

Perceptions of Early Career Researcher roles in teaching and learning for Postgraduate Taught students

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Academic educational interests

- Roles for research in Postgraduate learning and teaching activities
- Relationships, tensions and interactions between teaching and research in a research intensive University
 - The RESEARCH-TEACHING NEXUS
- Personal and academic development of PGTs, PGRs and ECRs as researchers

Milestones and Transitions for Researchers

- Undergraduate
- Masters
- PhD
- ECR
- Academia,
Industry, Other?



Von Humboldt and research



Wilhelm von Humboldt
(1767-1835)

Study is guided by humanistic ideals and free thought, and knowledge is formed on the basis of logic, reason, and empiricism

“The professor was supposed to introduce students to the principles, methods and techniques of scientific problem solving ... while students should learn by watching the professor doing his research, and by participating in it”

Schimank DM & Winnes M (2000) Beyond Humboldt? The relationship between teaching and research in European university systems. *Science and Public Policy* 27:397-498

The research-teaching nexus

Refocusing the role of research in teaching:

“... an ultimate goal of the integration of research and teaching is the creation of inclusive scholarly knowledge-building communities in universities...”

Angela Brew

Brew A (2006). *Research in teaching*. In series: Entwistle N & King R (Eds) *Universities into the 21st Century*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, Hampshire

Graduate teaching assistants (GTAs)

One of the ways that Universities have found of “... teaching a greater number of students with an ever decreasing resource [has been] to employ a greater number of part-time staff, many of whom are postgraduates, to do certain teaching tasks.”

Gillon & Hoad (2001) Postgraduate students as teachers. Troon UK: National Postgraduate Committee.

Drivers for GTAs to teach

- Opportunity (ECR, Department / Faculty)
- Source of income (ECR)
- Personal and career development (ECR)

Park, C. (2002). *Neither fish nor fowl? The perceived benefits and problems of using graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) to teach undergraduate students*, Higher Education Review 35 : 50-62

Muzaka, V. (2009). *The niche of graduate teaching assistants (GTAs): perceptions and reflections*, Teaching in Higher Education 14 : 1-12

Opportunities for ECRs

Teaching training

- Sheffield Teaching Assistant
 - HEA accredited professional development programme for PGRs and ECRs

Teaching practice

?

- Who to teach?
- What activities?
- Stakeholder views?

























My study June 2014

- Online questionnaire to test the hypothesis that:
 - Benefits and problems perceived for the roles of ECRs in teaching PGTs will share features with those of GTAs for UG teaching, and will have a significant focus on research
 - Mixed methods approach for analysis

Valid survey responses

Faculty	ECRs	PGTs	Academics
Arts & Humanities	5	1	-
Engineering	5	2	2
Medicine Dentistry & Health	10	4	7
Science	6	-	-
Social Sciences	5	3	4
International	-	-	-
	ECRs	PGTs	Academics
Totals	31	10	13

Suitable PGT teaching: undertaken, assigned, experienced

Teaching activity	ECRs	Staff	PGTs
Pastoral care		-	-
Teaching support			
Research supervision	 	 	
Teaching delivery	 	 	
Assessment	 	 	 
Leading & developing	 	 	-



I would consider all teaching in a University to be a suitable role.
(ECR, AH)

ECRs could theoretically perform most of the activities involved in teaching ... (Staff, MDH)

All [teaching activities], with guidance from other teaching staff. ... (PGT, SS)

The students don't receive the best quality teaching unless the ECR has taken a teaching qualification.
(ECR, SS)

Lack of experience - ECRs' teaching might not reach the same standard as other teaching staff, although the teaching quality of other academics varies too. (Staff, MDH).

Current PGT teaching: undertaken, assigned, experienced

Teaching activity	ECRs	Staff	PGTs
Pastoral care	😊	-	-
Teaching support	😊	😊	😊
Research supervision	😊	😊	😊
Teaching delivery	😊	😊	😊
Assessment	😊	😊	😊
Leading & developing	😊	😊	😊

Confidence?

Demonstrating and practical work as I have done in the past, with somebody else taking responsibility for the course and any problem students. (ECR, Sci)

[suitable]: Seeking out teaching material, preparation of case studies, demonstrating in practical classes / problem classes.
[unsuitable]: Formal lecturing except perhaps a targeted lecture on their own area of research. (Staff, MDH)

Experience, training

there are no activities which an ECR couldn't do given either experience or training.
(Staff, SS)

I have experience in developing curricula and lecture content (ECR SS)

I've attended the STA workshops and have some experience from public engagement events. ...
(ECR, MDH)

ECRs have knowledge and experience of **research** within their subject area. ... (Staff, Eng)

Marking and assessment

the assessment process should be closely monitored by an experienced teacher. (ECR, Sci)

For preparing teaching, and setting and marking assessment, I would want to pick individuals more carefully, and / or ensure they were appropriately trained. ... (Staff, SS – suitable)

Supervision of **smaller research projects** within PGT courses (NOT full dissertations). (Staff, MDH)

ECRs often have **up to the minute research skills** and findings that can be shared with PG students. They make a valuable contribution to **research-led teaching** therefore. ... (ECR, SS)

I wouldn't want to give ECRs anything too obviously problematic - for example, **supporting a dissertation student** who is likely to fail. ... (Staff, SS – unsuitable)

With adequate support I could supervise **PGT dissertations** in my field. With extensive support, in another (related) field. (ECR, AH)

To gain valuable experience for future career development as an ECR / PGR.
... (ECR, MDH)

[ECRs] may remember what it is like to be a taught student better than more senior people, and be more sympathetic and patient. (ECR, Sci)

It will benefit the Faculty as it is a way to provide more teaching to PGTs while allowing ECRs to gain teaching experience (PGT, SS)

Bringing fresh knowledge, skills, and expertise to the course, e.g.. neither of my supervisors knew about the specific topic I am working on so ... we could use different elements of our knowledge and experience to maximize the student's experience (ECR, MDH)

It is also a really good way to identify the next generation of talented and committed teachers. ... (Staff, MDH)

Other benefits

... It will benefit the Faculty as it is a way to provide more teaching to PGTs while allowing ECRs to gain teaching experience. I think it could create a more involved faculty community if carried out correctly and fairly. (PGT, SS)

Better links between research and teaching within the department. ... (Staff, MDH)

Teaching duties in contract?
Time for teaching?
Payment?

... By the time an ECR has established a role in PG teaching, they are often potentially leaving their position within the next full academic year. (ECR, SS)

QAA
HEA &
standards?

ECRs:
Career
development
Training
Experience

Academics:
Curriculum
objectives
Workload
Finance
Resources

**Taught
students:**
Value for money
Expectation for
'expert' teaching

How have I responded?

- Encouraging engagement with STA
- Offering teaching opportunities through my PGT course
 - Research Skills workshops: development & delivery
 - Literature review supervision & marking
 - Research Project supervision & marking
- Mentoring, observation & feedback
- Encouraging engagement with HEA recognition

Postgraduate students, in particular those engaged in research projects, provide a very valuable resource for teaching within higher education institutions. They are highly skilled and have an in depth knowledge of their subject area, and having recent experience from the other side of the desk are also well versed in the teaching methods used.

National Postgraduate Committee, 1993