

SEDA Grant Holder Project Abstract

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International students who teach: A creative approach to supporting them and evaluating this provision

This project investigated the experiences of international postgraduates who teach; specifically examining their adjustments experiences and the challenges and learning journeys they have undertaken teaching in UKHE, using a creative approach. We situated our work in relation to research that investigates challenges experienced by international postgraduates in UKHE (Brown and Holloway, 2008; Matheson and Sutcliffe, 2017; Rizvi, 2010; Wu and Hammond, 2011), studies into HE teacher training (Wood, 2000; Ho, 2000; Trigwell and Prosser, 1996) and specifically Winter et al's (2015) work on how international students experience challenges and benefits associated with training as GTAs. We examined the efficacy of existing support for international postgraduate researchers who teach at our institution. We evaluated the creative approaches we used to understand international students' experiences. We shared our findings to initiate discussions about the benefits and limitations of our model of support.

Initially, we conceived of establishing a support group for PGRs who teach, where students would meet together and use creative methods for self-reflection over a nine-month period. However, in the early stages of the project the researcher surveyed around 213 GTAs and HPLs (44% and 28% response rate from the overall communities respectively). From that we found a demand for workshops that taught core teaching skills, as individuals felt overworked and felt lacking confidence in their teaching alongside the need for opportunities to develop a sense of belonging and community.

We therefore revised our planned activities and decided to run two streams of workshops: reflective workshops with discussion and practice of skills development (R), and skills-based workshops which modelled teaching techniques throughout and allowed participants to analyse what was experienced and observed (S). Alongside the workshops, one of the researchers conducted interviews to further explore key themes and experiences.

Unfortunately, the academic year was somewhat disrupted with a significant process of restructuring at the University of Kent from 2019 through to 2020, UCU strike actions in November 2019 and February 2020, and the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in the spring term of 2020. Nonetheless, we registered 89 attendances in the workshops and interviewed 20 international GTAs. Attendances in the workshops were constituted as follows: 49 (55%) were international or EU students and 64% were women. 29% were Humanities students, 48% were Social Sciences students, and 23% were Sciences students, which is broadly representative of the spread of PhD students across the faculties at the University of Kent. Of the 20 international GTAs the researcher interviewed 14 were from Tier 4 countries, and 6 were EU GTAs. 11 participants were female and 10

were male, and across the sample 7 GTAs worked and taught in the Sciences, 11 in the Social Sciences and 2 in the Arts and Humanities.

The first phase of the project highlighted an important misconception regarding international GTAs. We had thought that students wanted and needed a support network to undertake reflections. Instead, there was significant need in opportunities to make sense of experiences and differences in educational development and cultural upbringing. The role of cultural identities and educational experiences amongst GTAs was addressed in detail throughout the workshops, which significantly changed individuals' views of their own teaching skills. The reflective practice sessions provided the tools needed to continue a process of self-reflection in order to improve on specific skills within the context of teaching.

Dissemination and outputs to date

Research outputs:

- A paper entitled "Making sense of cultural bumps: supporting international graduate teaching assistants with their teaching" submitted to and currently under review with *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* (IETI).
- A book chapter entitled "Using creative approaches to support GTA identity work" submitted to book editor Dr Eli Saetnan, University of Liverpool. The book has been proposed for the *Critical Practice in Higher Education* series and is currently under review with the series editors Prof Joy Jarvis and Dr Karen Smith, University of Hertfordshire.

Conference presentations:

- Jo Collins, Nicole Brown and Jennifer Leigh presented "International postgraduates who teach: where can GTA developers make a difference" at the UKGCE Annual Conference (online due to Covid-19) in July 2020.
- Jo Collins and Nicole Brown presented "Making the implicit explicit: supporting international teaching assistants" at the UEL Learning and Teaching Symposium, *University of East London* (online due to Covid-19) in September 2020.

Public engagement:

- Jo Collins authored the guest post [What support do international graduate teaching assistants need?](#) for Kay Guccione's Supervising PhDs website. Entry dated 11th February 2020.
- Jo Collins and Nicole Brown co-authored the guest post [Creating a sense of belonging](#) for Kay Guccione's Supervising PhDs website. Entry dated 29th October 2020.

Internal dissemination within the University of Kent:

- Dean of the Graduate School
- Dean for Internationalisation
- Director of Education

Further planned outputs and dissemination

- Toolkit: We are currently building up a resource pack for educational developers including sample lesson plans, reflective exercises, and our findings.
- 2 research articles still under development.
- Dissemination of the toolkit.

References

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