UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

CODE OF PRACTICE ON THE TEACHING AND ACADEMIC SUPPORT OF UNDERGRADUATE AND POSTGRADUATE TAUGHT STUDENTS BY POSTGRADUATE TEACHING ASSISTANTS AND UNDERGRADUATES

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1. Preamble

1.1 This Code of Practice applies to all teaching and academic support of undergraduate and postgraduate taught students by postgraduate students or other undergraduate students where the student providing the teaching or support is doing so in addition to their own programme of study.

1.2 This Code of Practice does not apply to those students undertaking teaching duties as part of their approved programme of study, for example those on teaching training programmes or those undertaking 'peer marking' as part of a module. For these students separate provisions are made for their training and supervision and for quality assurance of their activities. This Code of Practice does not apply to Honorary Lecturers or contracted staff of the University who may also be students. For these students the regulations and terms applicable to all academic staff apply.

1.3 This Code of Practice differentiates between postgraduate students and undergraduate students in terms of the type, the amount and the level of the teaching or academic support that they may do.

1.4 This Code of Practice differentiates between **'teaching'**, '**academic support', 'formative assessment'** and **'summative assessment'**.

1.4 .1 **'Teaching'** includes undertaking occasional lectures, holding seminars and tutorials, facilitating workshops, assisting with the supervision of undergraduate research projects or dissertations and all activities included under 'academic support'. The teaching may involve a measure of responsibility and discretion in a limited field; it may also involve substantial preparation at least equal to and sometimes greater than the time spent in actual teaching.

1.4 .2 **'Academic support'** includes laboratory demonstrating and helping students in classes with practical work including laboratory-based work, study skills workshops, assisting with fieldwork activities,mentoring, managing e-learning discussion boards, peer assisted support and language laboratory support. The academic support should not involve any substantial amount of preparation and should be closely supervised by the academic staff member responsible for the module.

1.4 .3 **'Formative assessment'** includes assessment that does not contribute to the final award (as a mark or as credit), but is undertaken for developmental purposes. Formative assignments ,essays or presentations may be required of students in order for feedback to be provided prior to students undertaking a piece of assessed work which does count towards the degree classification.

1.4 ,4 **'Summative assessment'** includes assessed work which contributes to the final award (as a mark or as credit), such as unseen examinations, essays, dissertations or presentations.

1.4 .5 It is noted that some activities may fit into more than one of the categories above, for example fieldwork which may involve leading

activities including devising the schedule for the work (more likely considered as 'teaching') or may involve supporting academic staff by providing additional support as a source of advice (more likely considered as 'academic support'). In such cases the academic member of staff responsible for the module should use their judgment, consulting with the Head of School if necessary.

2. Postgraduate Students involved in teaching or academic support

2.1 A Head of School may appoint postgraduate students as Postgraduate Teaching Assistants (PGTAs). Postgraduate Teaching Assistants may be known by another name in some Schools but the duties and responsibilities should be commensurate with those described in this Code of Practice.

2.2 Postgraduate Teaching Assistants may be involved in the **teaching** of and in the provision of **academic support** for undergraduate and postgraduate taught students following appropriate training and subject to supervision by academic staff.

2.3 Postgraduate Teaching Assistants will not be the sole or main supervisor of an undergraduate research project or dissertation including MSci/MEng projects. Postgraduate Teaching Assistants will not be module convenors, responsible for a module and may only deliver such teaching as specified in this Code of Practice.

2.4 Postgraduate Teaching Assistants may be involved in the **formative assessment** of undergraduate students at all stages of an undergraduate programme and of postgraduate taught students.

2.5 Postgraduate Teaching Assistants may be involved in the **summative assessment** of undergraduate students at stage 1 of an undergraduate programme, where this assessment is subject to supervision and moderation by academic staff.

2.6 Postgraduate Teaching Assistants may be involved in **summative assessment** at stages 2 and 3 or for postgraduate taught students where each individual piece of assessment does not exceed more than 10% of the overall mark for the module and the total does not exceed 30% of the overall mark of the module. In all cases, this assessment should be subject to supervision and moderation by academic staff.

2.7 Where a School wishes to make an exception to this rule (i.e. to allow PGTAs to be involved in summative assessment other than as specified in 2.6), the proposal should be approved in advance by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Quality & Students).

2.8 Each School will complete a PGTA checklist as part of the BIQAES process for consideration by the College Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee.

3. Undergraduate Students involved in teaching or academic support

3.1 A Head of School may approve in exceptional cases the use of undergraduate students in the provision of **academic support** for undergraduate students

where this academic support is subject to appropriate and documented supervision by academic staff.

3.2 Undergraduate students may not be involved in the teaching of undergraduate students or in the marking of assessed work, whether formative or summative. Where a School wishes to make an exception to this rule based on the expertise of the undergraduates concerned, or in relation to a particular piece of assessed work, this should be approved in advance by the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Academic Quality and Students.

3.3 Each School will provide an annual report to the College Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee outlining the use made of undergraduates including the number employed and on which modules, the activities they have been involved with and the training and support provided by the School. The College will confirm that these reports have been received and reviewed through the BIQAES Annual Checklist.

4. General Provisions

4.1 The terms and duties of engagement must permit the Postgraduate Teaching Assistants and any undergraduates involved in academic support to complete the work for their own degree within the normal time period for that degree.

4.2 The teaching hours of a full time student who is a Postgraduate Teaching Assistant shall not exceed six hours per week averaged across the academic year. Training, preparation and marking time should be included in this six hour period. The weekly maximum may be redistributed across the academic year with the prior agreement of the student concerned.

4.3 The rates of remuneration shall be as determined from time to time by the University, and may be subject to limit by research councils or other sponsors.

4.4 Neither Postgraduate Teaching Assistants nor undergraduates involved in academic support shall attend Boards of Examiners.

5. Responsibilities of the School in relation to Training

5.1 Postgraduate Teaching Assistants and undergraduates involved in academic support must receive appropriate training and support for the duties they are required to perform. This may include attending generic training provided by the University but should also include discipline specific and module specific training.

5.2 It shall be the responsibility of Heads of School to satisfy themselves that appropriate procedures are operated throughout the School for determining the suitability of individual students to undertake any teaching or academic support requested of them. Module conveners are responsible for ensuring that Postgraduate Teaching Assistants and undergraduates have relevant knowledge of the discipline and the subjects to be covered, a strong command of English (or the relevant language if undertaking activities in a foreign language) and/or the requisite computing or laboratory skills. Interviews or practical tests may be used to assess these skills and experience. Where practicable a probation period should be in operation.

5.3 The School should ensure that students involved in demonstrating have hands-on experience of the equipment to be used and guidance concerning the common problems and expected outcome of the experiment, and have been fully briefed on the safety procedures for that experiment and those in force for the laboratory concerned; a note of such guidance given should be retained.

5.4 Postgraduate Teaching Assistants involved in marking should be given information and guidance on marking schemes, assessment criteria and worked examples where appropriate.

6. Responsibilities of the School in relation to Supervision and Monitoring

6.1 In each School using Postgraduate Teaching Assistants there should be an identified member of staff, 'the co-ordinator', responsible for overall co-ordination, monitoring and quality assurance (which may be carried out by different staff). This could include observation of teaching sessions, the use of evaluation forms, or holding review meetings for all students involved in teaching or academic support to discuss issues and techniques. Particular attention should be given to new appointments and a probation period considered.

6.2 Each Postgraduate Teaching Assistant should have a 'mentor', an experienced member of staff who could provide advice and support as necessary. Where possible this should be someone in addition to the member of staff identified as the co-ordinator, but may be the research mentor.

6.3 In all cases a member of academic staff shall be responsible for the work of the Postgraduate Teaching Assistants and for the module overall, both for the delivery of teaching and for assessment.

7. Responsibilities of the College

7.1 The College, through the College Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee, will monitor the appointment, training, supervision and monitoring of Postgraduate Teaching Assistants and undergraduates involved in academic support through the completion of a PGTA checklist by each relevant School and through direct consideration via School Review. The College will also monitor the academic progression of students who undertake these duties in order to ensure timely completion of research objectives.

7.2 The Pro-Vice-Chancellor (Academic Quality and Students), will be the approval body for any exceptional appointments (as detailed above).

7.3 The College, through the Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee, will report any concerns in relation to generic training, remuneration, supervision or other concerns to the University Quality Assurance and Enhancement Committee.