
Chapter 2

Roles and Responsibilities

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INTRODUCTION

Many universities are privileged to have a large community of active, committed postgraduate students who are willing to undertake part-time teaching duties. Many are also in the fortunate position of being able to draw on other suitably qualified members of their local community, for example, clinicians and practising lawyers and accountants, to undertake part-time teaching roles. In a time of scarce resources, the contribution which these tutors, demonstrators, and other part-time staff make to the teaching provision of a university is not just valuable: it is vital. Without it, we would not be able to maintain the quality of the teaching which is such a distinctive feature of UK higher education.

In any resource scenario, the standard and type of teaching which is offered to undergraduate students would be much diminished if tutors and demonstrators were not involved, for they can often fulfil some roles much more satisfactorily than more senior staff. Of course, their principal roles are the ones they share with all other teaching staff. There is, first, the academic role of supporting and enhancing student learning and, second, the pastoral role of enabling students to deal with their own personal and welfare concerns. Both of these are examined more fully in the rest of this chapter. But in addition, postgraduate tutors and demonstrators can have a special 'bridging' role to play between the worlds of teaching and research, and they can often be very effective role models for first-degree students.

Many universities in their mission statements have committed themselves to sustaining and developing teaching in a research-led environment, and it can often be postgraduates who, in their daily working lives, do most to bring these two aspects of universities' work together. This is not because postgraduates are expected to make their research

topics the focus of teaching - far from it - but because the commitment and enthusiasm which they bring to teaching is so very often a reflection of their intense interest in furthering knowledge and the understanding of it through research.

They, much more than other staff members who are not so continuously active in research because of heavier teaching or administrative burdens, can give undergraduates an immediate sense of the excitement of discovery and of what it means to be at the cutting-edge of research. Thus, even though they have not been part of the academic world for as long as senior staff, postgraduate tutors and demonstrators are particularly good models for bringing home to others the importance of academic values and aspirations. In other words, they show very clearly what a university is 'about'. Not all tutors and demonstrators are postgraduates, however. Many are drawn from the professions and thus provide a different, but equally important, bridge between the worlds of academic knowledge and day-to-day professional practice.

In fulfilling these roles, part-time teachers do not - and certainly should not - act alone, nor should they imagine that there are no limits or boundaries to their responsibilities. In the academic and the pastoral roles especially, it is the student, and not the tutor, who has the ultimate responsibility for his or her own learning and personal welfare. In performing their duties, tutors and demonstrators can also expect support and help from the department in which they teach, and the next section in this chapter looks in more detail at the division of responsibilities between part-time staff and other members of their departments and universities.

In the remainder of the chapter there is a short section on the tutor's and demonstrator's responsibilities in relation to devising a teaching programme, followed by another on problems

associated with marking and assessment. Then the pastoral role is looked at briefly, and the chapter concludes by suggesting how part-time staff might begin to reflect on their personal priorities as they embark upon their teaching responsibilities.

PART-TIME TEACHING STAFF AND THE DEPARTMENTS

When any part-time tutor or demonstrator agrees to take on teaching duties in a department, that department has a responsibility to define the extent of these duties, and also to formalise arrangements concerning pay and hours of work. This is simply good professional practice, and no one should feel hesitant in asking for the following aspects of his or her responsibilities to be clarified in the form of a job description (see *figure 1* for an example). If things are clear from the outset, it will help the part-time teacher orient him or herself in the life of the department and set up a good working relationship with other teaching staff.

- All tutors and demonstrators should be given a formal letter of appointment from the head of department or other organisation responsible for the teaching, and this should state the number of contact hours and the rate of pay. This rate may vary depending on the exact nature of the duties, and differs between tutors

and demonstrators. Payment for giving a formal lecture (not normally asked of postgraduate tutors) is set at a higher rate than the standard tutorial rate, and this in turn is higher than the payment for certain types of language teaching for which little preparation is needed. The standard tutorial rate includes an element for preparation and other associated duties, as well as the actual contact hour, while the payment for demonstrators is solely for contact hours, on the grounds that the preparation required for demonstrating is significantly less than that for tutoring.

- Departments must spell out clearly which, if any, duties are associated with the teaching (practice will vary across an institution), and in particular they should make clear to tutors and demonstrators whether marking or other forms of assessment is included. If there is a requirement for the tutor to be available at set times to students for consultation, this should be taken into consideration in calculating payment.
- Part-time teaching staff should also be informed of how they will be paid - at the end of each term is usual, but some departments may pay twice termly.

All this enables the part-time teacher to be sure that

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE DEPARTMENT - JOB DESCRIPTIONS

(kept on-line and mailed to potential tutors/demonstrators)

Course: AI1

Level: FIRST YEAR

Course Organisers:

Type of Job: GENERAL TUTOR

Number of Contact Hours: 1 per week, 22 in total (8/9/5 for each term)

Number of Tutors Needed: 9/10 (c. 8 per tutor)

Short Course Description: The course is an introductory one, assuming no prior experience. The modules cover Prolog, Natural Language, Problem Solving, Vision, Current Issues and Philosophical Issues plus an introduction to Symbolic Computation. Each student writes an essay in term 1 and another essay or a project in term 2. The class is a mixture of Arts (mostly Linguistics), Social Science (mostly Psychology) and Science students (more than half the class are first year Computer Science students). Tutors look after a group of about 8 students over the academic year and are their main contact with the A.I. Department, and the department's main contact with the students.

Specific Requirements: An ability to communicate with students who know nothing about A.I., and to appreciate their difficulties and misunderstandings. A general background in A.I. - sufficient to keep 2 steps ahead of the students in each of the above modules. Essay topics, tutorial assignments and reading assignments are set by lecturers. General tutors are mainly responsible for: tutoring students on A.I. and on general study skills; monitoring attendance and general progress of students; supervising essay and project writing. Additionally tutors are required to give the students feedback on a number of assigned tutorial exercises and reading assignments, and to be involved in the marking of essays and projects. (Note: marking by postgraduates will be supervised and additional payments will be made at the rate of one hour of marking per week, averaged over 22 weeks).

Figure 1¹

he or she is really willing to undertake duties on these terms, and once agreed, these are binding on both parties.

- Departments should also tell tutors and demonstrators what training they are required to undertake and where and by whom this is to be delivered.
- In allocating teaching hours to part-time staff, departments are expected to take into account their other commitments, especially research. Many departments will allow tutors to choose their own teaching hours, and so plan their own timetable, but sometimes constraints on the availability of accommodation or the fixity of a class hour make this impossible. A tutor should be told how much freedom he or she has to set class times. Departments are expected to avoid undue fragmentation of a tutor's timetable, so that the uninterrupted blocks of time which are necessary for research and writing, and also for teaching preparation, are not constantly disrupted. Laboratory and field-work demonstrators will generally be working to a specified time-table.
- Most especially, in the case of postgraduates, departments should not expect tutors to teach in more than one or two courses unless their expertise is particularly widespread, because this adds significantly to the burden of preparation.

It is worth noting here that, when the course is underway, all teaching staff have a responsibility to turn up promptly at the appointed times. Illness apart, they must not miss or cancel classes. If special circumstances make it desirable to rearrange a class hour either to suit the tutor (who might, say, have to attend a training session) or the students (who might perhaps want to attend a special lecture), this will usually be acceptable, so long as the department knows and the students themselves agree and clearly understand the alternative arrangements.

- It is common practice for a university to require departments to nominate a member of the lecturing staff to whom the tutor or demonstrator is responsible, and from whom he or she can seek help and advice. This may be a course leader or it may be another member of staff with knowledge and experience of the course in which the teaching takes place. The tutor's or demonstrator's formal responsibility to this person is rather different from his or her relationship with a 'mentor', who is an experienced senior academic who acts more

informally as a guide or support to a tutor in developing his or her professional expertise. Mentoring schemes are becoming more widespread and where they do exist departments should inform tutors about them, and how they function.

- If marking or other forms of assessment are included in the duties, the department must give clear guidance on the marking scale and the assessment criteria to be used. A tutor will be given advice, especially if marking essays for the first time, and the person to whom he or she is responsible (as well, possibly, as the mentor) will supervise or monitor his or her marking. Corresponding arrangements will be made where demonstrators are involved in assessing laboratory or field work. In many courses or departments, all staff contributing to a course are involved in a similar process of moderation or standardisation of their marks.
- Advice and help on assessment should include a clear statement of the department's policy on granting extensions to deadlines for written work and penalties for late submission of essays etc. In similar vein, departments should tell part-time staff if there are formal requirements to report a student's non-attendance at classes to the appropriate person.
- Departments must also attend to the practical details which allow teaching to take place. They must allocate teaching space for tutors and provide the same level of secretarial support as they give other teaching staff to ease communication with students and course leaders. They must issue curricular materials (such as course booklets and laboratory guides) and give practical information on things such as photocopying procedures. Should appropriate teaching materials not be provided, the tutor should contact the course leader.
- Perhaps most importantly, the course leader, or another member of the department with first-hand experience of the relevant course(s), must discuss with tutors how much autonomy they have in devising their own tutorial programme and what constraints there are on what and how to teach. More is said about this in the next section.

Setting out responsibilities has advantages both for the department and the tutor or demonstrator. It sets their employment in a proper professional context, and it allows the department to be sure that the quality of teaching provision for its

undergraduate students is maintained. It also ensures that an adequate framework is in place for the department to be able to say to the part-time teacher "over to you", and for the tutor or demonstrator to respond with confidence, when teaching gets under way.

The above review has identified a number of roles you will have as a tutor or demonstrator and some of the principal responsibilities associated with each. Some of the avenues by which you might take things forward have also been indicated.

What seem to be early priorities for you to get to grips with - and how will you make a start?

THE TEACHING PROGRAMME

Tutoring

Although universities are convinced of the essential value of tutorials in fostering undergraduates' critical and creative thinking in relation to their chosen discipline(s), they also recognise that tutorials can achieve a multiplicity of aims and that there is therefore no one thing that tutorials are 'for'. In general, however, tutorials must integrate with and enhance the structure, content and aims of the course of which they are a part, and so in the most basic sense all tutors must, in developing their tutorial programme, 'follow the course'.

What this means in practice, and in particular how much autonomy this allows tutors to devise their own programme, will differ from course to course, even within the same department. As noted above, this is an important subject for discussion and negotiation between course leader and tutor before the course begins. It is an important part of the responsibilities of tutors to ensure that they have identified, understood and accepted the constraints under which they will work. If they do not, their students may suffer, for when it comes to formal assessment some students may find themselves less well prepared than others if their tutors have not developed a tutorial programme which relates to the main features of the course. It is very likely, however, that tutors will find the structure of a course sufficiently flexible to give them some opportunity (and in many cases, considerable opportunity) to use their own distinctive ideas, interests, experience and expertise in their teaching.

More advice on how to go about planning tutorials which relate to the overall structure of the course

as well as to the tutor's own interests and expertise is given in chapter 3 on *Tutoring in Arts and Social Sciences*. This also discusses some of the basic aims of tutorials, which can include

- deepening knowledge;
- problem-solving;
- facilitating open-ended exploration of themes and issues;
- developing skills in argumentation and communication.

When it comes to taking the tutorial, tutors have a responsibility for what happens 'in the classroom'. This means that they are responsible for identifying the purpose of a tutorial and for their own style in fulfilling that purpose. They are responsible for leading the group, and for managing group interaction, to achieve this end. But they cannot dictate what the quality of that interaction will be, and their teaching skills are only one factor in influencing the outcome of any tutorial. All teaching staff find that, even when the topic, the method and the tutor are the same, no two tutorial groups are alike because each teaching and learning experience is the product of the interaction of the whole group, not just a reflection of the skills of the tutor.

Important as tutors are, it is good to remember that they are not responsible for the students' learning: the students are responsible for that. In other words, the tutor's basic responsibility is to create a good learning environment for the students, not to try to do the students' learning for them.

Each university and its constituent departments therefore have some very basic expectations of how tutors will approach their teaching duties, but there is no template for what in detail they should do. This makes it both easier and harder for the tutor. On the one hand, there may be considerable freedom to develop one's own interests, impart one's own enthusiasms and cultivate one's own style. The other side of the coin is that the multiplicity of choice as to what to do and how to do it means there is no 'right' answer to some of the questions involved in teaching, although the chapters in this handbook should provide some guidance.

Such hard-and-fast 'rules' as there are for part-time tutors relate to their obligation to fulfil the terms of the initial agreement with the department, and also to their duty to maintain a fair, impartial and

professional relationship with undergraduate students. This is important for both the student and the tutor at all times.

Demonstrating

The flexibility available to the demonstrator in the laboratory is generally much less than that which exists in a tutorial. The programme of work in the laboratory or in the field is usually determined in a fairly specific way by the full-time member of teaching staff responsible. Nevertheless, the interaction between the demonstrator and students has an element of personal contact which is greatly valued by students. In some cases students may find it easier to admit their difficulties to a demonstrator than to the full-time academic staff involved in the course. It is particularly important that the demonstrator is active in making contact with students and does not merely wait for questions to be asked. For example, the demonstrator should be willing to ask questions of the students to discover the extent of their understanding. It may be helpful for the staff running laboratory classes to suggest questions that demonstrators might ask.

Part-time demonstrators are not expected necessarily to be familiar with all the techniques and material covered in a laboratory class before they embark on demonstrating, but where they are not it is important that they should familiarise themselves with the material before the start of the practical class. Briefing meetings are often held to help prepare demonstrators for a particular class and all such meetings should be attended. The aims of the practical class and the nature of the material will be covered in such briefings. Where there are particular aspects of safety to be considered, it is vital that demonstrators are fully competent; the demonstrator is a crucial link between the member of full-time staff running the class and the students carrying out the practical work. Chapter 5 reviews demonstrating practice in laboratory and field work classes in more detail.

MARKING AND ASSESSMENT

The extent to which postgraduate and other part-time tutors and demonstrators are involved in assessing students' coursework varies between courses. Part-time teaching staff are not usually given formal status as members of Boards of Examiners or asked to mark degree examinations, but in many, probably most, departments it is common for them to be asked to mark essays or

other exercises which are part of the written requirements of the course throughout the year.

If a tutor is involved in marking, this gives him or her first-hand experience of an important dimension to the student's learning, and it is of great benefit to the student to be given feedback on coursework from the same person who is involved in other aspects of the teaching/learning programme.

All departments must ensure that part-time teaching staff know and understand the assessment criteria and the marking scale in use in the relevant course. Tutors and demonstrators should feel free to ask for a detailed explanation of what is intended by the criteria - simply to be given a written copy of the marking scale is not likely to be enough. The department also has a responsibility to make arrangements for the checking and moderating of all staff marking, in the interests of quality assurance. This may involve the double-marking of some or all of the written exercises for students in a given group or class. In the case of part-time staff marking for the first time, the course leader or another experienced colleague should give fuller preliminary guidance, and go over samples of the tutor's marking at an early stage.

Tutors and demonstrators are responsible for adhering to the assessment guidelines and the marking scale in use in the course, and for submitting samples of their marking as required for moderation, double-marking etc. They must also check that they are fulfilling the administrative work associated with marking, e.g. handing in marks to the course leader or departmental secretary for recording and collation.

Fuller advice on marking and related tasks is given in chapter 6, *Marking and Commenting on Essays*, and within chapter 5 on demonstrating. But it is worth saying here that the responsibility of marking involves more than 'giving a mark' to students' work. The assessment process should help students advance their learning and improve their understanding, and so the comments and feedback which are given to students are just as important as the actual mark. For example, it is useful to give some of this feedback in writing - a few paragraphs at the end of an essay, perhaps - but many students will also want a face-to-face discussion. At least some of this can be done by using the regular tutorial hour for giving back essays individually.

Tutors and demonstrators, however, should not feel that students can make unlimited demands on their time and expertise when it comes to coping with

written work. It is part of a teacher's function to give guidance and support in report- and essay-writing to improve students' skills. But again it should be emphasised that students have responsibility for their own learning, and it is not the responsibility of tutors to do students' written work for them. So, for example, the tutor is not expected to look at several redrafts of an essay or to go over a written exercise time and time again. To end up in a situation where the tutor has put as much into the task as the student is not in the long term helpful to the student, and, however well-intentioned, it is not part of the tutor's professional duties.

In laboratory teaching and fieldwork much of the feedback to students provided by demonstrators will be oral, given while the work is being carried out. If laboratory or fieldwork reports are to be marked, demonstrators should seek guidance on how much detail is expected to be provided by way of written feedback to students.

THE PASTORAL ROLE

The pastoral role of the part-time teacher is another area where there are limits to what can and should be done. This is to their benefit as well as the students'. Not all teaching staff agree on how the limits should be defined, but in essence most accept that staff should not go outside a professional relationship with their students, both in terms of the time and the sympathy and degree of involvement which they give to students' personal problems. Tutors and demonstrators must not infringe the students' ultimate responsibility for resolving their own personal or welfare concerns. Laboratory or fieldwork demonstrators are perhaps less likely than tutors to be given a pastoral responsibility for students, but should this happen, then the same considerations outlined above would apply.

Tutors and demonstrators should remain receptive to the student who really does need guidance, even if they have no personal sympathy with the particular problem. A problem will very often be simple and short-lived, and it is entirely appropriate for teachers to help simply by listening, and so help the student clarify the nature of his or her concern.

Striking a balance may be quite tricky, especially for part-time teachers whose age and role in the academic community often makes them seem more approachable than older, more senior members of staff. What really matters is watching out for problems which can have a serious adverse impact

on academic functioning, and knowing who else in the student support system (e.g. personal tutor or university counselling or health service) needs to be brought in, and when. There is usually an established network of services on which tutors can draw for their students' benefit, and more is said about this in chapter 7, *Supporting and Advising Students*.

Many student problems are first manifested in non-attendance at classes and the tutor should watch out for this as a warning sign. Generally, institutions require repeated non-attendance to be reported to the course leader or to the student's personal tutor. With regard to absence from practical classes, the demonstrator may have a role in reporting this to the member of academic staff or technician in charge of the class. These mechanisms allow other agencies to be brought in to help deal with the problem.

Sometimes tutors or demonstrators may feel a tension between their pastoral responsibility towards one student and their more general duty to implement departmental policy on, say, penalties for late work or non-attendance at class. Especially if a student has spoken in confidence, it may be difficult to know how and when to pass information on to another colleague. If possible the nature and extent of the confidentiality should have been discussed with the student at the time. It may be useful to distinguish between making known the fact of a student's non-compliance with course requirements and divulging the reasons behind it. The latter should normally be disclosed only with the student's permission and/or after the matter has been discussed with the student as being in his or her best interest.

Part-time staff may find it helpful to talk over 'problem' cases with a more experienced colleague, preserving the student's anonymity if necessary. It may also help to reflect on one's responsibility to all students, not just to a single one, and to ask if special allowances made to one student, say for non-production of work, undermine the achievements of the others who have striven to meet the deadlines, etc.

CONCLUSION

This overview has tried to show what universities expect of their part-time teaching staff and how these expectations fit in with the responsibilities of the department, on the one hand, and the undergraduate student on the other. It is the department, and behind it the individual schools or faculties, which are responsible for defining the

parameters of the part-time teacher's role and duties, and for giving him or her sufficient information and practical support to allow teaching to take place. But the tutor or demonstrator has the responsibility for deciding how to flesh out and execute that role, and how to fulfil these responsibilities in such a way as to enhance the undergraduate's learning experience. The contributors to this handbook hope that the

following chapters will help part-time staff develop their own teaching style and derive enjoyment and satisfaction from their much valued contribution to teaching provision in universities.

FOOTNOTES

1. With kind permission of the Department of Artificial Intelligence, The University of Edinburgh.

