



courage

wellbeing project

Case Study Strand F: Associate Tutor Network

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Setting the scene

Postgraduate researchers who are on casualised contracts to teach lectures, seminars, supervise, do marking and lab demonstrations are known as 'Associate Tutors' (ATs) at UEA. At UEA, over 50% of registered PGRs are ATs. Over a year, PGR ATs account for 32.3 Full Time Equivalent staff members, equating to over 50,000 teaching hours provided by PGR ATs.

A research project, 'The Experience of PhD Students as Associate Tutors' by the Students' Union has identified that ATs feel underappreciated for the work that they do. ATs want to feel valued in their research community, be fairly remunerated and adequately prepared for their role. Managing teaching workload, emotional labour associated with supporting student mental health and wellbeing, precarious contracts and research responsibilities has a significant impact upon individual mental health and wellbeing. You can read the full report [here](#). You can read more about the experience of a PGR AT in our Lakeside View PGR Blog here:

<https://www.uea.su/blogs/blog/lakesideview/2019/05/08/Associate-Tutor-Contracts-and-the-Fight-for-Anti-Casualisation-at-the-UEA/>

Action taken

The Students' Union and the Postgraduate Research Service had been working together to better understand and raise awareness of the issues surrounding the rights of ATs at UEA prior to the Courage Project. This foundation of collaborative work provided a platform for this strand of the project to create a network for ATs from across UEA.

There was collaboration across the Students' Union, University and College Union, the Postgraduate Research Service, Student Support Service and PGRs. PGR leadership was key in the establishment and development of the network and the Courage project funded one PGR to work with the Students' Union for 6 hours per/week over a four month period.

What is the Associate Tutor network?

The AT Network is a place for ATs to share their experiences of teaching at UEA and for the Students' Union to share their plans to transform the experience of ATs, ensuring all contributions to the University education system are valued.

The format and purpose of the network meetings was set by PGR ATs. An email list was set up and a regular newsletter sent with updates about the previous and upcoming network meetings.

Key impacts and outcomes

There are currently 61 people in the AT Network and there have been five network meetings held during the Courage project. The network has brought together ATs from across disciplines and has been used to discuss topics including AT rights, casualised contracts, UCU strikes, pensions and pay, decolonising the curriculum, mental health and supporting student mental health as an AT, training and development and fair remuneration.

The AT Network has created a place for ATs to have their voice heard. The collaboration between the Students' Union and the University prior to and during the Courage project has ensured that the rights of PGR ATs are accounted for across different levels of the institution. This has included collaboratively creating guidelines and handbooks for ATs in different faculties, using Postgraduate Employment Charters (e.g. <https://www.ucu.org.uk/postgradcharter>) to inform policies for Postgrad Research Student Employment in Teaching at the university, and having standing items on agendas during Graduate School PGR Forum meetings. Immediate issues for ATs have become easier to signpost support and deal with because of an increased awareness across the institution of ATs rights and the Students' Unions communication channels and relationships with senior members of the University. Moreover, thorough understanding of the experiences of ATs (ascertained through research available here <https://www.uea.su/postgraduate/thehonestyproject/>) and collaboration between the Student Union and the University to advocate to improve the experience of PGR ATs, who make a huge and valued contribution to the everyday functions of university institutions.

This collaborative work will continue beyond Courage. The Students' Union have begun a large scale piece of research into the experience of ATs at other institutions and a workshop for Associate Tutors.