

UNIVERSITY OF MANCHESTER

School of Social Sciences

**Minutes of the GTA Coordinator Committee – 04 March 2019
Room G.020/021, ALB at 1pm**

Present – Adrienne Roberts (School TA Coordinator), Ian Bruff (Politics TA Coordinator), Owen Abbott (Sociology TA Coordinator), David Liggins (Philosophy), Michelle Kelly (School Resources Officer), Louise Wylie (Politics TA Rep), Jana Fey (Politics TA Rep), Alexander Squires (Economics), Francesco Montagnani (Social Anthropology TA Rep), Simon Walgenbach (Philosophy TA Rep – in place of Penny Orr), Lotanna Emediegwu (Economics TA Rep)

1. Apologies – Vic Jotham, Eduardo Fe

2. Matters arising from meeting on 19.11.18

2.1 Update on Working Group for reviewing DA Principles (Item 2)

A previous commitment had been made to undertaking a review of the TA Departmental Principles, however due to the ongoing UCU/HR negotiations and the fact that the remit of those negotiations kept expanding, making any amendments to the Principles that could turn out to be in conflict with the outcome of the negotiations was becoming increasingly difficult.

The committee felt that there should still be a working group, however, at present, it was recognised that the School's hands were tied in terms of being able to make any meaningful changes at present.

It was queried as to whether there could be a TA budget to work to.

It was suggested that the committee holds two meetings per semester instead of one. The committee approved this.

It was suggested that a SharePoint be set up for committee members to be able to access all previous minutes.

Noted: The working group was to be set aside for now, until there was further information on the outcome of the UCU/HR negotiations.

Actions:

- Adrienne would raise the issue of a TA budget at T&L Committee.
- Adrienne would gather as much information as possible on the status of the UCU/HR negotiations, prior to the next meeting.
- Michelle to put '*UCU/HR Negotiations Update*' on next Agenda.
- Michelle to schedule another meeting for after Easter.
- Michelle to look into the best way for minutes to be stored/accessed

2.2 SoSS TA Handbook (Item 6.1)

The SoSS TA Handbook had been sent out to all TAs and was also available on the intranet.

2.3 Room Bookings (Item 6.3)

Flexibility, availability and allocations had been a contentious issue. TAs were seemingly having to move rooms/buildings without reason and were following each other around 'swapping' rooms unnecessarily.

Following discussions, room allocations would now involve rooms being co-located according to module code. This would be implemented from 2019-20 with the largest buildings housing the larger modules and smaller buildings, the smaller modules.

3. Departmental Updates

Sociology

Nothing to report.

Social Anthropology

There had been a pay issue with a new TA which had been quickly resolved. The committee was reminded that TAs ought to be raising any problems as soon as they arise and not sitting on them.

A logistical problem had arisen with student systems which affected the attendance rosta/TurnItIn. This had been very time-consuming for the TA involved to resolve and although these sorts of issues really ought to be dealt with by the course convenor, in this instance, the TA resolving the issue was the most practical and efficient way of getting the problem solved quickly, as the course convenor did not have the knowledge about the students that the TA had. SLP would hopefully resolve/address some of these issues in the future.

Some TAs still hadn't received their Semester 2 continual appointment letters or marking payments.

Philosophy

As pay breakdowns were no longer provided, it was difficult for TAs to work out if their pay was correct, particularly if working across departments.

The Equality & Diversity Officer for Philosophy had noticed that the TA Review Form doesn't include anything for E&D on it. This was a departmental form and not a School one. The departmental form would be amended accordingly.

Economics

Semester 2 contracts – the streamlining of the contract administration from a TA perspective was viewed positively, although the fragmented implementation for returning TAs was less so and some individuals were not certain if/when they should have received their contract email.

LEAP – discussed under Item 4.

Politics

Exam marking – the TA Handbook says that marking ought to be returned in approximately 10 working days. For those with a higher marking load it was not always possible to return marks as quickly. Advice to TAs was to raise the issue of the scheduling of exams with Andrea and also to raise with UG office if exam scripts weren't getting to people in time. TAs also needed to check the exam schedule to see the timings of exams/script availability dates for marking etc.

TA Peer Reviews – the majority were very positive, however there appeared to be a gap between the peer reviews and what was actually happening in tutorials. The wording on forms may need to be amended to encourage more positive critical feedback and not encourage a predisposition to a positive review. It was the coordinator's responsibility to ensure that peer reviews had taken place. It would also be helpful to look at the timings of reviews and perhaps specify that they are to take place in the first half of the semester.

Pay issues - there was concern that theoretically, TAs who don't receive their pay could just choose to walk out, leaving the workload to be reassigned.

Office Hours – In Politics, TAs get one paid office hour per week per module they work on. Previous improvements to TA conditions had led to the number of tutorial groups that can safely be allocated to TAs before they hit the 180 hours ceiling fall from 7-8 to 5-6. This meant that as the School normally sought to allocate no fewer than 3 tutorial groups to each TA per module, there was now an incentive to allocate the 5-6 tutorial groups to each TA for just one module. While in the past it was likely that the 7-8 tutorial groups would be broken up across two modules (giving TAs pay for two office hours), now there is a greater likelihood that the 5-6 tutorial groups will be for just one module (meaning TAs only get pay for one office hour).

It became clear last semester that, owing to student demand, several TAs were putting on a second office hour unpaid, which was frustrating for them.

Given that the UCU-HR negotiations have put everything on hold, allocating tutorial groups across two modules rather than on just one module would give TAs, by virtue of how the Politics Principles were configured, two paid office hours per week. Having been asked by both the Head of School and Julian last semester to help TAs where possible in the current circumstances and given that it is unknown when the UCU-HR negotiations will be concluded or, indeed, when any agreed changes would be implemented, allocating tutorial groups across two modules would help us help TAs.

Noted:

- It was recommended that TAs use the worked examples in the TA Handbook to calculate their pay breakdown and to contact their departmental TA Coordinator with any queries.
- Any TAs who had queries about deductions made from their pay for Tax/NI should contact HR Services/Payroll.

Actions:

- Michelle to look into Semester 2 continual appointment letters not having been received by TAs
- Adrienne to flag up with T&L Committee if there is a way to get TAs a breakdown of their hours to enable them to check their pay.
- Ian and Adrienne to look into deadlines for marking and see what could be done.

4. LEAP Training

Accreditation had now moved to LEAP which was also accredited by the HEA. All new TAs were being advised to follow the LEAP pathway.

Feedback from Economics was that recent communication from the Faculty had helped in understanding what was happening with the application process, but TAs were seeking clarification on who the contact was for SoSS. It was understood that two references were required for any application – one from the School plus one other. Convenors/academics would like clarification on how they would be supported in writing this 2nd reference.

TA Coordinators requested that Adrienne forwards any further information/communications regarding LEAP to them as they are unclear about what to tell their TAs regarding processes.

There was concern from Philosophy that they wouldn't have enough HEA accredited academic staff who could act as reviewers for LEAP.

Any questions regarding LEAP should be directed to Adrienne.

Action:

Adrienne to look into how references would work.

5. AOB

5.1 Contract extension confirmations from HR for returning TAs

Actioned under Item 3.

Summary of Actions

Action	By Whom
Raise the issue of a TA budget at T&L Committee	Adrienne
Put ' <i>UCU/HR Negotiations Update</i> ' on next Agenda Actioned.	Michelle
Schedule another meeting for after Easter	Michelle
Look into the best way for minutes to be stored/accessed. Actioned: Minutes to be stored on intranet under Teaching Assistant pages. Job logged with IT Services to create new page.	Michelle
Look into Semester 2 continual appointment letters not having been received by TAs. Actioned: HR said confirmation emails due out this week. TAs notified.	Michelle
Flag up with T&L Committee if there is a way to get TAs a breakdown of their hours to enable them to check their pay. Actioned: Mail merge of hours breakdown created to address this.	Adrienne
Look into deadlines for marking	Adrienne & Ian
Look into how references would work for LEAP	Adrienne