

Title: **Understanding the development needs of graduate teaching assistants in the UK context**

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Session Learning Outcomes

By the end of this session, delegates will be able to:

- Understand the contexts of GTA/postgraduate tutor skills development at Warwick.
- Analyse Warwick's outcomes with their own institutions' efforts.
- Begin to assemble a wider understanding of GTA/postgraduate tutor skills needs and how these can be implemented and supported in a meaningful way.

Session Outline

Employment of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) or postgraduate tutors is on the rise in UK HEIs. Unlike their equivalents in North America, however, UK-based GTAs have not had the same levels of professional recognition and skills development (Park, 2004). This has led to widely differing experiences for GTAs across departments, let alone HEIs, and has impacts on the wider student experience. Much of the skills development work in this area is done on an ad hoc basis, but a fifth of all GTAs report that they received no training or support prior to starting their duties (NUS, 2013).

At Warwick, the decision was taken in 2017 to change the way in which support for GTAs was handled. Teaching became part of a wider set of 'core transferable skills' that any aspiring academic needs to develop moving teaching skills development from a space open only to PGRs who were teaching to one where all PhD students need to attend an introductory teaching skills development module within their first year of registration. This created opportunities for wider engagement within the University, but also presented challenges, especially around the selection of material and methodologies suitable to this expanded cohort.

Postgraduate teaching skills development should not be conducted in isolation and many stakeholder groups need to be involved in the formulation of workable and proactive approaches to supporting GTAs, however (Barr and Wright, 2018). This session, therefore, will use rich data gained from working with over 1,000 Warwick-based PGRs over the past two academic years, and aim to prompt a wider discussion of what methodologies are appropriate for providing PGRs with a reasonable baseline around teaching. Participants will be invited to engage with the Warwick experience, integrate

good practice from their own institutions, and begin to chart a core set of values, needs, and approaches to support the critical work done by postgraduates in UK higher education and embed further employability options.

Session Activities and Approximate Timings

- Introduction and scene setting: 10 minutes
- Group discussion – what are the core elements of GTA skills development using material drawn from the Warwick experience and participants' own institutional approaches: 20 minutes
- Bringing it together – groups feedback and key elements distilled: 10 minutes
- Plenary – the way forward – starting a dialogue on good practice: 5 minutes

References

Barr, M., and Wright, P. (2018). Training graduate teaching assistants: What can the discipline offer? *European Political Science*, pp. 1-14.

NUS (2013). *Postgraduates who teach*. London: National Union of Students.

Park, C. (2004). The graduate teaching assistant (GTA): Lessons from North American Experience. *Teaching in Higher Education* 9(3), pp. 349-61.