



Warwick Postgraduate Teaching Survey 2021



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An exploration of the PGR experience of teaching

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Acknowledging the work of Kate Lewis (School of Life Sciences) and Joy Oti and Sahar Shah (School of Law) as principal researchers in this project.

Warwick Postgraduate Teaching Community

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PGRs from across Faculties – Law, History, Life Sciences, Engineering, Computer Science working with ADC.

<http://warwick.ac.uk/pgrteachers>

- In 2021 with grant money the WPTC was established, to kickstart a **community of practice for PGR teachers at Warwick.**
- 8 experienced PGRs were selected and given the freedom to steer the work, with mentorship from ADC.
- This led to online resources, enhanced communication, CPD opportunities, the *Journal of PGR Pedagogic Practice* AND the **PGR Teaching Survey.**

Context

Warwick University's GTA contracts

- PGRs undertake a range of teaching duties at Warwick.
- Warwick University currently has well over 1000 GTA contracts which are 'live'.
- GTA contracts were introduced in 2019, after consultation, to reduce the reliance on casualised teaching and offer improved employment rights for PGRs.
- GTA roles are advertised centrally at Warwick.
- There is a central policy for PGR teaching.

Warwick PTC's perspective

- There was a sense from PGRs across the Faculties that there were differences in recruitment, opportunities and access to professional learning and mentorship in departments.
- No evidence was available about the PGR teacher experience across the institution, other than PRES results.

The Survey

- Ethical approval was gained in summer 2021 and the survey designed and delivered shortly afterwards.
- Three PGRs worked together with ADC lead to develop questions and carry out analysis.
- Respondents were asked **59 questions** related to teaching, opportunities, professional learning and EDI data was collected.
- The survey **results are small scale** (106 useable responses: 45% Social Sciences; 33% Science and Med; 16% Arts; 6% not declared)
- **61% surveyed currently had a teaching role at Warwick**

Summary of findings

Evidence of inconsistency and **lack of transparency in the PGR teacher recruitment process**.

Insufficient support with subject disciplinary knowledge and a lack of time are highlighted as problems for new/existing teachers.

Centralised CPD opportunities are positively received, although **not always regarded as sufficient**; awareness is sometimes limited.

Departmental **mentoring and support opportunities may be lacking** and are indicated by PGRs as an area for improvement.

PGR teachers feel a sense of disadvantage, difference and/or **discrimination in relation to gender, ethnicity and age**.

PGR teachers feel a **lack of respect and that they are not adequately compensated** for teaching work; some are unpaid.

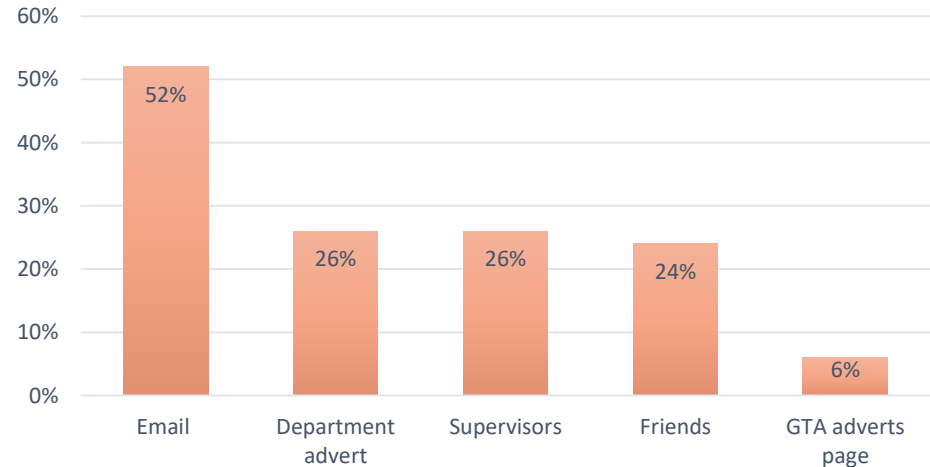
Finding teaching work

- Although centrally advertised, PGRs tend to hear about teaching work through department emails, colleagues or friends.
- Some respondents questioned the transparency of recruitment processes:

“The application process seemed like a lottery draw”.

“I got my teaching jobs on a basis of ‘who you know, not what you know’. While I feel like my experience was fairly successful, it feels like there is a light nepotism culture for PGR teaching

How did you find teaching opportunities?



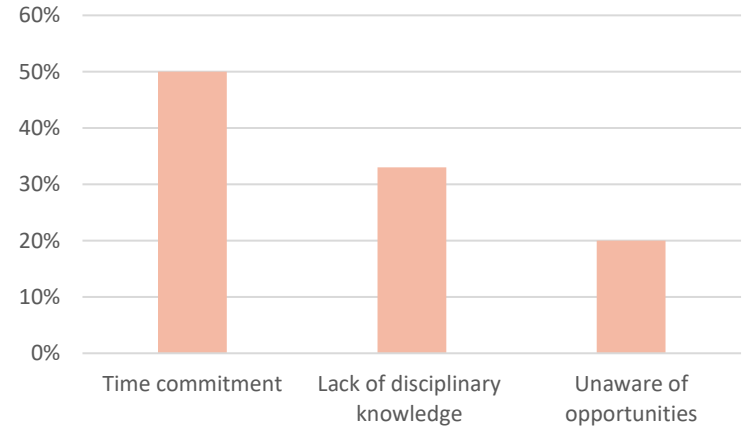
When teaching opportunities are not taken

- Time commitment and lack of subject knowledge were the main reasons for this.
- Several respondents discussed their issues or lack of confidence with disciplinary knowledge:

“I would have liked to do more teaching, but the lack of subject-specific knowledge and training were big obstacles for me. I wish that in the future PGR demonstrators would be given the opportunity for a proper induction to the course content...”

“I don't feel like sufficient training or learning materials were made available to PGRs prior the modules they were supposed to teach in.”

Why would you not take up teaching opportunities?



Professional learning and support

- Central CPD/professional learning provision is well-regarded, but the initial *Preparing to Teach* seen as insufficient by some. Not all PGRs knew about CPD opportunities, however.
- Mentorship is built into the GTA contract but the survey suggests it or not happening consistently:

“I definitely had supportive colleagues and mentors, and I’m confident in what I do now...but there’s a culture of “experience is the best teacher”. Frustratingly, it is - but I wonder if anything can be put in place/offered to help this.”

1/3 respondents either agreed or strongly agreed that Warwick provides sufficient teaching-related development opportunities for PGR teachers.

1/5 were unaware of teaching-related professional development opportunities.

Over 1/3 respondents suggested mentorship in departments could be a way of improving their experience.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: Gender and ethnicity

The survey gathered EDI data but also asked questions relating to teaching and key characteristics.

We asked: ‘Do you feel that interactions with more senior colleagues/students as a PGR teacher have been in any way affected by your gender, sexuality, ethnicity or (dis)ability?’

- Higher numbers of female PGRs and non-binary/third gender/other felt that their interactions with students had been affected (31% of female PGRs, and 67% of nonbinary/third gender/other), and similarly were **more likely to answer negatively on the amount of time they felt respected.**

“Having an Asian female tutor is a novel experience for many students which several have commented on.”

“Some students may address female staff in a less formal/respectful way. I also remember a couple of comments in the evaluation form being awfully rude.”

“Some students seemed much more likely to listen to fellow PGR teachers who were male...but it was always a bit jarring when you are an expert in a particular area...”

Age and experience

- Most respondents were younger people: 62% aged 35 or younger and a fifth (21%) under 25 years old.
- Most were in full time study (77%) while many had no additional caring responsibilities, such as children or elderly relatives (69%).
- There is a suggestion that older and/or more experienced PGR teachers could be overlooked in teaching and professional development:

“I have prior teaching experience, yet the opportunities are not available to utilise these skills...”

“I have 20+ years of experience of teaching and teaching related admin as a FT senior lecturer. The teaching related development opportunities of which I was aware were....not aimed at people with my experience.”

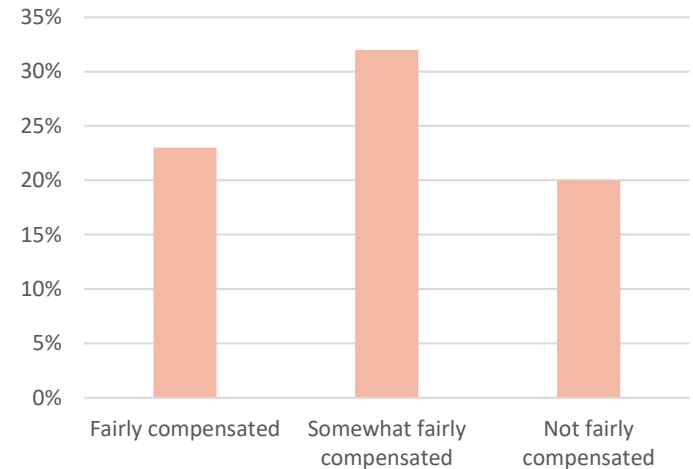
Precarity and Pay

- The theme of time, precarity and pay came through strongly in qualitative comments and aligns with what we know about PGR teacher experience from elsewhere.
- Unpaid teaching work was also reported by some.

“Preparation and marking hours are greatly underestimated.”

“Time allocated for teaching should be written into the contract to be done in office hours, so that realistic expectations can be set on how much time will be spent on research and so the PhD isn't hurt by the teaching, and so a work-life balance can be kept.”

Are you adequately compensated for your work?



What next?

- The WPTC survey **made recommendations** in relation to recruitment, advertising, support, pay and professional development for PGRs.
- The **Doctoral College and Board of Graduate Studies supports the findings** which are found to align with institutional results from PRES.
- The survey has been shared with PGRs and senior colleagues at Warwick, to be **elevated through education and social inclusion committees**.
- **Departmental data** to be prepared and shared.
- Warwick PTC is continuing analysis and looking to **publish** this work.