summative work at FHEQ Levels 3, 4, 5, 6, and (with the agreement of the Head of School) 7 for a module carrying the value of up to 15 credits. There is no expectation for postgraduate researchers to be involved in the marking of high credit value summative assessment, such as project of dissertations, for a module carrying the value of 30 credits. Where they have agreed to undertake this work for the University, postgraduate researchers should be one of two markers on FHEQ Levels 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7. The other marker should be an academic member of staff (a non-PGR student). Where a postgraduate researcher has acted as primary marker, their marking must be carried out in accordance with the procedures set out in the *Code of practice for assessment and feedback*.

6. Postgraduate researchers cannot be involved in the following activities:

- Lectures: Delivery of an oral presentation to groups of students in order to convey the core content of a module, unless there is a clear case, based on the experience and specialist expertise of the postgraduate researcher that is supported by the Head of School.
- Project or dissertation work: Postgraduate researchers will not be involved in the assessment of project or dissertation work for a module carrying a value of 45 credits or more at any FHEQ Level.
- Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Body (PSRB) restrictions: Postgraduate researchers will not be involved in any teaching activity if prohibited by a PSRB.

## Principles

7. This *Code of practice* is underpinned by the following principles, each of which is expanded upon in subsequent sections:

Principle 1: Postgraduate researchers are recruited to support teaching through a standardised recruitment procedure as specified in paragraphs 8 – 12 below. This is to ensure the fair, transparent, and equitable appointment of postgraduate researchers to the support of teaching duties across the University. Where applicable, appointments to teaching support roles must be consistent with the terms and conditions of student visas.

Principle 2: All postgraduate researchers appointed to support teaching will be trained in all aspects, including assessment and health and safety (as appropriate), prior to taking on any duties. They will also be supported and mentored in order to carry out their teaching duties effectively.

Principle 3: Postgraduate researchers who support teaching are considered a part of the support teaching team.

Principle 4: Postgraduate researchers' teaching loads will be monitored to ensure that they do not interfere with their primary focus of completing their postgraduate research degree. To this end, the University limits the load to a maximum of 200 hours per year (to include preparation, delivery and, if applicable, marking), or to any limits which may be imposed by sponsors, whichever is lesser. Under exceptional circumstances, part-time postgraduate researchers may exceed 80 hours per

semester on the recommendation of the supervisor with the support of the relevant Associate Dean (Doctoral College), provided this does not exceed limits imposed by sponsors.

Principle 5: Postgraduate research students may provide support for formative and summative assessment and in doing so must adhere to the policies set out in the *Code of practice for assessment and feedback*.

Principle 6: All teaching opportunities available to postgraduate researchers are optional, unless teaching activities form a contractual component of their studentship offer.

## Principle 1: Recruitment

8. Postgraduate researchers are to be recruited to teaching positions through a fair, transparent and equitable appointment procedure described in detail below. The contractual and payment arrangements will be managed through Unitemps.

9. All teaching support opportunities will be advertised through Unitemps or via additional open calls if appropriate. In order to ensure that postgraduate researchers are furnished with sufficient information to judge if their skills and expertise are suited to the teaching opportunity and if they have sufficient time to meet the demands of teaching alongside their research, the following information will be provided in the call:

- Job description.
- The up-to-date module descriptor.
- The number of contact hours which the postgraduate researcher will be expected to teach.
- The anticipated preparation and marking time.

10. Allocation of PGR teaching opportunities will be completed via a suitable fair and transparent process. In cases where there are more short-listed applicants than teaching opportunities, the shortlisted applicants will be invited to attend an interview conducted by at least two members of staff, at least one of whom will be an academic member of staff. The Module Leader would normally be a member of the interview panel in order to ensure that the postgraduate researcher demonstrates the technical competencies and subject knowledge required to support teaching on the module. The interview may be waived at the discretion of the Module Leader in the following circumstances:

    (i) demonstrating at FHEQ Levels 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7: if a formal interview process is not feasible, the panel should be substituted for the application;

    (ii) the applicant has previously shown that they are capable of supporting the same form of teaching.

11. Where applicable, appointments to teaching support roles must be consistent with the terms and conditions of student visas.

### *Notifying central Departments about training needs*

12. Schools must send lists of newly-appointed postgraduate researchers to teaching duties and their training needs to the Surrey Institute of Education and Researcher Development Programme team in order to facilitate the planning of the training provision.

## Principle 2: Initial training and ongoing support

13. It is acknowledged that the type of teaching support activities involving postgraduate researchers vary from discipline to discipline. The training framework articulated in this *Code of practice* aims, therefore, to be sensitive to those disciplinary differences

whilst assuring that postgraduate researchers are all trained to a minimum threshold standard.

14. It is a requirement that postgraduate researchers complete the requisite training below before undertaking any teaching or assessment duties.

***Centrally delivered training***

15. All postgraduate researchers undertaking teaching support duties are required to complete a training programme comprising of centrally-delivered workshops and discipline-specific training. The table below summarises which central workshops postgraduate researchers must successfully complete depending on the type(s) of teaching duties they have been employed to carry-out.

| **Type of teaching duty** | **Required training** | **Training provider** |
|---|---|---|
| Demonstrating | *"Demonstration in Laboratories, Practicals and Tutorials"* | Researcher Development Programme |
| Seminar/lecture/tutorial based teaching | *"Introduction to Teaching in Higher Education"* | Surrey Institute of Education |
| Assessment of taught students' work | *"Assessment and Feedback"* | Surrey Institute of Education |

16. A register of postgraduate researchers who have successfully completed the central training will be maintained in SITS. The register will be accessible to Module Leaders and must be checked to verify that postgraduate researchers teaching on their modules have completed the requisite training.

***Discipline-specific training***

17. The centrally-delivered training will be complemented by discipline-specific training that will be delivered in-Faculty. The normal expectation is that this will be provided by the Module Leader, although in some cases it may be appropriate for other members of staff to deliver the training. The format of the training will vary depending on the type of teaching support activity that the postgraduate researcher is engaged in and the discipline.

18. It is important that the training is provided in a timely fashion. In the case of demonstration duties, this will be at least 24 hours prior to the class. In the case of seminar teaching, postgraduate researchers should receive training at least one week prior to the class to allow for adequate preparation time.

19. It is expected that Schools will provide postgraduate researchers with clear guidance concerning the amount of training required. As a minimum, the discipline-specific training will cover the following:

- The content of the class.
- The learning objectives.
- What postgraduate researchers are expected to prepare.
- Advice on how to convey any challenging concepts to students.
- Frequently asked questions by students about the topic.
- Information on any learning adjustments that need to be made for individual students.

- Assessment requirements (see paragraphs 27 – 29 below).
- Health and safety requirements.

20. It is good practice to allow postgraduate researchers the opportunity to observe or shadow staff delivering teaching and/or undertaking assessment; where possible, this should take place.

21. Discipline-specific training delivered at School level must be paid. This does not apply to generic training delivered by the Researcher Development Programme or Surrey Institute of Education.

***Ongoing monitoring and training***

22. The University recognises the importance of ongoing training and support for postgraduate researchers so that they can reflect on their experiences, monitor their development, and continually improve as professional educators. It is acknowledged that supporting the ongoing development of postgraduate researchers who support teaching also benefits the learning of students. Postgraduate researchers will be supported with their ongoing training and development by the Module Leader in the following ways:

- Annual observation of their teaching.
- Feedback on their performance.
- Access to relevant student feedback.

## Principle 3: The teaching support team

23. The University values the contribution that postgraduate researchers make to supporting teaching activity. In recognition of this, postgraduate researchers are considered part of the teaching support team. Programme Leaders are encouraged to integrate postgraduate researchers who support teaching into the wider teaching community by allowing them to be involved, *inter alia*, with the following: Staff-Student Liaison Committees (SSLC); discussions about annual programme reviews and external examiner reports; discussions about Module Evaluation Questionnaire (MEQ) scores and feedback; and Boards of Studies.

## Principle 4: Teaching loads

24. Schools will report teaching loads to the Associate Dean (Doctoral College) each semester. The report will comprise of the number of hours schedule, number of postgraduate researchers involved, average load, and maximum load.

25. The purpose of monitoring teaching loads is to ensure that they do not interfere with the postgraduate researcher's primary focus of completing their doctorate on time. To this end, the University limits the load to a maximum of 200 hours per year (to include preparation, delivery and, if applicable, marking) or to any limits which may be imposed by sponsors, whichever is the lesser. Under exceptional circumstances, part-time postgraduate researchers may exceed 200 hours per year on the recommendation of the supervisor with the support of the relevant Associate Dean (Doctoral College), provided this does not exceed limits imposed by sponsors.

26. If a postgraduate researcher is concerned that workloads have the potential to exceed contracted hours, concern should initially be raised with the Module Leader. If the outcome from this is unsatisfactory, the postgraduate researcher should contact their Associate Head of School, Education.

## Principle 5: Assessment

27. Postgraduate researchers are permitted to carry out formative and summative assessment only if they satisfy the eligibility criteria set out in paragraphs 5 and 6 above.

28. In order to ensure that the standard of assessment carried out by postgraduate researchers meets University expectations, it is a requirement that they successfully complete the training specified in paragraph 15 before undertaking any assessment duties. In addition to this training, Module Leaders are required to provide postgraduate researchers with clear written guidance on the assessment criteria, and advice on how to use and apply those criteria.

29. All formative and summative assessment carried out by postgraduate researchers must be carried out in accordance with the policies set out in the *Code of practice for assessment and feedback*.

## Principle 6: Teaching support duties are optional

30. All teaching opportunities available to postgraduate researchers are optional, unless teaching activities form a contractual component of their studentship offer. All contracted teaching activities must be undertaken as paid employment and not as part of a requirement associated with a stipend.

## Appendix 1 – Payment for teaching and demonstrating

All work undertaken to support teaching or demonstrating is supervised by the Module Leader. The Module Leader is responsible for ensuring that the Postgraduate Researcher (PGR):

- Has undertaken the required training to prepare for this work.
- Has a clear understanding of the nature of the work.
- Has clear information about the rate of pay and hours to be worked.

Although PGRs will have expertise and subject specific knowledge, they are not in a role where they should be making academic judgements autonomously. PGRs must be provided with academic support and supervision for all work undertaken.

***Financial Reward***

PGRs support learning in range of ways, including: Tutorial support in groups (e.g. seminars and workshops); Tutorial support in computer laboratories; Laboratory demonstrating; and Marking.

For all forms of teaching support, PGRs will be paid at a standard rate of pay via Unitemps (Salary 2B Point 4).

There is one single standard rate of pay, and this single rate will be used to reward PGRs for any preparation time and discipline specific training that they are required to undertake.

If, with the support of their Head of School, a postgraduate researcher undertakes lecturing (i.e. delivery of an oral presentation to groups of students to convey the core content of a module), or where their expertise/experience and contribution to teaching warrant a higher rate, the postgraduate researcher can be paid at a commensurate Associate rate for these higher-level teaching activities.

***Payment for preparation***

The amount of time needed to prepare for teaching and demonstrating will vary according to the nature of the task and whether the work is repeated and therefore requires less preparation. The amount of preparation time allocated to a task must be clearly specified in advance by the person recruiting the PGR for the task. This time will be paid for at the standard hourly rate.

***Payment policy for training***

To be eligible to provide support for teaching and demonstrating, the PGR must undertake the required centrally-delivered workshops relevant to the type of teaching duty they are undertaking (see paragraph 15 in this *Code of Practice*).

These workshops are considered to be a part of the doctoral training process, and PGRs will not be reimbursed for time spent on centrally-delivered training.

The centrally-delivered training will be complemented by discipline-specific training that will be delivered in-Faculty (see paragraph 17 in this *Code of Practice*). PGRs will be given precise information about the discipline-specific training required and how it will be provided. All PGRs must be paid for required discipline-specific training at the standard rate of pay outlined above.

***Payment for marking***

The time required for marking a specific assignment will vary according to the nature of the assignment. The rate for marking (the calculation of how many assignments can be marked within an hour) will be included in the job specification and will be paid at the standard hourly rate.

### *Exceptional cases*

In exceptional cases, where the nature of the work undertaken or where market forces require a variation from this policy, the arrangement must be approved by the budget-holder (Head of School or equivalent) and by the Associate Dean (Doctoral College) for the relevant Faculty. The reason for the variation to policy must be recorded and the Dean of the Doctoral College must be informed about any alteration required in an exceptional case before the work is undertaken by the PGR.