

Part-time Teaching: A Good Practice Guide

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Number 9
August 2004



A Report to the Higher Education Academy
English Subject Centre

Part-time Teaching: A Good Practice Guide

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ISBN 0 902 19429 1

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Foreword

The English Subject Centre Report Series aims to provide contextual information about the condition of the subject, its relation to national Higher Education priorities, and the practical and academic concerns shared by English Departments at the present time. In this way the series intends to assist departments in their planning, and in their understanding of their own positions.

While proportions vary from department to department, it is widely recognised that a sizable proportion of teaching in the subject is performed by colleagues on part-time and fractional contracts. Responses to a Subject Centre survey in 2003¹ indicate that it is not uncommon for a department to employ up to four part-time and fractional staff on permanent contracts, and a similar number on temporary contracts. In addition departments often employ significant numbers on an hourly paid basis (including graduate teaching assistants): in the survey one department claimed as many as 34 hourly paid tutors on its books. There is of course a wide variety of kinds of contract and local arrangements. Nevertheless, over some years we have been seeing a shift away from the assumption that the part-time tutor is typically a postgraduate or postdoctoral researcher moving through a kind of apprenticeship towards a permanent lecturing contract. (Where such figures exist they are in any case now more likely to be moving towards fixed-term contracts.) There are many colleagues for whom the part-time condition has or may well become permanent, and equally there are many part-timers who work simultaneously for two or more institutions. This Guide (the 9th in the English Subject Centre series) is addressed to this situation. The object of the English Subject Centre is to support all colleagues within the discipline, part-time and fractional contract staff included. We recognise, however, that the latter have particular needs, and we hope that Dr Holland's Guide will contribute to their treatment as full and valued

members of the subject community. Its recommendations, based on extensive interviews and focus group material, are addressed both to departments and to part-time colleagues themselves.

It is as hard to generalise about part-time colleagues as it is about any other group. There is clearly a spectrum of kinds of experience ranging from the well-known writer who is a Visiting Lecturer on a Creative Writing programme to the person completing their doctorate who is rung up and asked if they would take over a Modernism group next Monday. But even where – as most do – Departments take seriously the needs and development of fractional and hourly-paid staff, there are constraints built in to the part-time condition, constraints which frequently result in such colleagues finding themselves left out of the normal processes of information, consultation, and collective decision-making. And we need to be aware of a gender dimension to all this: to put it crudely, the further down the jobs pecking order you are the more likely you are to be female. Natural justice as well as academic effectiveness would suggest that the subject community should do all it can to ameliorate the drawbacks of part-time working.

In the present state of the academic labour market it would probably be unrealistic to hope that all lecturers could be on permanent contracts. Indeed there are areas of work where part-time and fractional contracts may be in the best interests of all parties. It seems more sensible for departments to work to recognise and then strive to overcome the side-effects of this situation. We hope that this Guide will contribute to a developing conversation over how to improve the working conditions of part-time staff and to involve them to the fullest in supporting the student experience.

Professor Ben Knights
Director – English Subject Centre
June 2004

Background and aims

Background

Most lecturers on full-time contracts will have had experience of working on a part-time contract at one time or another in their careers. Many academics in English will have started to teach as ‘hourly-paid’ postgraduate tutors and they may well have gone on to complete fixed-term contracts before securing permanent posts. This pattern of experience can encourage full-time staff to think of part-time and fractional contracts as offering colleagues an apprenticeship in academia.

This perception of the relationship between the part-time lecturer and her host department can be misleading. As one part-time tutor explains, ‘Full-timers often see part-time work as a “rites of passage” thing and are not overly sympathetic’. In fact, a part-time, hourly-paid or fractional contract is now less likely than ever to represent a short stopgap in a career that proceeds smoothly from doctoral work to full-time employment.

For increasing numbers of doctoral graduates, as Ruth Helyer notes in Appendix 2, part-time teaching involves developing and maintaining a portfolio of teaching posts in several departments over a number of years. Part-time contracts rarely offer people access to research support and therefore a commitment to part-time teaching, and excellence in it, can actively prevent academics from securing full-time posts.

Many English departments have successful and supportive relationships with their part-time staff but the practicalities of part-time work can serve to alienate those undertaking it from the departments in which they work and from disciplinary debates about teaching and research.

Yet among the many changes in higher education in recent years, the increasing reliance on part-time tutors and people on fractional contracts in the delivery of curricula has been one of the most marked. There has always been a strong tradition in our disciplines of using postgraduate teaching as an apprenticeship for a career in academia but recent disciplinary shifts have contributed to a more substantial use of part-time contracts. For example, the rise in Creative Writing as a discipline which operates both within and alongside programmes in English Language and Literature has led departments to call on the expertise of lecturers who teach in higher education and retain other ongoing professional commitments.

Increasingly though a reliance on part-time tutors reflects the straitened financial circumstances of

departments, faculties and institutions (the ratio of full-time academic staff to students has fallen from 1:15 in 1995/1996 to 1:17 in 2001/2002). Changes at disciplinary level have taken place at a time when the role of part-time tutors has taken on greater prominence in national policy debates. In recent years, as Richard Blackwell notes in Appendix 3,

Part-time teaching and teachers have assumed an increasing profile in policy circles. The sheer amount of part-time teaching, the extension of the legal rights of part-time teachers, campaigns against casualisation by Trades Unions and concerns about ‘quality’ have mobilized a range of stakeholder interests. The staffing implications of the Government’s widening participation agenda and target for 2010, apparently overlooked in the policy formation process, (estimated to be a requirement for an extra 17,000 FTE staff by Universities UK) are helping to concentrate minds too.

Aims

In the context of these changes, the English Subject Centre’s *Part-Time Teaching: a Good Practice Guide* seeks to offer support to full-time colleagues who are responsible for co-ordinating part-time teaching in their departments.

It should help colleagues to:

- Identify the different constituencies of part-time tutors working in our disciplines.
- Integrate part-time tutors into departmental life and ensure their effective contribution to policy implementation.
- Identify effective support strategies for part-time tutors.
- Make decisions about which strategies are practical for use in specific institutional contexts.
- Plan training for part-time tutors and adhere to the demands of quality mechanisms.

The guide supplements the resources available on the English Subject Centre’s website at www.english.ltsn.ac.uk which are addressed directly to part-time tutors.

Part-time tutors make an important contribution to the learning and teaching of English Language, Literature and Creative Writing. This *Good Practice Guide* suggests that changes which promote proper recognition and support for part-time tutors will improve the quality and variety of teaching offered within our disciplines in the long term.

Project design

In preparing this *Guide*, I have drawn on consultation with part-time tutors who have a range of different contract types and work in different kinds of English departments. The English Subject Centre's part-time teaching focus group was made up of five tutors and drew on teaching experience in 12 institutions at all levels from first-year undergraduate to MA teaching. I have co-ordinated an email discussion group on part-time issues in our disciplines and commissioned articles from lecturers with substantial part-time experience as well as from Richard Blackwell, Senior Adviser at the Higher Education Academy Generic Centre, who has substantial knowledge of the national policy agendas on part-time teaching.

The English Subject Centre has been extensively involved in another part-time teaching focus group co-ordinated for HEFCE by the Generic Centre and the Higher Education Staff Development Association (HESDA). We have developed training materials for new postgraduate tutors at the University of Birmingham in collaboration with the School of English and the Staff Development Unit there, and we have trialled these materials with part-time tutors in the English Department at Goldsmith's College, University of London. These resources are now available via the English Subject Centre website at www.english.ltsn.ac.uk. We would like to thank everyone who participated in the development of this Guide.

1. Part-time tutors – who are they?

Any moves to improve support for part-time staff will be helped if departments have a clearer sense of the different constituencies included under the umbrella term, ‘part-time tutors’.

1.1 Graduate teaching assistants

It is still the case that many of the part-time tutors in English departments are completing their doctoral studies. The teaching they perform plays a key role in training them for future careers in academia. Graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) themselves have certain advantages over part-time colleagues who do not have affiliations with a department beyond their teaching role.

GTAs will have both knowledge of a department’s approach to subject debates and insight into its pedagogies. They will be familiar with some administrative procedures and have access to the library, internet facilities and an institutional email address. They are likely to know other members of the team teaching the module or modules to which they have been assigned and will often have opportunities to contact these other tutors during the semester. A GTA’s teaching responsibilities will often relate to an area which is of relevance to his own area of expertise, although GTAs can also expect to be invited to become involved, often for the first time, in teaching ‘outside their area’ on courses with a generic, survey or introductory function.

There are advantages for the GTA who begins teaching in a department with a substantial cohort of doctoral students because in large departments opportunities often arise for GTAs to participate in and benefit from formal and informal peer support and mentoring schemes. It is likely that, as national higher education strategy places increasing emphasis on training for part-time tutors and on doctoral programmes with training elements, larger departments will begin to exploit the opportunities made available by the graduate teaching tradition within our disciplines. However, there are some factors that need to be taken into account to ensure that GTAs benefit from the advantages of teaching for the first time in a familiar departmental culture.

GTAs have dual status as students and teachers because they are pursuing graduate studies in the

department in which they teach. As Vaneeta-Marie D’Andrea notes, on the basis of her research in the USA, the dual status of GTAs can materially affect the ways that students treat them. In some of the cases she encountered

Students felt like they were being short-changed by not having a full-time member of staff as the lecturer. They also knew that the GTA was just a few years older than they were and therefore assumed that the GTA was less likely to know the material being taught or know much about how to teach.²

Departments can play a crucial role in signalling the expertise of, and their trust in, GTAs and other part-time tutors. Simple practical changes such as including the details of part-time tutors in module handbooks can help to establish them, in the undergraduate imagination, as ‘serious’ members of teaching teams rather than as junior adjuncts. Departments can also improve clarity about the dual status of GTAs by separating out, where possible, the roles of research supervisor and teaching mentor.

There are practical difficulties related to cost and staff time involved in changing the support mechanisms for graduate teaching assistants but it is likely that leverage in this area will be made available if changes to the nature of doctoral programmes and the new emphasis on professional training on those programmes are enforced at national and institutional policy levels.

1.2 Visiting lecturers

Visiting lecturers may have experience of studying in one of the departments in which they teach. However, they are no longer ‘based’ in that department and may well be managing a portfolio of teaching responsibilities in a number of higher education institutions. Visiting lecturers may be pursuing part-time work as a means to fill the gap between doctoral work and full-time employment, but they may also have chosen to pursue a career as a part-time lecturer in English Literature, Language or Creative Writing. Reasons for this kind of choice might include caring responsibilities (though as Jo Gill notes in Appendix 1 part-time teaching and these responsibilities are often hard to juggle) or, particularly for tutors of Creative Writing, a combined career path.

1. Part-time tutors – who are they?

As the number of Creative Writing programmes expands and the range of programmes diversifies to include undergraduate and specialised MA courses, many visiting lecturers are being recruited who have expertise in their subject area but little experience of working with the constraints and administrative demands of contemporary higher education programmes. The English Subject Centre has stressed the need for departments to make available to new colleagues in Creative Writing appropriate training and access to national debates about curricula and their delivery³. It is likely that, in the training and support of these ‘expert professional practitioners’, our subject disciplines have much to learn from subject communities (e.g. art and design, architecture) with substantial experience of recruiting part-time staff on this kind of basis.

Visiting lecturers, whatever their area of expertise, have divergent support needs and may well have different requirements to their GTA colleagues who are teaching alongside them. For some visiting lecturers a new contract will represent their first point of contact with a department and with the issues involved in delivering the kinds of undergraduate or postgraduate programmes it offers. Others will have amassed considerable amounts of teaching experience and it will be inappropriate to offer training and support to them if that training assumes lack of knowledge and experience.

Visiting lecturers will benefit from being offered opportunities to become involved in departmental culture and debates and to receive appropriate support and feedback. Yet visiting lecturers who have spoken to the English Subject Centre have stressed that their varied career intentions mean that offers of ‘one size fits all’ training, support and other opportunities, however well intentioned, are not always appropriate. Career development needs differ among part-time tutors and these differences will affect the extent to which visiting lecturers will want to become involved in departmental duties. If a department wishes to appoint a part-time teaching representative to attend meetings, for example, either on a paid or unpaid basis, only some part-time tutors will be interested in taking up the post.

While all of the visiting lecturers who have spoken to the English Subject Centre have emphasised the benefits of part-time tutors being involved in departmental culture and subject-specific debates, they do not want to be compelled to take up formal administrative roles in return for limited remuneration or career benefits that are not relevant to them. Meanwhile, for departments, any attempts to offer opportunities such as ‘part-time representative’ roles, or lecturing experience to those tutors who do plan to pursue careers in academia are generally complicated by the problem of how to provide adequate or indeed any financial remuneration.

2. Some concerns

2.1 Budgetary constraints

Heads of departments stress that many of the problems that arise in their provision of support for part-time tutors arise because of budgetary constraints. These constraints contribute to the most commonly expressed problem faced by visiting lecturers: that of the late assignment of teaching responsibilities. While tutors would welcome a substantial period of time in which to plan and prepare for their teaching on new courses, it is often impossible for heads of department to secure funding, or to have firm student figures, sufficiently far in advance of a semester's commencement.

2.2 Late assignment of teaching

Whatever the part-time tutor's career plans and whatever the practical problems departments face, visiting lecturers will appreciate offers of teaching work which take into account the complex working patterns that many of them now maintain. As I have noted, it is likely that a part-time tutor will be managing multiple part-time contracts. (The five members of the English Subject Centre's part-time teaching focus group were able to draw on experience of teaching in 12 institutions at all levels from first-year undergraduate to MA teaching). As visiting lecturers are increasingly likely to be teaching in several places during any one semester, and in light of their likely extra-curricular responsibilities, it will be helpful to consult with them, where possible, and as far as possible in advance, about their availability for teaching and the teaching hours which are to be allocated to them.

The money earned by part-time lecturers is easily eaten-up by travelling expenses and the need to purchase texts for multiple courses. The costs involved for part-time staff who are frequently asked to teach a number of different modules on contemporary literature, for example, can be significant and some sensitivity here is likely to encourage good working relationships between visiting lecturers and their host departments. The National Association for Teachers in Further and Higher Education (NATFHE) report on part-time teaching – *In from the Cold?* – concluded that part-time lecturers 'want their contribution to be valued, their conditions to be fair and their professional development to be taken seriously.'⁴ It is, of course, often difficult in the current higher education climate for departments to adhere to best practice because of constraints of time, money and institutional policy.

2.3 Teaching non-specialist areas

In English departments, the majority of lecturers are expected to teach texts, periods and genres that are different from those covered in their research and it can be helpful for those tutors who plan to obtain full-time posts to develop a second area of teaching expertise (in the Renaissance as well as Romanticism, for example). Nevertheless, the need for a tutor to teach 'outside their area' for the first time can be daunting.

Support mechanisms, most likely involving the provision of documentation and advice from the relevant module tutor, will be helpful in alleviating anxiety and in improving the quality of this kind of teaching. Tutors can also be directed to subject-specific pedagogic resources such as the English Subject Centre's discussion document on teaching literary theory, or Robert Sheppard's report on the role of critical discourses in the teaching and learning of Creative Writing⁵. The Subject Centre has also developed a 'Guide to Seminar Planning', available on its website as part of its resources for part-time tutors, which discusses the kinds of preparation that are appropriate for teaching new texts for the first time as well as covering some practical issues of concern to new tutors.

2.4 Varied levels of responsibility

There is considerable variation in the levels of responsibility allotted to part-time tutors. Some GTAs in English are asked to teach seminars on specific texts within the framework of a well-documented module programme. Tutors elsewhere are asked to teach a number of authors over the course of the semester and to make decisions about which texts are read and at what pace without the benefit of either training or prior teaching experience. The Open University provides staff and students with detailed course materials. Seminars are left to the tutor's own devices, and the tutor decides the pace at which the course content is studied, but a lot of the other material is structured and tutors are trained. These levels of variation between institutions can be problematic. It will, for example, be difficult for tutors teaching for the first time to make informed decisions about how best to plot teaching and learning strategies for a module without training and support.

2. Some concerns

Often, variations are accounted for by the tutor's considerable experience within a department or their level of subject-based expertise. More established part-time tutors are sometimes asked to take on even more substantial programme responsibilities and will, for example, have designed, taught and assessed specialist modules focussed on their areas of expertise. However, in these cases, the part-time status of the tutor involved has sometimes led departments to allot overall control over these modules to full-time lecturers on the grounds of quality concerns. This can cause substantial problems for people who may, for example, want to cite

their levels of responsibility and achievements in future job applications. Differences in the level of acknowledgement of contributions made by individuals to course design and delivery are potentially problematic.

For departments who accord GTAs and part-time tutors varying levels of responsibility, solutions to these issues are likely to lie in the development of efficient training and support systems and the formalisation of contracts, though this latter step is likely to be dependent on policy shifts at institutional level.

3. Training

3.1 Provision of training

In the United States, where debates about part-time teaching have a significant history, the issue of training for part-time tutors has been a crucial one. Vaneeta-Marie D'Andrea notes that training courses developed there, in the first instance, in the form of courses for GTAs represented a response to the concerns of

*GTAs themselves who were often given a teaching assignment as late as the day before the beginning of the semester/term and felt as if they were being thrown in at the deep end; and more recently by many others (such as legislators, parents and students) who have had a concern for the quality of the undergraduate experience itself.*⁶

In the USA, the focus on part-time issues was heightened by the demands of GTA unions.⁷ Here, where no such unions exist, it is the quality agenda that is increasing the pressure on institutions and departments to account for the training and support of part-time tutors as Richard Blackwell notes in Appendix 3.

Now that institutions are developing pathways for part-time tutors to become members of the Higher Education Academy, part-time tutors are increasingly being offered formal, generic training for teaching. The value of generic courses is that they can encourage new tutors to think critically about their own experiences of being taught and to develop teaching strategies which encourage deep learning from a diverse student body.

Problems can arise though if training does not offer the kind of immediate practical support needed by the new tutor grappling with, for example, how to teach long 19th-century novels within the limits of 50-minute seminars or how to encourage students to use critical theory when analysing literary texts. Part-time tutors are particularly concerned to learn techniques which are appropriate to their immediate needs. If they lack detailed interaction with colleagues in the department, or departments, in which they work, then generic courses delivered to groups of tutors from different disciplines can compound their exclusion from detailed subject-specific debates about learning and teaching. This is especially the case in the Creative Writing

community where a challenging debate about the value of the workshop, for example, is available⁸.

The effect can be that part-time tutors are frustrated by training courses which focus only on generic approaches and offer conversation predominantly with colleagues from non-humanities disciplines. Staff development units have developed a number of strategies to mitigate some of these problems. On some training courses, for example, tutors are asked to pursue 'action research' projects in relation to the specific circumstances of their teaching practice. However, it is likely that training will be received most positively where there is direct disciplinary input.

The English Subject Centre has collaborated with full- and part-time staff from the English department and the Staff Development Unit at the University of Birmingham to design an outline for a training module which incorporates discipline-specific insights and is tailored to the immediate needs of a group of GTAs. Our module was designed for delivery to tutors who shared disciplinary expectations about the nature of knowledge and its acquisition, and could debate, with relevant colleagues, generic materials and these subject-specific assumptions at the point of need. The module, which is outlined on the English Subject Centre's website, encourages tutors to confer on 'teaching problems' the same attention and respectability that they confer on problematic issues in their research. It is available for use or adaptation by any department which is seeking to provide training for its part-time tutors.

The benefits for 'trained' part-time tutors in the short- and long-term are considerable in terms of the opportunities they offer for sophisticating disciplinary debates about teaching and learning and improving practice. However, training can only provide one element of an improved support system for part-time tutors. Later in this guide formal and informal strategies are suggested which might, within the restraints of budgets and staff time, help to improve mechanisms for the support and career development of part-time tutors.

3.2 Training for assessment

Some part-time tutors are established tutors with substantial experience of assessing students' work. They may have dealt with assignments in a range of different formats (essays, exams and portfolios, for example) and have marked work in departments with different kinds of curricula (for example those which expect students to demonstrate substantial historical or theoretical expertise). One concern that part-time tutors in English have expressed is about the lack of support provided for part-time tutors who are marking assignments either for the first time ever, or for the first time in a new format (e.g. the exam), at a new level (e.g. third year work) or in an institution where they have not marked before. For full-time lecturers, this lack of training and support can generate problems at times that are already the busiest in the academic year.

Problems around assessment in a discursive discipline usually have little to do with the 'part-time' nature of the marker's contract. Instead, they correlate with a lack of training and support for both part-time and full-time lecturing staff. Problems often arise in departments when any tutors are asked to mark a new form of assessment without training. At the Open University, tutors are provided with detailed guidance on how to mark. This guidance and training is delivered in advance of the marking process. All assignments are sampled for monitoring purposes in the first two years,

so that training is incorporated into practice. The provision of training (perhaps with input from the institution's staff development unit), the establishment of robust double-marking procedures, and the prominence of assessment issues in a non-judgemental mentoring process will help to prevent difficulties arising for part-time tutors at assessment time.

Where it is difficult for a department to provide training for part-time tutors, either because tutors are unable to attend training sessions or because funds cannot be provided to pay them for the time spent in training, other strategies can be developed which will help to integrate part-time tutors into the assessment culture of a programme and module. Part-time lecturers in English have suggested that measures such as allowing part-time tutors to see anonymised, marked scripts from a previous batch of essays on the module they are teaching would help them to mark appropriately. This kind of measure would not be difficult or expensive to implement.

Some tutors are invited to meetings where exams are set, and one tutor in our focus group had appreciated being paid to attend a meeting at which marks were finalised. For those part-time tutors who do go on to take up full-time posts, and for the departments and discipline they work in, training for assessment will have substantial long-term benefits.

4. Informal support strategies

4.1 Naming

The attribution of titles to part-time tutors varies. A person might be referred to as a part-time tutor (the blanket term favoured by NATFHE), postgraduate tutor, graduate teaching assistant, GTA, visiting lecturer, VL, regular visiting lecturer, RVL, teaching assistant, TA or as something else entirely. It hardly needs saying to lecturers in English that naming is a serious business, and part-time tutors often feel that the titles given to them do not inspire the respect of students or colleagues. A lively debate on the English Subject Centre's email discussion list among former part-time tutors highlighted the importance of this issue. Contributors suggested that 'visiting lecturer' is the most helpful term because it implies that the tutor has the same status as full-time colleagues and has been invited to teach in the department on the basis of expertise.

4.2 Communication

Problems in communication often lead part-time tutors to feel as if they are being left out of the departmental information loop. Even if a department provides them with an email address or a pigeonhole, part-time tutors are often not added to distribution lists which are used during term-time to notify staff about, among other things, late changes to courses, the availability of set texts or student welfare. As a result, departments, often inadvertently, cultivate a sense of exclusion among part-time tutors.

One tutor, offering advice to new part-time tutors via the English Subject Centre's email discussion list, argued that good communication with the department was the enabling condition of good teaching:

(1) make sure you are given access to all Handbooks with information you will need (helps you keep good relations with hard-pressed secretaries); (2) keep good relations with said secretaries; (3) have a mentor in the department; (4) set aside (unpaid, I am afraid...) time to talk with other staff (it IS worth it); (5) have confidence in yourself. The department really does need you.

F. Jacobs notes that 'The power of inclusion in [departmental] culture has been underestimated and undervalued, and even though it affords few real solutions, inclusion does raise morale and engage the commitment of part-time faculty to quality.'

Departments can encourage inclusion by providing part-time staff with timely information and advice about referral mechanisms.

Many of the basic questions posed by part-time tutors are easily identifiable in advance and a number of English departments provide tutors with guides which help them to navigate their way through administrative and curricular procedures. Details about access to room keys, photocopying machines (and details about how they work), email addresses, access to computers, libraries and even car parks, provided in handbook form, substantially improve the efficiency of part-time tutors and free departmental staff from answering repeated queries. At Sheffield Hallam and at Plymouth, part-time tutors are provided with short handbooks which offer guides to departmental and modular practices.

Many new lecturers on full-time contracts would appreciate the same kind of information, but where it is not available in this form, it is easier for them to ask for help than it is for their part-time colleagues. Part-time tutors are often wary of wasting the time of administrators and module tutors and clear indications of whom they should approach about key issues are helpful.

The English Subject Centre's part-time tutors' focus group stressed the value of a system for information distribution for those part-time tutors who are not based in the department for research or study purposes. Its benefits are likely to include the improved confidence of part-time tutors who will be able to make better decisions about how to proceed when difficulties (over student absences or tutor ill-health, for example, arise). As D'Andrea notes, part-time tutors will benefit from 'mechanisms [...] to get questions answered and problems resolved' and form a clear sense of whom to contact about administrative and curricular issues.¹⁰

The focus groups also suggest that departments should keep a file which contains contact details for each part-time tutor and information about his or her availability for teaching or for consultation with full-time staff and students. If files also contain up-to-date CVs, it will be possible for departments to make appropriate decisions about the allocation of specific teaching responsibilities.

4. Informal support strategies

4.3 Involvement in debates and policy implementation

Problems are often caused when a teaching hierarchy excludes part-time tutors from the departmental community. The marginalisation of part-time tutors can impact on departmental practice in terms of student satisfaction and retention issues which are becoming key for many departments. Other factors, such as the need for departments to ensure that students with disabilities are treated with consistent fairness, for example, make it imperative that all lecturers are fully involved in debates about, and the implementation of, departmental strategies. Part-time lecturers, like their full-time colleagues, should be equipped to respond knowledgeably to enquiries about institutional student support services, or departmental literacy support schemes, for example.

In many departments, part-time lecturers are already included in discussions about practice. In the English departments at the University of the West of England and Staffordshire University for example, part-time tutors are invited to pre-semester course meetings where they are introduced to the ideas involved in the courses they are to teach and to the course team. At Bath Spa, part-time tutors are paid a special rate to attend meetings. In other departments, where payment is not provided for this, tutors are invited to meetings informally or are provided with relevant minutes so that they can keep track of changes in departmental practice and in the curriculum.

4.4 Involvement in subject-specific debates

Part-time tutors are often able to provide each other with the support and mentoring which full-time colleagues sometimes take for granted. Full-time tutors should work to include part-time lecturers in conversations about practice at departmental and national level. Many part-time tutors are not automatically included on departmental distribution lists for information from the English Subject Centre for example and this leaves them at one remove from disciplinary debates about teaching and learning. Departments should order sufficient copies of newsletters and reports to ensure that everyone involved in delivering the curriculum has access to subject-specific debates about teaching and learning. Part-time tutors frequently attend and contribute to English Subject Centre events and it welcomes articles,

reports and project proposals from part-time as well as full-time lecturers.

4.5 Space

Communication problems are often exacerbated by practical issues such as the problems with the provision of office space for part-time tutors. It can be difficult for departments to provide adequate space and while some offer separate offices, others use office share schemes and others again have a single room which is shared by postgraduate and/or visiting lecturers. Part-time tutors need a base, however limited, so that they do not have to carry teaching materials and personal items around with them throughout the day. Part-time tutors are now more likely to be moving between institutions throughout the working week. It is quite common for them to be working in three institutions in the same semester. Being able to leave teaching materials or collections of texts in the departments in which they teach can make life much less arduous.

4.6 Helping part-time staff to support students

More importantly, part-time tutors need space if they are to provide students with the kind of support outside seminars which students may have come to expect from full-time colleagues. Part-time tutors have pointed out that discussion outside the structured teaching environments of lectures, seminars and workshops is part of the culture of higher education, and a key part of the culture of the discursive disciplines of Literature, Language and Creative Writing. Students use consultation opportunities for formative purposes, and part-time tutors need practical help if they are going to contribute to the students' acculturation into our disciplines.

If students are given to expect that they can visit full-time tutors regularly during a semester, they will want the same level of support from part-timers. If they expect to receive oral feedback on assessment from full-timers, and informal revision classes, then part-timers need to be resourced to provide the same level of feedback and preparation. Where part-time tutors are not given the practical resources and space to support students, they become much more vulnerable to unfair criticism from students, and students are not being provided with fair and consistent levels of support. One part-time tutor explains:

It isn't easy to make oneself available without an office and a telephone line and in this regard I feel quite fortunate. I have a nice, warm office, a telephone, and a networked computer; I give the students my email address, my extension number, my office location, so that they can contact me in a number of ways.

This tutor is right to feel fortunate, as another visiting lecturer notes:

While I agree that to do the job properly as an hourly paid tutor one SHOULD make oneself available both for students and for meetings outside of the paid teaching hours, I do feel strongly that institutions can take this altruism for granted.

Now that students are in the habit of emailing tutors for support, part-time tutors are facing additional calls

on their time and their resources especially if they do not have access to email through an institutional network. The issue of provision of email access for part-time tutors is often exacerbated by institutional systems which make it difficult for departments to provide standard email addresses quickly prior to, or at the beginning of, a semester.

The tutors in the English Subject Centre's focus group argued that problems with part-time teaching generally occurred most often in departments where an inadequate communication structure exacerbated the effects on students of the absence of part-time tutors outside class time.

5. Formal support mechanisms

5.1 The Module tutor's role

Full-time staff who have worked as part-time tutors, or have at some point inherited courses from their predecessors, will know how disconcerting it can be to teach a module designed by someone else. It can be difficult to work out the logic behind the choice and order of texts, the content of bibliographies and the teaching strategies relevant to the assessment profile of the course. It would be helpful therefore if module tutors would support part-time tutors by putting their teaching responsibilities into context. Visiting lecturers emphasise that while they welcome the freedom to make choices about delivery of course material in seminars, module leaders could helpfully provide:

- An opportunity for a meeting before the module begins.
- Any documentation related to the module (a module description with learning outcomes, module handbook, website address etc.).
- Access to any occasional emails or circulars about the module's progress.
- Criteria to be used for assessment purposes.
- Contact details so that queries can be pursued.
- Details about course content and pace of delivery. (In some institutions, module leaders provide brief descriptions of lecture content which can help part-time tutors to pitch seminar material appropriately and in ways that seem relevant to the student's overall experience of a module. In other cases, the student handbook provides details about issues to be discussed each week, or seminar preparation exercises, and these guide – but do not constrain – the part-timer's practice.)
- An opportunity to 'debrief' at the end of the module and pass on ideas and comments based on their experience of teaching a module. The experience and expertise of part-timers can be utilized if their views are canvassed and this process also improves the part-time tutors' sense of investment in the module and the department's programme.

5.2 Peer observation schemes

Part-time tutors have expressed an interest in being involved in schemes in which tutors observe each other's seminar teaching in a peer review system. As

these schemes already function in many departments, it may well be possible to integrate part-time tutors into them. Where problems of funding or staff time make this difficult it may be useful to encourage part-time tutors to observe each other's classes on a voluntary basis as a means of building confidence, encouraging debate and diversifying a tutor's range of teaching strategies.

One part-time tutor in an English department tells new tutors:

Don't be scared of asking for help. Ask if you can sit in on a more senior colleague's seminar. If possible double-mark a couple of scripts informally and at an early stage of your marking as this will give you a benchmark for the rest of it. Make sure that your students know how to contact you, as it can be frustrating for them if you don't seem to be available to them full-time, as other tutors seem to be.

Wherever peer observation schemes operate, they should be regarded as a means of improving debate about, and the practice of, teaching and learning within a department rather than as 'contract review' mechanisms. Equally, they should not make demands which exceed those placed on full-time lecturers. In one department, reports on the marking habits of individual part-time tutors are circulated to all staff while full-time tutors are not subjected to the same level of critique. It is reasonable that English departments should want to ensure that part-time tutors are marking assignments consistently, but the provision of training for all staff may well provide a less divisive means of encouraging good assessment practice.

At the University of Exeter, full- and part-time lecturers in the English department have participated in marking exercises prior to the assessment process. This kind of exercise encourages debate about assessment practice, promotes consistency and helps part-time tutors to develop a sophisticated understanding of departmental assessment practices.

5.3 Mentoring

Mentoring schemes fall, broadly speaking, into two categories. They draw on either supervisory or counselling frameworks in terms of the way they understand and make use of the mentor's prior experience. Some models for mentoring are predicated on the idea that the mentor and mentee can fruitfully share their different experiences and incorporate some element of training for the mentee. In other mentoring

models, the mentor does not, at any time, introduce his or her own experience into discussions.

Whichever model is adopted, the mentoring relationship needs to operate as a kind of protected space in which the mentee can discuss progress and problems freely and in confidence. In order that the mentoring relationship can function in this way, roles, responsibilities and the ethics of the process need to be established before a scheme begins to operate. Not everyone will be suited to work as a mentor; not everyone will feel comfortable about being a mentee. However, clear guidelines and training can help to clarify the processes involved in mentoring.

Mentoring schemes for GTAs may well need special attention. Some separation of function between the roles of student and tutor will help GTAs to establish their authority and encourage students to take seriously their contribution to a department's teaching mission. Where mentoring schemes exist, and involve full-time lecturing staff, it will be helpful for GTAs to be assigned mentors who do not also work as their research supervisors. It would, of course, be possible to involve established part-time tutors as mentors if proper remuneration were provided.

For new part-time tutors it will be important to have opportunities to ask questions about procedure and practice and also to discuss issues that have arisen in seminars. Whereas colleagues on permanent contracts have opportunities to discuss with their peers issues such as how to respond to racist or sexist comments about a text, or how to deal with the student who dominates group discussions, part-time lecturers may not have access to support unless some kind of formal scheme is in place. For established part-time lecturers who may no longer retain an affiliation with a 'home' department, mentoring schemes can provide an invaluable link with the subject community and a positive source of information about career development opportunities. Mentoring is an expensive process to organise and maintain and so anyone interested in developing a scheme needs to be clear about its implications in terms of time and money. Mentoring can nevertheless provide an effective means of supporting part-time tutors.

5.4 Contractual changes

The increased sense of commitment and creativity fostered by fractional contracts over hourly-paid ones is borne out by the results of NATFHE's extensive research on part-time teaching:

It was clear at interview that those with fractional contracts were integrated into the life of their departments, and functioned as members of academic teams in a way that was very rare for the hourly paid lecturers, even when the contract fractions were as low as 0.2 and represented teaching hours at the same levels as those taught by many hourly-paid part-timers.¹¹

A member of the English Subject Centre's part-time tutors email discussion group explains the relationship between commitment, excellence in teaching and contractual status:

I believe the instability, the not knowing whether one is going to teach the same course (or even another) again next year, can get in the way, because it makes one wonder whether it is really worth putting so much work into it. Sorry, hope that doesn't sound like I'm a complete whinger, but I do find it frustrating not to be able to put more time in and make the seminars more interesting for everyone concerned, including myself. [In a fractional post] there is a sense that my colleagues and I can develop something over several years: try out, revisit, try something else, or improve, change, whatever. This feeling of being 'part of the furniture' does give some security, and that in turn fosters creativity.

Practice will always vary according to the financial circumstances of different institutions, but part-time tutors have made it clear that it is helpful if English departments can offer clear advice on the general principles of the payment system and information about basic administrative expenses. (For example, does the part-timer have a right to stationery? Computer disks etc? Does the part-time tutor have access to childcare schemes on campus?) The 'first day' employment laws (see Appendix 3), for example, give part-timers a right to benefits such as holiday and maternity pay, and it would be good if tutors knew that this was available to them. Heads of Department should also be able to notify part-time tutors about their right to access funding for research and staff development, and any opportunities they will have to apply for permanent or full-time posts as they arise.

Conclusions

Part-time tutors who are supported and given multiple frameworks in which to build and progress their own teaching methods, at the outset of their teaching experience, are the most likely to develop versatile, informed and relevant teaching strategies throughout their part- and full-time careers. In the narrowest utilitarian terms, the part-timer who establishes a good working relationship with their department will see benefits in their references when they apply for other jobs.

The project has demonstrated that there is a clear role for departments in the provision of information

about administration procedures and practical issues, mentoring processes and practical information about pastoral and ethical matters. There are also responsibilities that are likely to lie with the module tutor and teaching teams. For the English Subject Centre too, there is a role in terms of providing part-time tutors with subject-based support and resources and links to colleagues in the wider subject community. The provision of these kinds of support will encourage part-time tutors to share and develop their expertise in ways that benefit their subject communities in the long term.

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Introduction to appendices

- **Appendix 1: Part-time teaching in English by Dr Jo Gill**
- **Appendix 2: Teaching in multiple departments by Dr Ruth Helyer**
- **Appendix 3: Enhancing the role and contribution of part-time teachers in higher education by Richard Blackwell**

This report is supplemented by three appendices, the first two of which illustrate from first hand experience, the pressures faced by part-time teachers. Jo Gill's appendix also suggests some departmental practices, in

some cases very small things, which can improve the part-timer's situation substantially. She also describes some of her own coping strategies which might be adopted by others.

Richard Blackwell's appendix looks at part-time teaching in a national context, focussing on the legal and policy developments. He draws on the work conducted by the Higher Education Academy Generic Centre in this area. To find out more about Generic Centre work on part-time teachers see: <http://www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre/index.asp?id=16891>

Appendix 1: Part-time teaching in English

**by Dr Jo Gill, now Research Fellow,
Kingston University**

When I tell colleagues that in my last year as a part-time lecturer in English I worked at three different institutions and taught up to 15 hours each week on five distinct courses, there is always someone who knows someone who can beat this. There is always someone covering more modules, or teaching evening classes and summer schools too, or travelling further (my one and a half hour / 80 mile commutes seem like a stroll in the park compared to London to Exeter or Derby). There is always, more worryingly still, someone who has been doing it for longer. Three or four years is common, eight or nine years not unusual (13 and 20 years were reported by participants in the English Subject Centre's part-time tutors' focus group). Indeed a common question which new part-timers ask each other is: how long have you been doing this and how long will you put up with it? More experienced part-timers have, I think, ceased tormenting themselves. Among part-time tutors – in English particularly where there are so few permanent vacancies – there is always the worry that each additional year that one does tolerate these conditions pushes one further away from the goal of securing a full-time post (a.k.a. “a proper job”).

What, then, can part-time lecturers do to maximise their chances? How best to turn this experience to account? What can we and, most importantly, our host English departments do to ensure that a full and valuable apprenticeship is provided? From my experience of teaching at four different institutions (in three as a part-time tutor, in one on a one-year contract) it is clear that there are a number of things which can

be done; from the seemingly petty (ensuring that new staff know where the kettle is and that part-time staff are listed on school websites and notice boards) to the more important (providing training opportunities, research time and a research allowance).

The best institutions are those which award their part-time staff the same status as full-time employees. This means, among other things, inviting part-time tutors to important meetings and paying for their time (see below). Equally, office space is a must. One of my institutions offers nothing to its part-time staff (a logistical nightmare and inconvenient to students who may wish to meet with you outside teaching hours), others offer a communal ‘part-time tutors’ room’ or, best of all, an office shared with an established member of staff working in the same field. Full marks to the University of the West of England here. I found their practice invaluable in terms of providing a sense of welcome, informal induction (whereabouts of the photocopier, advice on administrative procedures) and, as it transpires, long-term academic relationships.

One of the nightmares of teaching on an hourly contract is the rigmarole of claiming pay and this is a particular problem when one has more than one employer. When each institution has its own complex system, provides a separate tax code and communicates with a different tax office, one can do little but complete the monthly forms and hope for the best. The ideal system, one adopted by two of my institutions, is to pay part-time staff a set fee for the complete module, encompassing teaching hours,

marking and preparation time and agreed hours for attendance at meetings. This is automatically paid in equal monthly instalments over the academic year. Quite apart from the gains in terms of administrative simplicity and regularity of income, such a system is to be favoured because it affords part-time tutors a degree of trust and respect which is, perhaps, missing from the monthly pay-claim system.

Peripatetic part-time tutors often find that in order to justify the cost of their journey to work they need to pack more teaching hours into a single day than they can comfortably manage. This is demanding in terms of advance preparation and exhausting at the time but is necessary in order to avoid spending more on travel than one is going to earn – I know, I've done it. In terms of managing one's timetable, the more notice of its teaching requirements a department can give, and the more firm it can be in its commitments, the better. At this point, too, I would like to dispel a general view that part-time lecturing is ideal for those with young children. It is not. The uncertainty of one's hours from one term to the next makes it difficult to find and commit to reasonable childcare and the pay makes it impossible to afford it.

There are, however, some advantages to teaching part-time in a number of different institutions. Being purely mercenary, it does give you access to more than one University Library! More importantly, it offers the chance to gain far broader – and thus more valuable – experience (in terms of range of courses, modes of assessment and teaching practices) than one institution alone can provide. While some of my departments limit part-time duties to leading seminars, others have asked me to develop third-year options, to act as module leader, to set and moderate assessments, and to deliver lectures to year groups. Although questions need to be asked about the degree of responsibility unsalaried staff should be asked to take on, sometimes it is responsibility of this kind which one needs in order to demonstrate one's ability to assume an established role. Finally, I will stick my head above the parapet and say that part-time tutoring may offer a little more flexibility – and thus research time – than at first appears. If you can arrange your timetable in such a way that you have one or two clear days, you may in fact have as much time for your own work (and thus the all-important "Publications" section of the CV) as many of your permanent colleagues.

Appendix 2: Teaching in multiple departments

by Dr Ruth Helyer, University of Newcastle and University of Teesside

I work as an English lecturer on a part-time hourly-paid basis (4th year) in two universities. I began teaching at Newcastle whilst researching my PhD there (finished last year) and also at Teesside. In an attempt to make a living from tutoring you are tempted to take everything offered to you. Due to the kind of work which falls to part-time staff (covering for colleagues on sabbatical, core courses etc), this results in an overload of getting up to speed with another's research area, prohibitive amounts of marking, and so on. I feel fortunate in that I enjoy good working relations with some very supportive colleagues in this far from ideal working situation.

The diversity of my experience has been useful but travelling between institutions whilst maintaining two sets of administrative records; pastoral support; lesson preparation; lecture writing; attending meetings and so on, has a serious impact on my potential to do any research. Although some of my work has been published I am aware that I need to build up a stronger research profile to be seriously considered for the full-time posts I am applying for. Frustratingly, this requires time I do not have, due to the everyday demands of teaching. This semester I was given the opportunity to write my own module at Newcastle, which was fantastic but is rare.

Appendix 3: Enhancing the role and contribution of part-time teachers

The Higher Education Academy Generic Centre and Higher Education Staff Development Agency *Part-time Teachers Project* by Richard Blackwell, Senior Adviser, Higher Education Academy Generic Centre

Introduction

Part-time teaching and teachers have assumed an increasing profile in policy circles. The sheer amount of part-time teaching, the extension of the legal rights of part-time teachers, campaigns against casualisation by Trades Unions and concerns about 'quality' have mobilized a range of stakeholder interests. The staffing implications of the Government's widening participation agenda and target for 2010, apparently overlooked in the policy formation process, (estimated to be a requirement for an extra 17,000 FTE staff by Universities UK) are helping to concentrate minds too. I select two of the less obvious influences for further comment below: the European Union and Parliament.

Amongst the unexpected drivers of change has been the much wider process of harmonising employment law in the European Union. This has produced the so-called "first day" employment rights in 2000 (rights accrued from day one e.g. maternity, sick and holiday pay) and in 2002 the fixed term contract regulations and accompanying advice from the joint negotiating group in higher education to move towards continuing contracts, of various sorts. In Parliament, a select committee report (House of Commons Education and Skills Committee *The Future of Higher Education*, Fifth Report of the Session 2002-2003, HC425-1, July 2003), influenced by the National Union of Students, worried about the impact of excessive use of hourly paid staff on the subjective learning experience of students, a matter briefly debated in the House of Lords sometime later. The focus was not the quality of the teaching but the disjointedness that might arise in extra class support and contact, for which the part-timers were not paid. A Union Learning Fund study subsequently (2001) suggested that many part-time teachers engaged in a wide range of activities for which they received little or no payment. Taken together these inputs raise a critical issue: the extent to which part-time teachers are properly integrated into and valued by their departments and institutions.

The Project

The Generic Centre/HESDA project began by focussing on support and staff development (SD). It builds upon and extends existing good practice in HEIs, at departmental and institutional level. The project aims to stimulate enhanced support for part-time teaching in higher education institutions involving SD Units, departments and Higher Education Academy Subject Centres. It is designed to ensure a better balance of subject specific 'in department' provision and the more generic training offered by SD Units. This shift in emphasis towards greater co-ordination, integration and, particularly, greater subject contextualisation and input is known to accord with the preferences of most part-time teachers themselves (expressed in various surveys). The English Subject Centre has been at the forefront of this move and has developed an ILT approved 'pathway' for English part-time teaching staff at University of Birmingham in partnership with their SD Unit and department.

Future directions

It has been encouraging to note recent pro-active moves by some HEIs to address issues in this area, notably through extended training and deliberate attempts to move towards fractional appointments rather than reliance on hourly paid contracts. The next step for the project is to identify the implications of such moves, including apparent good practices, and to ensure that contractual change, to a certain extent required by the new regulations on fixed term contracts (July 2002), incorporates some 'joined up thinking'. In particular, it should join up contractual change and part-time teachers extended rights with the type of co-ordinated support and development pioneered by the English Subject Centre. At the same time there is a need to recognise the heterogeneous backgrounds, interests and circumstances of part-time teachers in a discipline like English. It can no longer be assumed (if it ever could be) that the part-time teacher is something akin to an apprentice, willing to sit at the feet of a Don in poor conditions for a suitable period until a full-time job appears. 'Joined up thinking' needs to include the interests of those colleagues who do an excellent job and are perfectly happy with both a limited teaching role and limited engagement with their employer(s).

Concluding comments

It would be naive to expect that the many questions surrounding part-time teaching are about to be resolved. There is, however, the prospect of real progress. In particular the underlying question of the proper integration of part-time teachers into HEIs, their academic departments, cultures, and support activities is now 'on the table' for discussion. The project aims to continue to capitalise on this opportunity and looks forward to further contributions from the English community.

The resources produced by the project can be accessed on the Higher Education Academy Generic Centre web site at: www.ltsn.ac.uk/genericcentre/index.asp?id=16891

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