
Guidelines: Teaching by Postdocs

Approved by the MHLS Faculty Executive Board on 26/02/20

While postdocs are principally hired to carry out research, some teaching experience is likely to benefit their career progression. The MHLS Faculty recognises the importance of facilitating teaching access to postdocs, while also protecting time for the delivery of their research project.

This document aims at providing guidelines to postdocs, their managers, and module co-ordinators in the Schools, regarding what the MHLS Faculty considers as reasonable in terms of teaching for postdocs. Involvement in teaching outside these guidelines may happen in some exceptional cases, but requires agreement by all parties (postdoc, manager and module co-ordinators).

While teaching can be provided in many forms, including supervision and mentoring, these guidelines are only relevant to activities related to classroom teaching.

In a nutshell:

- Contribution to teaching by postdocs should not be mandatory but voluntary (except if clearly stated on their job description)
- Postdocs could reasonably be involved in teaching up to 10 h of student contact per year, with no more than 4 h being lectures
- The postdoc's PI and the relevant module co-ordinators need to be consulted

Notes:

- These guidelines apply to Research Fellows and Senior Research Fellows but not to independent fellows such as Vice-Chancellor's Fellows, whose teaching involvement is regulated by their funder and Fellowship scheme, and advised by their progression committee
- The involvement of postdocs in teaching must be discussed between the postdoc and their line manager/PI (for example as part of their Personal Development Review)
- All contributions of postdocs to teaching must be known and agreed by the relevant module co-ordinators
- In addition to these, some school-specific guidelines may exist, notably for Quality-Assessed degrees, which may somewhat restrict access of teaching to postdocs (e.g. School of Pharmacy)
- Opportunities to teach cannot be guaranteed for all postdocs as they vary based on subject, available lecturers and teaching staff, number of students, number of postdocs interested in contributing etc.
- While PIs and module co-ordinators are encouraged to let postdocs know about relevant teaching opportunities in their area, postdocs willing to teach are responsible for seeking opportunities themselves

- Teaching by postdocs is not associated with a financial compensation as it is carried out voluntarily during their contracted time (so already paid), and listed as a potential task on their job description

Teaching quantity

It is sensible to limit the amount of time postdocs spend teaching, to provide them with the opportunity to develop their teaching and leadership skills but not to the detriment of progression of their research career.

The number of hours provided by these guidelines is the maximum teaching time considered reasonable for a postdoc by Faculty. It does not constitute an expectation of what teaching postdocs should undertake for lectureship applications.

- Except if clearly stated in the job description that teaching will be expected as part of the position, contribution to teaching activities by postdocs is purely voluntary
- Postdocs could reasonably spend up to 10 h of student contact per year, including no more than 4 h of lectures. Postdocs may however decide to get additional teaching experience by using part of their [career development days' allocation](#)
- It is understood that 1 h of student contact can require variable amount of preparation time depending notably on the postdoc's experience, subject knowledge, availability of materials, type of teaching (lecture, tutorial...) etc.. Postdocs should be guided by discussions with the module lead regarding how much preparation would be required before taking on a teaching assignment
- While the contribution of postdocs to teaching is usually limited to teaching delivery, it may also include the design of materials and assessment. As for any teaching activity, these require approval by the module co-ordinator and may not always be possible
- In order to enrich postdoc's teaching experience, they should not repeat the same teaching piece more than 3 times but seek other opportunities (including variety in teaching type; see "Advice for postdocs"). This will avoid teaching always being carried out by the same postdocs and facilitate access to teaching opportunities to a wider number of postdocs

Teaching quality

Making sure postdocs are appropriately mentored and guided is important to ensure that they get full benefit in terms of skills and career development, and that the teaching they provide is up to the expected standards for students.

- The teaching subject should ideally align to the disciplinary knowledge and expertise of the postdoc but, where willing, may involve other areas
- Contributions by postdocs, including new materials, should be mentored and/or reviewed as recommended by the module co-ordinator by an academic with significant teaching experience, usually someone familiar with the module

Advice for postdocs

- Be careful not to overcommit yourself with teaching; it is not the principal duty of a postdoc and shouldn't be detrimental to the research project you are employed to deliver
- Teaching experience in moderation as advised here is important for postdocs seeking an academic career
- Be pro-active in looking for teaching opportunities, notably by talking to PIs and teaching coordinators in your area of expertise
- Carefully estimate how much time a teaching commitment is actually going to take, including preparation and potential follow up administration (your PI can help you estimate)
- Prioritise diversity to quantity; It is more beneficial to get involved in several subjects, student levels (undergraduate, postgraduate), teaching types (lecture, tutorial, demonstration, group project, field trip...) and associated activities (design, delivery, assessment...) than delivering the same piece of teaching multiple times
- To enrich your teaching experience and versatility, do not repeat the same teaching assignment more than 3 times
- Be aware that the preparation required for your teaching may have to be carried out in your own time
- Use your teaching experience to apply for the Associate Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy; this will likely be useful for your academic CV (See the [CED's website](#))
- Seek feedback on your teaching by academics and students; this will help with improving your teaching skills and providing examples of achievements to use in applications and interviews
- If you feel that, after discussing it, your PI is not supporting you accordingly to these guidelines, please contact your Centre or School manager to resolve the situation

Advice for PIs

- Clarify teaching expectations on the job description prior to advertisement

In terms of teaching, generic job summaries provided by People and Culture are as follows:

“Carry out occasional undergraduate supervision, demonstrating or lecturing duties within the post holder’s area of expertise and under the direct guidance of a member of academic staff” (Research Fellow)

“Contribute to the work of the School through limited teaching and associated tasks within own research specialism” (Senior research Fellow)

Only if teaching is not permitted by the funder, remove the default sentences relevant to teaching (keeping the involvement in supervision).

If teaching will be required, which may sometimes be the case for Senior Research Fellows, add precisions at the end of the default sentence, for example “The post-holder will be expected to deliver approximately X h of teaching per year in the area of SUBJECT”

- Discuss your postdoc’s aspiration to teach and, if they want to teach, support them to gain experience within the time commitment described in these guidelines
- Help your postdoc identify teaching opportunities, either by offering them to deliver some of your own teaching, or introducing them to relevant colleagues
- Provide advice, mentorship and feedback to your postdoc in relation to their teaching, including helping them to estimate the time it will take them and how to improve
- If you could provide teaching opportunities to postdocs but can’t identify an interested postdoc, contact the PDC PI ambassador of the relevant Schools/Centres (see list on the [PDC website](#) or email fdc@qub.ac.uk), who can advertise the opportunity on your behalf to all postdocs in their area

Advice for module co-ordinators

- Support the involvement of postdocs in teaching
- Advise on the appropriate level of mentorship, review and feedback required, which may depend on the teaching activity and the experience of the postdoc
- Advertise available teaching opportunities in your module to postdocs in the relevant Schools or Centres; the PDC PI ambassadors have updated postdoc mailing lists and can cascade the information on your behalf (see list on the [PDC website](#) or email fdc@qub.ac.uk). Note that postdocs in other Schools may have the relevant expertise so don’t hesitate to advertise opportunities widely
- Keep in mind that there are not enough teaching opportunities for all interested postdocs and, while it would be impossible to provide equal access to teaching to all, we should do our best to work in this direction. If possible, avoid always involving the same person in a specific piece of teaching when other volunteers have also registered their interest. We advise postdocs not to repeat the same teaching assignment more than 3 times so that they broaden their experience
- If feedback is collected from students at a module level, inform postdocs on the feedback their teaching received and advise on potential improvements