

Postgraduate students: Know your employment rights!

While the Postgraduate Employment Charter outlines good practice, being an employee means you have certain specific rights in law:

- You should have a contract with a full statement of your terms and conditions when you start your job: www.ucu.org.uk/written/terms
- You should be paid equal pay to other members of staff doing work of equal value
- You should be paid for all hours worked and you should be provided with holiday pay www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3538
- You should have the same access to work facilities as other members of staff including computing facilities, photocopying and secretarial support. If you don't and the reason is because you are part-time or fixed-term (or hourly paid) then you may be able to challenge your employer: www.ucu.org.uk/index.cfm?articleid=3546
- You should have access to a grievance procedure if you need to make a formal complaint
- Any complaints about you or your work should be handled in accordance with an agreed disciplinary, capability or probation policy
- You have the legal right to join a union
- Your employer has a legal responsibility for the health, welfare and safety of staff and you should have a safe and healthy work space: www.ucu.org.uk/safemembers
- You should not be discriminated against on the grounds of your sex, sexual orientation, race, disability, age, religion or belief or your membership of or non-membership of a trade union: www.ucu.org.uk/equality
- As an employee you have the right not to be unfairly dismissed after one year. If you are made redundant and have worked for at least two years you are entitled to redundancy pay.

Key Stats

Postgraduate Research Experience Survey 2009 (n=18,644)

49.4% agree or strongly agree

I have had adequate opportunity to gain experience of teaching whilst doing my research degree programme

45.9% agree or strongly agree

I have been given adequate support and guidance for my teaching

NUS Postgraduate Employment Survey 2010
Respondents with teaching experience = 350 approx

48% Had access to student written evaluations

21% Had opportunities to sit on a departmental teaching committee

90% Agree that the role helped them develop useful skills and made them more employable

86.9% Agree that they are confident they performed the role to an adequate standard

85.1% Agree that generally speaking their experience in the role was positive

79.3% Agree that they are generally teaching subjects on which they have adequate expertise

52.3% Agree that the payment they received was appropriate to their work in the role

36.7% Agree that they have sufficient opportunities to feed back to their department on student issues/curriculum

36.4% Agree that they have received appropriate supervision and feedback

59% Got their teaching role through being directly approached by a supervisor or other academic

38% Were not asked to supply CV, references, interview or evidence of training

25% Were not supplied with any formal documentation eg: contract, job description or letter of appointment

61% Did not know if there is a complaints or grievance procedure available

55% Thought they had appropriate and adequate training for the role

67% Had a designated supervisor, mentor or line manager

60% Said they did not have clear standards for effective performance of the role

61% Did not have a regular review/evaluation of their performance

63% Had no advice on professional development and training

About the Postgraduate Employment Charter

The Postgraduate Employment Charter focuses on the experience of postgraduates that teach but the good practice described in the Charter applies to all academic or non-academic roles that postgraduates might take up.

What could I do with it?

- Contact your local UCU branch to see if you can work together to lobby your institution to implement the Postgraduate Employment Charter
- Get buy-in from your vice chancellor and other senior management, including HR, to the principles of the Charter.
- Seek feedback from postgraduates on what kinds of support and representation they are lacking and how they would like the principles of the Charter to be put into practice.
- Together with your institution, and with postgraduate students, explore whether there are effective and appropriate policies on support for postgraduates who are employed by the institution and for postgraduates that teach, and suggest improvements.

How are postgraduates represented in their employment?

- Postgraduates in employment have the right to join a trade union and UCU has the capacity to represent postgraduates who have grievances and issues related to their employment.
- Postgraduates are still students, however, and students' unions have a vital role to play in enabling the postgraduate student voice to be represented to their institution and in pressing for good and effective policies to be put in place to support postgraduates that teach.

Where can I go for more information?

For more information on NUS' postgraduate campaign and the work we do with students' unions go to www.nusconnect.org.uk/campaigns/postgrad or contact postgraduates@nus.org.uk

For more information on the work of UCU, including the early careers guide for new staff in further and higher education, and lists of local contacts go to www.ucu.org.uk

Postgraduate Employment Charter

1

Fair and equal appointment procedures.

Positions should be advertised with a job description such that qualified students are equally able to apply for the role. Postgraduates should be made aware of any pre-conditions for permission to teach. 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.

For postgraduates that teach payment should include recognition of time spent in preparation or marking at a reasonable average for that subject, and for office hours. This should be provided in addition to payment for teaching contact hours. It should be clear how payment and taxation processes are managed and, for international students, how National Insurance numbers are obtained.

3

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.

4

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.

5

Induction and initial training. In addition to standard training provided for employees of the institution, postgraduates that teach should have an induction into teaching structures and systems at their institution as well as an introduction to subject and course materials, teaching methods, modes of assessment and feedback and student complaint procedures. Tutors expected to make use of a virtual learning environment should receive support in how to use it effectively.

6

Support for appropriate continuing professional development.

This could include opportunities to develop specific teaching skills such as lecturing or teaching students with specific support needs, introduction to pedagogic theories or opportunities to undertake an accredited course in teaching in higher education. Subject- and practice-based professional development is likely to be valued more than courses provided centrally.

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.