



Maynooth University
Human Resources Office

Policy on the Engagement of Graduate Teaching Assistants

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Engagement of Graduate Teaching Assistants

Maynooth University, as a research-intensive and research-led teaching institution facilitates registered postgraduate students by allowing them to generate some income through occasional work in the University environment. This, internationally accepted element of a postgraduate research studentship, not only provides the student with income during their studies, but it also develops their teaching skills and other transferable skills in a supported and mentored environment, which enhances their employability both within and outside of the education sector. This policy outlines the guidelines and procedures to be followed by Heads of Departments when engaging Graduate Teaching Assistants.

1. Introduction

A Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) is a registered postgraduate student of the University who is also engaged by the University to provide teaching support (as a Teaching Assistant, Tutor or Demonstrator) under the direction and guidance of a supervising member of staff. While teaching is not a mandatory element of graduate study, and postgraduate students may opt not to teach, the University has a reasonable expectation that research postgraduate students, in particular, would contribute to the teaching mission of Departments. Research postgraduate students are particularly encouraged to gain teaching experience and although the University is not obliged to offer a graduate student teaching experience, those wishing to develop their skills in this area will be supported in doing so whenever possible.

A Graduate Teaching Assistant performs an important teaching support function, and in doing so is directly or indirectly supported and mentored by members of the academic and support staff of the University.

A Graduate Teaching Assistant's engagement with the University is contingent on them being a registered postgraduate student and their employment as a Graduate Teaching Assistant will terminate when they cease to be a registered postgraduate student. The grounds for automatic termination are that a Graduate Teaching Assistantship is primarily a training role offered to postgraduate students to gain experience of teaching. It is a legitimate objective of the University to provide education and training for successive cohorts of Postgraduate Students; thereby providing an opportunity to students to develop skills in teaching by serving as a Teaching Assistant, Tutor or Demonstrator. This is an important part of postgraduate training, and so where work as a Teaching Assistant, Tutor or Demonstrator is available; the University makes such work available to postgraduate students as a priority.

Where a postgraduate student is in receipt of a grant that specifically precludes them from engaging in teaching-related work, they are not eligible to work as a Graduate Teaching Assistant. Furthermore, where the conditions of a grant allow the recipient to teach, but limit the number of hours of teaching, the recipient is not permitted to teach beyond this limit, paid or otherwise. Furthermore, the University limits the average number of hours per week which Graduate Teaching Assistants may work to **a maximum of 20 hours**¹. However, Graduate Teaching Assistants will normally work considerably less than 20 hours per week, and the University relies on Heads of Department to ensure that their teaching workload, and the opportunity it presents to the student for professional development and to support themselves through their studies, does not significantly interfere with their ability to study or conduct research.

¹ In no circumstances may the total hours worked in any one 12-month period exceed 360 hours.

While in the past Departments engaged postgraduate students on an occasional hourly-paid basis to support teaching, there are advantages to the University and to the student that they be engaged on a part-time contract of employment for a period of up to the duration of their studies, as it provides greater clarity to both parties. The University has determined, therefore, as a matter of policy, that postgraduate students who teach should be employed as Graduate Teaching Assistants on a part-time contract of employment as outlined in this policy.

The provisions of this policy do not apply to Postdoctoral Fellows who are full-time employees of the University. The University has a legitimate expectation that Postdoctoral Fellows, as part of their duties and professional development, contribute to the teaching mission of the University.

This policy applies to Graduate Teaching Assistants engaged on or after the 1st August 2019.

2. Objective

The objective of this policy is to inform Departments of the arrangements to apply in respect of the employment of Graduate Teaching Assistants, thereby ensuring that such arrangements are in line with the University's policy, current legislation and best practice requirements.

3. Definition

A *Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA)* is a registered postgraduate student of the University who is also engaged part-time by the University to provide teaching support (as a Teaching Assistant, Tutor or Demonstrator) under the direction and guidance of a supervising member of staff (who may be a member of academic staff, a researcher, a course leader or other appropriate supervisor). GTA's are engaged on an hourly paid, part-time basis during the academic year while working towards their postgraduate degree. Typically, a Graduate Teaching Assistant is engaged for the duration of their graduate studies and is involved in one or more of the following activities:

- teaching, including seminars, tutorials and other feedback/support sessions;
- developing materials for academic use;
- demonstrating practical skills in laboratory/field settings;
- appropriate administrative work within the department, ideally in support of teaching.
- additional administrative or support work outside of the department which is consistent with the appointee's GTA terms of engagement.

Graduate Teaching Assistants are engaged on a ***variable-hours appointment***, where the weekly hours of work are not fixed and may vary from week to week, depending on departmental requirements.

All work conducted by a Graduate Teaching Assistant within their department should be structured into their contract. However, a Graduate Teaching Assistant may also be engaged during term-time on an occasional hourly-paid basis outside their department to do additional administrative or support work. To ensure an appropriate balance may be achieved between study and work commitments, the average weekly hours worked (teaching support and occasional duties) may not normally exceed the lesser of 20 hours per week or 240 hours per academic year². A greater number of hours may be worked per week outside of term-time to a maximum of 360 hours per calendar year.

² An academic year is a period of time each year (normally September to May). The academic year is divided up into two semesters. A semester consists of 12 teaching weeks and two study weeks, followed by a period of examinations.

4. When to engage a Graduate Teaching Assistant:

It is appropriate for a Department to engage a Graduate Teaching Assistant, subject to the following provisions:

- the engagement is for the specified purpose of providing defined teaching, demonstrating and/or tutorial support to a supervising member of academic staff, researcher, course leader or other appropriate supervisor on a part-time, term-time basis for the duration of the postgraduate student's course of study;
- the Graduate Teaching Assistant holds a unique position, in that they are both a registered postgraduate student and employee of the University. These are two separate but mutually dependent agreements in that the postgraduate student's employment is contingent on them being registered as a postgraduate student with the University;
- should the postgraduate student's course of study with the University terminate for whatever reason, the employment relationship will also terminate that same day;
- there is an excellent opportunity for the postgraduate student to develop experience in teaching by combining graduate study with teaching support duties under the supervision of a more experienced member of staff;
- the postgraduate student during term-time only, may not normally exceed the lesser of 20 hours per week or 240 hours per academic year (including contact time, preparation and assessment and other related duties).

It is not appropriate to engage a student under the Graduate Teaching Assistant Policy where the work to be carried out is:

- not specifically related to the provision of teaching, demonstrating and/or tutorial assistance;
- is of a once-off, limited and finite nature; *or*
- is infrequent, unexpected and/or not recurring.

In such instances, and depending on the circumstances of the proposed engagement, the University's *Policy on the Engagement of Occasional Hourly-Paid Staff* may be more appropriately applied.

5. How to engage a Graduate Teaching Assistant

The engagement of Graduate Teaching Assistants takes place at Department level. It is the responsibility of the Head of Department (or nominee) to ensure that the selection process is fair and transparent and standards of best practice are adhered to when selecting postgraduate students to work in this capacity. It is essential that any postgraduate student engaged on this basis has the necessary level of skills and experience to carry out the required work.

Where a Graduate Teaching Assistant position is offered as part of an appointment on a funded research project, the recruitment process must adhere to the relevant provisions of the funding agreement (note in particular the provisions of EU funding agreements in this regard).

A postgraduate student may only accept an offer to work as a Graduate Teaching Assistant with the approval of their Supervisor; where a dispute emerges between student and supervisor in relation to the level of paid work which the student wishes to undertake, the Head of Department will determine what level of work, if any, may be assigned to the student.

6. Terms and Conditions

The Graduate Teaching Assistant is normally appointed for the duration of an academic year and/or their postgraduate studies, and is provided with a part-time (variable hours) contract of employment which extends for the full duration of their graduate studies, and terminates automatically when they cease to be a registered graduate student.

The number of hours of work per week may be renegotiated if necessary, with the agreement of the graduate student, at the beginning of any given semester.

In ordinary course, the average weekly hours of work may not exceed 20 hours, and the individual is paid an hourly rate commensurate with the type of duties worked. Hourly rates of pay for Graduate Teaching Assistants are provided at: <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/bursar/payroll-office/occasional-and-exam-pay-rates> Where the Graduate Teaching Assistant provides teaching support and fulfils occasional duties, the average weekly hours worked, (teaching support and occasional duties) may not normally exceed the lesser of 20 hours per week or 240 hours per academic year. A greater number of hours may be worked per week outside of term-time to a maximum of 360 hours per calendar year.

The fundamental principle in setting remuneration for Graduate Teaching Assistants is that they are *paid per hour worked at a rate appropriate to the nature of the work undertaken*, with the number of hours worked and the rates applicable having been agreed in advance with the Head of Department (or nominee). The hourly rates for different activities (administration, grading, laboratory demonstration, tutorials, and lectures³) are transparently benchmarked against the salaries paid to full-time staff where appropriate comparators exist. The use of hourly rates means that in a significant number of cases, an individual retained to do different types of work (say, tutorials and grading) may be paid for some of their hours at one rate and other hours at other rates.

There are also circumstances where Graduate Teaching Assistants are paid per item of work done, usually in relation to the grading of assessments. Where there is an agreed per item rate for assessment and grading, this should be used. Where there is not a per-item rate, the Head of Department (or nominee) should agree in advance an appropriate hourly rate and number of hours to complete the work.

It is a matter for the Head of Department (or nominee) to agree in advance with the Graduate Teaching Assistant the number of hours to be worked for any given semester using the guidelines provided by the University, the hourly rate(s) which will apply.

On the basis of information provided by the Head of Department (or nominee) to Human Resources, Human Resources will issue Graduate Teaching Assistants with a specified purpose part-time contract of employment. The contract will detail the terms and conditions of their employment.

7. Annual leave and public holidays

An annual leave entitlement of 8% of the total hours worked is provided to Graduate Teaching Assistants. Holiday entitlement is calculated on the basis of 8% of hours worked and is paid automatically by Payroll when the hours are claimed each month. It is understood annual leave can be taken during the University's reading weeks, Easter and/or Christmas closure periods and/or the summer months, depending on the nature and circumstances of the engagement.

Graduate Teaching Assistants will be paid public holidays if they have established an entitlement to payment through their work pattern. At a minimum, 40 hours is required to be worked in the 5 weeks ending on the day before the public holiday.

³ It is only in limited circumstances that a Graduate Teaching Assistant may deliver lectures, with the number of lecturers delivered capped at 24 per semester.

8. Procedure to appoint Graduate Teaching Assistants

The following procedure applies to the engagement and payment of all Graduate Teaching Assistants. A GTA may not begin the delivery of their assigned duties until all steps hereunder have been completed.

The Head of Department, or their nominee, must submit a completed *Graduate Teaching Staff Appointment Form (GTSAF)* to Human Resources, a minimum of 10 working days prior to engaging the individual. This form is available online via <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/hrforms>

The GTSAF is confirmation that engagement and payment of the named Graduate Teaching Assistant has been sanctioned by the relevant Head of Department (or nominee). Inaccurate or incomplete GTSAFs will be returned and will have to be resubmitted to Human Resources. This may result in payments and the commencement of the GTA being delayed.

On the basis of the information provided in the GTSAF, Human Resources will issue a specified purpose contract of employment to the Graduate Teaching Assistant, which must be signed by them and returned to Human Resources.

Payroll will use the GTSAF and contract to ensure correct and timely payments are made to all listed Graduate Teaching Assistants.

Each Graduate Teaching Assistant must also complete an Online Personnel Form (available at <https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/cgi-bin/hrforms/index.pl>) a minimum of 5 working days immediately before the commencement of their engagement.

9. Monitoring, Engagement and Support

The Head of Department bears overall responsibility for ensuring that Graduate Teaching Assistants are selected, trained, supported and monitored appropriately to the positions and with due regard for the circumstances. The Head of Department will often delegate this responsibility to appropriate nominees and course leaders. Where appropriate, the Head of Department must ensure that mechanisms are in place to induct and train Graduate Teaching Assistants, to provide information about how the programme on which they are teaching is administered, taught and assessed, to offer any necessary supports and to monitor performance and offer feedback to ensure the highest quality of teaching.

The Head of Department (or nominee) is also responsible for monitoring the duties performed by the Graduate Teaching Assistant as well as the number of hours worked each week.

A Graduate Teaching Assistant should not be engaged to carry out additional work in another Department without the knowledge and agreement of the relevant Heads of Department. The Graduate Teaching Assistant must advise all Departments in which they work of any other work that they carry out within the University. The term-time restrictions on work detailed in Section 4 of this policy apply to the total number of hours worked each week by a Graduate Teaching Assistant within the University as a whole. Moreover, where a GTA is carrying out duties in more than one school, they are required to bring this to the attention to each of the Heads of Department in which they have been engaged and provide all relevant details pertaining to same.

If it becomes apparent that a Graduate Teaching Assistant has carried out work beyond that defined by this policy and/or their contract of employment, the Head of Department should seek guidance from Human Resources on how to resolve the issue.

10. Employment eligibility

Any postgraduate student engaged as a Graduate Teaching Assistant must be a registered postgraduate student in the University and must be eligible to work in Ireland; proof of such eligibility will be required prior to the commencement of their engagement. All offers of employment are conditional on the individual satisfying the necessary legal requirements to work in this country.

11. Garda vetting

A person employed under this policy may be required to work in roles involving contact with children or vulnerable adults. In such cases Garda Vetting is required *before* the relevant work is commenced, and the employment is conditional on a Garda Vetting disclosure considered satisfactory by the University.

Where Garda Vetting is required, the Department should liaise with the Human Resources department, which will facilitate the process.

12. Termination

A Graduate Teaching Assistant's employment with the University is contingent on them being a registered postgraduate student and their employment as a Graduate Teaching Assistant will terminate automatically when they cease to be a registered postgraduate student.

The grounds for termination are that a Graduate Teaching Assistantship is primarily a training role offered to postgraduate students to gain experience of teaching. It is a legitimate objective of the University to provide education and training for successive cohorts of postgraduate students. Therefore, providing an opportunity to students to develop skills in teaching by serving as a Teaching Assistant, Tutor or Demonstrator is an important part of postgraduate training, and so where work as a Teaching Assistant, Tutor or Demonstrator is available, the University makes such work available to Postgraduate students as a priority.

In all instances, a Graduate Teaching Assistant's employment will be terminated in accordance with their specified purpose contract of employment, the University's established policies and procedures, and relevant legislation.