



British Philosophical Association

## **GTA Pay and Conditions**

For a number of years Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) in Philosophy have expressed dissatisfaction with pay, terms of employment, and conditions. In light of these concerns the British Postgraduate Philosophical Association (BBPA) conducted an online survey in 2012, asking GTAs specific questions about their pay, hours of work, and contracts. The results of the survey indicated disparities in rates of pay, and raised certain problems: some GTAs reported that they were being paid at below minimum wage given the number of hours they actually worked, others stated that they were given little information about the terms of their employment.

The BPA brought this matter to the attention of Heads of Philosophy Departments in the UK, in order to raise awareness of problems that GTAs have reported, to gain the impressions from HoDs on these issues, and to get feedback on GTA pay and conditions in UK universities.

This document presents the general findings of the survey, highlights examples of what we regard as 'best practice' concerning pay and conditions, and makes some suggestions as to the kind of information HoDs and Teaching Conveners should convey to GTAs, and the kind of expectations GTAs should have of their departments and institutions. We realise, of course, that HoDs and staff have little if any control over GTA budgets or terms of employment. And we also realise that HoDs and staff are under considerable pressure from many directions concerning the quality of research, teaching, and administration. It is not our intention to add to these pressures. Nevertheless, we hope that the document goes some way to raising awareness of the need for clear communication with and support for the graduate teaching community, and in doing so addresses in a positive way the serious concerns GTAs have had in recent years.

### **1. Questions and Feedback**

The BPA asked Heads of Department the following questions; the feedback is summarized below.

- (i) what are GTA rates of pay in your department?
- (ii) how many hours GTAs are expected to spend on marking for exams, preparation, and the like, in addition to teaching?
- (iii) what kind of training and support does your department or institution provide?

## *Pay*

Most universities follow one of two models for GTA pay.

(1) GTAs are paid for 'contact hours', but this money is supposed to also cover preparation and marking. For example, GTAs at University X are paid £35 for each 'contact hour' – i.e., hour they spend teaching in the classroom. This figure is supposed to cover time spent preparing for the teaching, and any marking they are asked to do. On average, GTAs were expected to work 2.5 hours per 1 hour of teaching they do. Payment on this model ranged from approximately £28 per contact hour to £47, although the BPA is not privy to the precise contractual details in these cases; as such, the former shouldn't necessarily be regarded as underpaying GTAs, nor the latter as overly generous.

(2) GTAs are paid specifically for each hour they work. This will include contact hours, time for preparation, time for marking, and other duties such as office hours. For example, GTAs at University Y are paid £13 per hour of teaching, with an additional £13 per hour of prep, and £13 per hour of marking. GTAs are typically paid for one hour of preparation per tutorial topic, so that the one hour is supposed to cover preparation for (say) three tutorial groups on the same topic that week.

Some universities deploy incremental pay scales, so that a GTA will get paid more per hour after 3 years of teaching experience; others pay GTAs to attend lectures, or to provide 'feedback' hours.

## *Hours*

Some universities favouring model (1) did not specify how many hours the 'flat rate' is supposed to cover; others make this explicit. Of the latter, preparation time varied between 1 hour and 1.5 hours per tutorial topic per week. Most universities expected GTAs to mark three essays per hour, or four exam scripts.

## *Training and Support*

There was some variation in training and support provided by departments and institutions, but on the whole practices were similar.

(1) Most departments run training sessions for GTAs, at the beginning of their teaching career. These cover teaching, marking, and course administration.

(2) Most institutions require GTAs to undergo university-organised training sessions before they teach, or during the first semester of teaching.

(3) Most departments have monitoring and feedback procedures in place, where the teaching of GTAs is observed and their marking monitored, with feedback and guidance provided afterwards.

Some innovative practices for training and support, which HoDs and staff might wish to consider, and GTAs lobby for, are given in detail below.

## **2. Recommendations and Good Practice**

Bearing in mind the caveat that rates of pay and terms of employment are outside of the control of philosophy staff, there are nonetheless things that HoDs and teaching conveners can do in order to inform GTAs about pay and conditions, and to clarify and improve departmental practices in a number of areas.

- Whether the institution employs model (1) or model (2) for pay, GTAs should be clearly informed about what they are being paid to do, and have clear information about departmental and university expectations when it comes to teaching, preparation, marking, and administration. For instance, GTAs should be clearly told how much preparation time they should spend per tutorial topic; how many essays and exam scripts they are normally expected to mark per hour; how many essays and exam scripts they are normally expected to mark per semester; the extent of comments on essays and feedback given to students; whether they are expected to attend lecture and, if so, whether they will be paid for this; whether they are expected to have office or feedback hours; and any other matters directly related to pay. It is possible that HoDs are unaware of the precise details of GTA terms of employment – for instance, whether or not GTAs are paid to attend lectures. If so, this is something that HoDs might consult their HR department about.
- Information regarding GTAs contractual obligations should be conveyed at the beginning of their teaching careers, and also repeated at the beginning of each teaching semester. So departments should think about setting up ‘in-house’ induction sessions for GTAs, where this information is presented to (new and returning) GTAs, and where GTAs have a chance to ask directly about pay, conditions, and terms of employment. Departments should also think about putting such information in any PG or GTA handbook, so that GTAs are assured of university regulations and departmental expectations. At the very least, this will lessen the risk of GTAs working for less than minimum wage because they are unaware of how many hours they are supposed to be working on teaching and related matters.
- Departments should think about having in-house training sessions for GTAs, especially those at the beginning of their teaching careers, in addition to any university-wide training that GTAs are required to do. Again, these sessions could include discussion between the HoD, course conveners, and GTAs about departmental expectations, and good practice on teaching, marking, and preparation. For instance, at these meetings GTAs might be told (or reminded) that tutorial sessions are not additional lectures, but sessions where the students are supposed to do most of the work; as such, GTAs shouldn’t feel pressured to do lots of preparatory primary and secondary reading, or construct intricate and detailed lesson plans, for each and every group they teach. At these meetings GTAs could also be informed both about the university requirements on teacher training, and of any optional university-level training available. Again, HoDs might not be fully aware of these possibilities, in which case they might consult Staff Development offices.

The following are elements of ‘good practice’ that occur in some universities, and that HoDs in general might like to consider.

- Monthly or fortnightly workshops for new teachers, conducted by senior staff, throughout the first semester of teaching.
- A mentoring scheme for GTAs throughout their teaching careers, where members of staff take responsibility for particular GTAs.
- An ‘awayday’ covering good practice in teaching at the beginning of each semester, and a ‘debriefing’ session at the end of the year, where GTAs and staff discuss problems that have arisen, and ideas for improvement.

### **3. Summary**

We hope that this document provides some helpful guidance for HoDs and GTAs; but we would of course be very happy to receive detailed feedback from GTAs and from philosophy teachers at all levels about issues concerning GTA pay, conditions, and terms of employment. In particular, if there are issues that you would like the BPA to address in an updated version of the document, or have other examples of helpful advice and good practice we can share with the philosophical community, please do pass these on to our Executive Secretary ([admin@bpa.ac.uk](mailto:admin@bpa.ac.uk)).

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