

**Title of Proposal: Fairness and Transparency for Research
Student Teachers**

Background

1. Currently, it is common practise for research students to undertake significant teaching during their degree. Those on Studentships are told they have to (and do) teach as a condition of their bursary. The level of written formality around this, and how many hours they are expected to teach varies from department to department. Self-funded students are typically employed on a zero-hours contract basis. Throughout this proposal, both funded and self-funded students will be referred to as 'visiting lecturers' (VLs) and a distinction made between the two as necessary (paid and unpaid). Student VLs typically undertake seminar or lab teaching duties, with some providing occasional guest lectures.
2. *There is a concerning lack of transparency around VL work in terms of:*
 - a. Clear **university guidelines** around the roles and responsibilities for VLs (e.g. dealing with student enquiries).
 - b. **Contracts** that clearly explain hours and pay rates (as applicable). Paid VLs should receive a 'schedule of works' that outlines expected hours and pay, but in reality do not always receive one. There have also been issues with paid VLs having to sign contracts before coming to a clear agreement on these matters. For unpaid VLs, no such contracts exist, and they are told they must complete x hours of teaching, and then allocated x numbers of seminars/labs to run. There is no clarity on how the number of classes taught, together with the student numbers, translates into the required number of teaching hours.
3. *This motion contends that current practises around allocating teaching work for unpaid VLs are unfair, for three main reasons:*
 - a. There is **no consistency** in terms of how teaching work is allocated amongst funded students - both within and across departments. Taking the Sociology department as an example (which is comprised of a number of research centres), some unpaid VLs are given the choice of which modules to teach and in which semester

they'd like to carry out their required hours of teaching. Others in different centres are simply allocated to a module. Looking at the School of Arts and Social Sciences as a whole, there is even less consistency. Within the Sociology department, the agreed number of expected/required hours of teaching per year is 100, whilst in International Politics, it is 150.

- b. Funded students have **no choice** around whether they would like to teach or not. This is a problem in two major respects. Firstly, depending on what the PhD research topic/methods are, some students will need more time to focus on their empirical research than others. Having compulsory teaching hours may deter students from choosing more time-consuming but well-suited research methods, thereby affecting the type of research the university produces. Secondly, this teaching 'scheme' also does not take into account students career prospects/plans, as not everyone will want a career in 'academia' or the benefit of teaching experience. Some may prefer to invest their spare time in work experience/other paid work to secure a future in industry or government for example.
- c. Funded PhD students are essentially carrying out **unpaid work**. This is a legal grey area: see the ongoing civil case between funded PhD students and the University of Sussex to claim back pay for unpaid teaching (<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/sussex-phd-students-demand-back-pay-unpaid-teaching.>) Ultimately though, it is problematic that a studentship - which is paid so they can students can produce PhD research and contribute to the University's research profile – is expected to cover another 'job' (i.e. teaching).

Principles

1. As an integral asset to the University's teaching staff, research students deserve **fairness and transparency** around the important work they do.
2. Furthermore, although teaching *can* be valuable work experience, it takes significant time away that could be otherwise spent completing PhD research (in a timely manner and of a high quality). Therefore, funded research students deserve to have **the choice** whether or not they want to teach, how much they teach, and when they teach.
3. Finally, *all* student VLs deserve **fair financial remuneration** for their efforts.

Idea/Proposal

1. We propose that all VLs receive contracts with a schedule of works detailing hours and rate of pay (even if that 'pay' is currently £0 for funded students). This is to be a formal written document that is discussed and agreed upon in advance of the VL signing it.
2. Furthermore, we ask that the University provide those on Studentships with the option of either:
 - a. A research-only bursary (that is enough to cover basic living expenses) and has no required teaching hours.
 - b. A teaching-plus-research bursary that is a top up of the basic bursary rate, with a set number of required teaching hours consistent across all departments.
3. Finally, we want the University to provide official guidelines on what being a student 'Visiting Lecturer' entails, including details of roles and responsibilities and outlining a formal procedure where VLs can take their complaints if they are asked to do work outside of these.