

TO: Assembly

FROM: David Evans

RE: Student Workers in Teaching and Assessment

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The belief and its justification

- Postgraduate students studying for a Doctorate have a right to opportunities to experience teaching and assessment work. As this work is an integral part of a future academic career to which many doctoral students aspire.
- Other postgraduate students and 4th Year Undergraduate students may in certain situations also be qualified to carry out academic work, dependant on discipline-specific expectations, but this should be the exception and not the rule.
- Student workers engaged in teaching and assessment work deserve to receive support and training from the University to ensure they can effectively carry out their duties. Undergraduates also have a right to be educated by properly supported, engaged and effective teachers.
- Higher Education teaching is a highly-skilled job, and those engaged in its delivery deserve rates of pay, benefits, and contracts reflecting the demands of the work.
- Assessment of written work, the provision of feedback, and the preparation of teaching sessions are in particular time-consuming jobs – those who undertake it are based placed to judge its workload demands and should be involved in workload modelling decisions around it.
- Personal circumstances should not affect the ability of suitable candidates to apply for academic work – in particular, work allocation should never be based in nepotism and allocation processes should be transparent as well as agreed by both staff and students.
- Work by the Students' Union should be just one part of efforts in this space – trade unions such as the University and College Union (UCU) can also represent affected workers and support us in securing rights for our own membership.

Definition of a better future

- The rate of pay for student workers involved in teaching and assessment should be set at a rate commensurate with others engaged in similar work in the University, not based on worker seniority, and should be subject to annual cost of living increases.
- Students agree with the University what work they will undertake in advance of each term or ideally year to provide certainty; accordingly students should be engaged on fixed-term contracts where possible and given the worker protections these provide.

- All departments offer some amount of teaching and assessment work to their postgraduate research students. Departments must not overuse peer marking to sideline opportunities for student engagement in teaching and assessment.
- Students agree the training they receive at faculty level prepares them well for engagement in teaching duties, all departments offer additional bespoke training and students are paid for all training they attend in connection with their teaching work.
- A University-wide policy should be agreed and adhered to regarding the manner in which opportunities for such work are advertised and allocated at departmental level.
- Departments collaborate with their student workers to regularly review and agree expectations for time spent on marking and teaching preparation work.

The barriers

- Bringing rates of pay up to a fair level incurs a cost, either borne centrally by the University or within departments – the benefits to postgraduates as well as to the undergraduates they teach must be evidenced to justify this.
- Responsibility for ensuring good practice for student workers is spread across several levels, including Human Resources (HR), trade unions, senior management, departments, faculties and workers themselves – all parties must be involved to ensure full buy-in.
- Employment and workers' rights is a complex technical space which we need to devote time to understand and be effective within – the substance of student involvement in teaching and assessment must be shown to warrant fixed-term employment.
- The current situation of precarious, casualised workers creates difficulty in mobilising students to lobby for changes to procedures within their departments, which is a key driver of unfairness regarding availability of opportunity and workload expectations.

Belief about the change and the responsibilities

- Durham Students' Union must create lines of communication for student workers involved in teaching and assessment to raise concerns about their conditions, without fear of jeopardy to their working relationship with the University.
- Departments and student academic representatives must work proactively to gather student opinion regarding conditions in student-led teaching and assessment, from both University and student perspectives, acting on their views as appropriate.
- Durham Students' Union must build relationships which span departments and University professional services. These should be used to ensure minimum standards of pay and conditions for student workers in teaching and assessment are agreed and followed, as well as working towards improvement in these areas.
- Durham University must recognise the value of student workers in teaching and assessment in supporting the delivery of Durham's educational mission. To demonstrate this, the University should match the rate for hourly paid teachers to a suitable pay scale point, and offer fixed-term employment contracts (with associated rights), to workers engaged for specified ongoing teaching and assessment duties.
- The Durham Centre for Academic Development must work with students, faculties and departments to identify and meet training needs for teaching and assessment work.

- Durham Students' Union and the UCU must collaboratively campaign to rectify any unfairnesses they identify in the pay and conditions of student workers in teaching and assessment, while respecting each other's negotiating priorities