

# UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

## School of Social Sciences

### Minutes of the GTA Coordinator Committee – 19 November 2018

Room G.30/31, ALB at 2pm

**Present** – Julian Dodd (School GTA Coordinator), Carla Liburd (School Resources Manager), Michelle Kelly (School Resources Officer), Louise Wylie (Politics TA Rep), Jana Fey (Politics TA Rep), Vic Jotham (Economics TA Coordinator), Alexander Squires (Economics), Francesco Montagnani, Eduardo Fe Rodriguez (Social Stats TA Coordinator), Ian Bruff (Politics TA Coordinator), Ali Siles (Sociology TA Rep), Jaime Garcia Iglesias (School GTA Rep), Soumhya Venkatesan (Soc Anth TA Coordinator), Owen Abbott (Sociology GTA Coordinator), Jonathan Bebb (Philosophy TA Rep)

**Apologies** – David Liggins (Philosophy TA Coordinator)

#### 1. GTAs' workloads and contractual principles

It was highlighted at the School TA Committee meeting that some course convenors were expecting TAs to do work that was outside of their contractual principles. As a result, JD asked TA Coordinators to check processes and reiterate principles within departments. Feedback from TA coordinators below.

Social Anthropology: Lecturers have been sent the principles so they are aware of what the expectations are for TAs, which they seemed to have adhered to.

Politics: The Politics handbook has been heavily revised. One of the issues in Politics has been TAs writing far too much feedback for the given essay, despite repeated reminders of the recommended word limits for feedback.

Economics: A checklist has been sent to course convenors together with a spreadsheet of what hours TAs had available. Expectations have also been reiterated in TA training and at staff meetings.

Social Statistics: There has only been one issue with a TA being asked to do something outside of the principles (to update Blackboard).

Sociology: TAs were concerned that they were being pushed to do more creative assessment.

Most issues had largely been around marking loads and there was some concern about the preparation time required for two hour lectures.

There was also some natural discrepancy between the difficulties experienced by new TAs who had never done the role before and those who had been TAs in previous years and knew what to expect.

A large proportion of TAs in Social Anthropology hadn't been able to stick to contracted hours due to problems with TurnItIn. SV noted that the department has had three different Programme Administrators in 18 months, so had experienced teething problems, these were now largely sorted out.

TAs should not be expected to produce lesson plans. Course convenors ought to provide this, it was noted that there are large discrepancies between what course convenors provide. Some also provided 'guiding questions', but these were not always enough to fill an hour.

If TAs are experiencing issues they should approach the course convenor in the first instance. If they felt they could not approach the course convenor, then they ought to approach their Departmental TA Coordinator, failing that the School TA Coordinator.

There was some discussion on resource available and also suggestions that could be introduced to TAs to help resolve issues with workload.

- Most of the issues experienced by TAs can be resolved in the training sessions available to TAs, however TAs are reluctant to attend the training as it is unpaid. Non-payment for training is the policy set out by the Faculty and is an ongoing issue that has been raised across all Schools in Humanities and is currently being looked into. TA reps highlighted that it would be beneficial to incorporate further training sessions throughout the semester, not just at the start to help resolve problems encountered during the term and allow experienced returning TAs to share their good practice.

The idea of TAs attending relevant modules of HNAP was suggested. The Humanities New Academics Programme is currently only open to new permanent Academic staff and those on a two year fixed term appointment. Spaces are extremely limited to get on the HNAP programme, however the School could look at incorporating some of the topics and training into School level training.

- It was suggested that additional hours be granted to new TAs to help with workload. This would require a review of the principles which falls under Item 2.
- Peer Reviews are an opportunity to raise issues or concerns a TA may have and it was noted that in some areas this is not being enforced as well as it should be. It was suggested to increase the frequency of peer reviews and ensure that the review process is adhered to.

**Noted:** Departmental Coordinator for Social Anthropology officially thanked Danny Allen (Management Information Officer) for the spreadsheet he designed showing the pay breakdown of TA hours as it was very useful and saved a lot of time.

## 2. SoSS Review of contractual principles

JD noted that the School Principles were initially agreed some time ago and feels that having heard the concerns raised from TA reps and TA Coordinators, now would be a good time to start discussions for reviewing the principles. The review group would need to be established which should involve TA Coordinators, Heads of Department and Head of School and 3x TA reps. It was agreed that initial consultations would need to start with the Head of School and Head of Finance to establish what financial movement the School has available for review.

**Action:**

- Following agreement from the Head of School, a Working Group to be agreed and a meeting to be arranged to discuss the initial stages of reviewing the DA principles. JD to contact HoS **(JD)**

### 3. TA applications and department nominations

Currently only new TAs are required to complete an application form, it was noted by the TA Coordinators and TA reps that there is some confusion when completing the form when highlighting areas of interest and felt that the form should be adapted to incorporate this.

Returning TAs are not required to complete an application form and the data used from their initial application with their preferences is never changed. There is currently no mechanism in place to indicate other areas of interest for returning TAs. It was suggested that the form be adapted to allow both returners and new TAs to complete each year and highlight the Department(s) a TA would like to teach in and in which areas.

Some TA Coordinators did raise the issue of offer holders withdrawing their application at the last minute. It was highlighted that TAs in their first year should not be allocated teaching.

#### Action:

- Review TA application form and incorporate a section for returning TAs and send to the TA Coordinators for input. **(CL/MK)**
- Revise communication and incorporate the rule for PhDs teaching in their first year in the call for recruitment.

### 4. Allocation of teaching within departments

The allocation of teaching to TAs was not always transparent and TAs contracted for REF support are not working to the same principles and pay as generic TAs

### 5. Training of GTAs

There is some overlap in School and Departmental training. The Faculty have announced a review of the HEA Accreditation fellowship which will be replaced by the Faculties LEAP programme. JD confirmed that returning TAs could still submit their portfolio for HEA accreditation if they have already started their portfolio before 2018/19. New TAs and any accreditation training thereafter will follow the LEAP programme..

No *Equality & Diversity* training existed for returning TAs.

#### Actions:

- CL to send JD HEA communication from previous year for circulation. **(CL)**  
 (ii) E&D training request to be passed to E&D Committee. **(JD)**

### 6. AOB

### **6.1 SoSS TA Handbook**

Currently in progress and had been circulated to TA Coordinators for comment.

#### **Action:**

- An update to be provided to Reps on progress and availability. **(CL)**

### **6.2 Room Bookings**

A long standing item on the agenda. TA reps and coordinators raised the concern that allocated rooms for tutorials are not always appropriate. The communication that has been fed back in the past is that Central Timetabling trying to find the best fit is not always the case. Andy Partington can help in some areas to try and resource adequate space however there is a larger problem that will need to be raised at senior level.

#### **Action:**

- CL to raise with Alison Wilson to approach CTS about this.

### **6.3 TA Applications and Department Nominations**

Discussed under Item 3.