



Royal College of Art

Postgraduate Art & Design

Policy on Postgraduate Researchers Who Teach

Cover sheet

Policy Owner	Head of Doctoral Programmes
Policy Overview	This policy establishes guidelines for Postgraduate Research (PGR) students at the Royal College of Art to engage in teaching and teaching-related activities. It balances professional development opportunities with the priority of successful research degree completion, ensuring fair access, transparency and compliance with academic, funding, and visa requirements.
Related Policies and Guidance	Terms & Conditions for Students
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Approved by / Date	Research & Innovation Committee, 15 July 2026 Education & Student Success Committee, 13 May 2026
Overview of Changes to Current Version	Minor typos corrected.
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Date of Next Review	July 2029

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Royal College of Art recognises that all Postgraduate Researchers (PGRs are MPhil and PhD students) benefit from opportunities to develop their career skills in teaching and teaching related activities (including seminars, tutorials, marking, demonstrations, and studio support), alongside, and embedded within study which develops subject discipline knowledge and understanding.
- 1.2. Our Doctoral Training Programmes (DTP) for PGRs provides training for this kind of career development, including information about the diversification of career options. This policy recognises that many PGRs aspire to careers in higher education on completion of their doctorate, and that some already have experience of higher education teaching or research before starting their doctorate. This policy sets key principles about teaching and teaching related opportunities to help PGRs to reach their career goals.
- 1.3. The College encourages its PGRs to apply to undertake suitable teaching activities, whenever the opportunity arises, and when it is judged suitable for the student to do so. The College, however, does not guarantee that such opportunities will arise during a PGR student's programme of study.

2. The purpose of the Policy

- 2.1. To provide guidance to PGRs who are interested in taking up the opportunity of contributing to teaching activities in Schools and Research Centres.
- 2.2. To provide guidance to the Head of Programmes supporting PGRs and all academic leaders on how to facilitate teaching opportunities and what such activities might entail.
- 2.3. To set out and explain the principles underpinning the policy.

3. Key principles

- 3.1. All PGRs should be made aware of all teaching opportunities available to them via the College's regular vacancy listings on RCA website, recognising that such opportunities to employment will vary across Schools, and will depend on subject area, the School's preferred models of delivery and, on PGR's recruitment.
- 3.2. The process and arrangements for selecting PGRs to be involved in teaching/teaching related roles should be fair and transparent and not restricted to students within the School/Research Centre. This is normally the responsibility of the School Programmes.
- 3.3. Teaching must not impede the successful completion of the student's own research degree and must not contravene any relevant funding conditions. PGRs may only undertake teaching or teaching related activities with the permission of their supervisor(s) and the RCA Head of Doctoral Programmes.

- 3.4. Supervisor permission will be sought through a fair and transparent process: supervisors will be expected to consult the student's most recent Annual Progress Review report and to discuss the proposed teaching with the student directly before confirming their agreement. Permission will be recorded in writing and retained by the Doctoral Research Office. The Research Degrees Committee will receive an annual report on the number of permissions granted, any instances where permission was declined, and evidence of impact on student progress, to ensure ongoing oversight of this principle.
- 3.5. PGR students undertaking Associate Lecture roles should be actively enrolled and would normally be expected to have completed their confirmation exam (for full-time candidates this exam must be scheduled during the second year of study; for part-time candidates, during the third or fourth year). Exceptions may be granted by the Head of Doctoral Programmes for students who have not yet passed their confirmation exam, provided the school confirms that:
- the proposed teaching will not adversely impact the student's progress towards confirmation and completion of their studies; and
 - the PGR has relevant teaching qualifications and/or sufficient teaching experience and skills to undertake the teaching role effectively.
- 3.6. Where the requirement for teaching forms part of a Graduate Teaching Assistant Scholarship, there must be transparency in terms of expectation and reward. The requirement to teach should form part of the interview for the GTA Scholarship and should be set out in the Terms and Conditions of the Scholarship Agreement.
- 3.7. The School is responsible for reviewing with the Research Office the condition of students funding before any employment.
- 3.8. To ensure teaching duties do not significantly interfere with PhD progress, a cap of teaching/teaching related activities will be set at maximum 6 hours per week during the term (please check your Visa work hours compliance). This cap covers all teaching-related duties in aggregate, including contact hours, preparation, marking, and administrative tasks associated with the teaching role, not contact time alone. This is particularly important for UKVI Visa compliance: all hours counted for immigration purposes include preparation and related duties, not contact time alone, and must not exceed the limits permitted under the student's Visa conditions. This cap applies equally to full-time and part-time PGR students; however, part-time students and their supervisors should take additional care to ensure that teaching commitments do not disproportionately affect their research progress given their already reduced study time.
- 3.9. Teaching during completion periods and extension periods requires particular scrutiny. PGR students who are in a continuation year or on an approved extension to their registration period may not normally undertake new teaching commitments, as evidence from the sector indicates that teaching activity during these stages is associated with declining completion rates. Any exception to this principle must be approved in advance by the Head of Doctoral Programmes and will be subject to enhanced monitoring of the student's progress. The Research Degrees Committee will consult with the PGRs Doctoral

Forum and other relevant stakeholders to develop further guidance on this matter, and will review this position in light of the College's own completion data on an ongoing basis.

4. Types of PGR employment

4.1. Associate Lecturer

- 4.1.1. Current PGRs can be engaged as Associate Lecturers to deliver teaching. The aim is to provide advanced teaching experience and bridge transition into academic careers.
- 4.1.2. To be eligible to apply for or be engaged as an Associate Lecturer, the PGR would normally be expected to have passed the confirmation stage of their PhD. Exceptions may be granted where the school provides assurance that the teaching will not adversely impact the student's progress, and that the student has the relevant experience to undertake the role.

4.2. Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTA)

Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) are PGRs engaged on a part-time, paid basis to support learning and teaching across Master's level programmes at RCA. GTAs would normally be expected to have passed their confirmation exam, or to hold an equivalent confirmation of preparedness, before commencing teaching. Where this is not the doctoral confirmation exam itself, the school must provide alternative evidence of readiness, for example, prior teaching experience or another appropriate qualification, to assure that the individual is prepared to undertake PGR teaching responsibilities. Working as a GTA is both a professional development opportunity and a recognised element of research training.

The GTA role is a supervised teaching role: GTAs support teaching activities under academic oversight rather than taking full independent responsibility for units or programmes. This policy covers two distinct routes into GTA work:

(a) Scholarship-condition GTA: where teaching forms a condition of a funded GTA Scholarship. In these cases, the expectation to teach is part of the scholarship offer and is set out in the Terms and Conditions of the Scholarship Agreement. Teaching hours form part of the contracted arrangement and are not paid in addition to the scholarship award. The requirement to teach will be included as part of the interview process for the scholarship.

(b) RCA-appointed GTA: where the College generates GTA opportunities that are advertised and open to eligible PGRs to apply for. These opportunities will be advertised transparently through the standard vacancy process (see [Section 6](#)) and will carry an appropriate hourly rate reflecting the supervised nature of the role. The College is developing the relevant recruitment processes to ensure consistency and fairness of access, including consideration of how such roles may

be integrated with existing People and Culture recruitment systems. Further guidance will be issued in due course.

4.3. Contracts

- 4.3.1. In all cases, the weekly cap of 6 hours (see Section 3.7) covers all GTA duties in aggregate, including contact hours, preparation, marking, and any other associated tasks. This is not a cap on contact time alone. GTAs must not be expected to undertake teaching-related duties that fall outside this total cap.

4.4. Other Research focused employment

4.4.1. Research Associate:

Current PGRs can be employed as a Research Associate to support externally funded research projects if they meet the criteria of the role and the contracted hours confirmed with their funding & / or Visa status and by their supervisors. The aim is to support students with research experience.

4.4.2. Graduate Research Assistance (GRA):

Graduate Research Assistants (GRAs) are PGRs who undertake defined research activity in support of a staff member, research group, or project, typically under the supervision of a Principal Investigator. GRA work must be related to and contribute meaningfully to the student's own field of study and research training. GRAs are paid according to agreed pay tiers and receive appropriate induction and support for their role.

Working as a GRA gives PGRs the opportunity to develop their research skills in a structured setting, deepen their subject expertise, and gain experience of collaborative and grant-funded research environments. It is recognised as a valuable part of doctoral training at RCA.

GRAs employed through a Scholarship Agreement hold a separate fixed-term employment contract as part of their scholarship package. Research hours form part of that contracted arrangement and are not paid in addition to the scholarship award.

Postgraduate Researchers may be employed on either short term or long term contracts with the following definitions:

a) Short Term Contracts are where a PGR is employed for work of a temporary nature, such as a specified individual activity, or ad hoc teaching events, and the contract lasts no longer than 12 successive weeks.

b) Long term Contracts are where a student is engaged for an appointment of longer than 12 weeks to undertake work that is substantive and continuous in nature and are contracted to work a set number of hours that can accurately be

described as a Full time Equivalent (FTE). Such appointments will often be for Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) or Graduate Research Assistant (GRA) roles.

All contracts are subject to right to work checks and Visa compliance. Find [more information](#) on the RCA website.

4.5. Employment on Other Research Projects

- 4.5.1. Should a PGR undertake employment on a research project (in addition to, or separate from, any teaching role), they must ensure that any intellectual property arising from that employment is kept separate from any IP created in the course of their doctoral studies. Students should seek guidance from the Research Office where there is any uncertainty about how IP should be attributed or managed.

5. Activities

- 5.1. Teaching opportunities will be introduced for PGRs by Schools Programmes and Research Centres to support current PGRs to become involved in teaching/ teaching related activities. Examples as below:
 - Delivering a limited number of lectures/sessions where the topic is directly related to the PGR's field of research expertise, or where involvement would enhance their own research project;
 - Delivering tutorials or classes on research methods;
 - Assisting as demonstrators for practical classes.
- 5.2. Care must be taken to ensure that work does not impede the progress of the PGR's studies. Work and work-related activities should not normally exceed an average of 6 hours per week during term time. This 6-hour cap covers all teaching-related duties in aggregate, including contact hours, preparation, marking, and any administrative duties arising from the teaching role. It is not a cap on contact time alone. This is particularly important for UKVI compliance: all hours counted for immigration purposes include preparation and related duties in addition to contact time.
- 5.3. **International students must also comply with UKVI Visa [working hour limits](#). For the avoidance of doubt, all working hours inside and outside RCA, contact, preparation, marking, and administration, count towards Visa hour limits.**
- 5.4. PGRs should not be expected to provide key pastoral care for other students. They should, however, be made aware of the College's system of pastoral support and know how to direct students to appropriate support if the need arises.

6. How Roles Are Advertised

- 6.1. All teaching/ employment opportunities will be advertised openly and transparently to eligible PGRs through the [RCA website](#) and externally for funded roles. HoPs may also

communicate opportunities directly to PGRs via the Research Office, but open advertisement remains the default to ensure fair and equal access.

- 6.2. All role advertisements will clearly state the role type, expected duties, time commitment, pay tier, eligibility requirements, and application deadline.

7. Application Process

- 7.1. PGRs who have reached the relevant policy point in their programme and wish to apply should submit to roles available.
- 7.2. Shortlisting and selection are carried out at departmental level, based on suitability, subject knowledge, and stage of study. All applicants will receive a timely notification of the outcome.
- 7.3. As roles on externally funded projects generally need to be advertised externally for funder compliance purposes, applications for Research Associate roles would need to follow the standard recruitment process of applying via the RCA website.

8. Pay and Remuneration

- 8.1. Work undertaken by PGRs may be remunerated either through a contract of employment (e.g. Associate Lecturer, Research Associate, GTA or GRA) or as a casual worker. The grade/hourly rate for the work undertaken will be based on the agreed grade for the role.
- 8.2. Upon work allocation or agreement, any potential conflicts of interest such as prior industry ties, personal relationships, or teaching commitments must be disclosed and discussed.

9. The Responsibilities of Head of Doctoral Programmes and the Head of Programmes

- 9.1. The Head of Doctoral Programmes and the Head of Programmes have the responsibility to:
 - Ensure that teaching allocations are fair, transparent and aligned to the policy.
 - Confirm that teaching duties comply with the student's funding conditions and Visa restrictions.
 - Document teaching allocations and retain recommendations from supervisors and the Research Office.
 - Avoid conflicts of interest and address any potential conflicts at the point of allocation.
 - Ensure PGRs are not allocated duties outside the scope permitted by this policy.

10. Training and Support

- 10.1. All PGRs who undertake teaching or teaching-related activities are mandated to complete a teaching training, in addition to any specialised training required by the Head of Programme.
- 10.2. It is deemed good practice for PGRs to begin their teaching experience by taking part in a co-taught or team-taught unit.
- 10.3. Schools/Programmes will assign an appropriate academic to mentor PGR teaching performance and provide ongoing pedagogical support. The Doctoral Research Office, in coordination with the Research Degrees Committee, is responsible for monitoring uptake of teaching opportunities, fairness of access across student cohorts, student experience of teaching roles, and any issues arising. This monitoring data will be collated annually and used to evidence the impact of this policy in response to periodic review and feedback from the Students' Union.
- 10.4. Staff development will be available to PGRs if they are undertaking teaching/ teaching related activities, which would be a valuable resource for students to access to enhance their employability; support for Heads of Programmes in relation to employment matters.
- 10.5. A PGR's experience of teaching and any related skills development, should be discussed as part of the formal review of their development and progress, in line with the requirements for Annual Progress Review.
- 10.6. The Research Degrees Committee will receive an annual monitoring report covering: the number of PGRs engaged in teaching activities; the breakdown by role type, school, and student demographic; data on supervisor approvals and any refusals; evidence of impact on student progression and completion rates; student experience feedback; and any issues of concern raised by students, supervisors, or the Students' Union. This report will inform any necessary review or revision of the policy.

11. Responsibilities

- 11.1. The Doctoral Research Office will provide information about a range of training and development for students including that related to teaching. The Doctoral Research Office also provides research supervisory training and so has a role in communicating to supervisors the importance to some students of gaining teaching experience whilst studying and how they can get support for this professional development.
- 11.2. The Doctoral Research Office can also provide Schools information about PGRs focus of study, their PhD progress thereby aligning them to different disciplines or programmes, in one or more Schools. The Research Degrees Committee has a key responsibility in monitoring issues such as PGRs' opportunities to teach, track uptake, fairness of access, student experience and teaching quality, and impact on completion rates. The Committee will receive the annual monitoring report described in Section 10.6 and use it to assess

whether the policy is achieving its stated aims and whether any adjustments are required.

Who is responsible	Responsibilities
PGR (MPhil and PhD Student)	Undertake mandatory training; obtain supervisor approval; manage workload; comply with Visa/work limits for studentships
Research Supervisor	Confirm suitability; ensure teaching won't impede progress; support development
School / Head of Programme	Allocate duties; ensure compliance with workload, funding, and Visa restrictions; avoid conflicts of interest
Research Office	Verify funding conditions; provide training; support supervisors and PGRs
People and Culture	Contracting; right-to-work checks; pay processing; compliance support

11.3. PGR Responsibility

- Engaging with the guidance provided by the module supervisor on the duties of the role, including the use of teaching materials and preparation.
- Engaging in professional development activities relating to teaching, learning, and assessment responsibilities.
- Undertaking training necessary for the role, including attending the relevant departmental inductions, and completion of the essential training.

11.4. Unit Lead

- Developing the job description, interviewing, and providing feedback.
- Guidance on duties of the role, including teaching materials and preparation.
- Discussing professional development needs and activities undertaken by the AL.
- Supporting the students' delivery of material and development, and criteria for assessment and feedback.

11.5. Head of Programme who employs Assistant Lecturers

- Approving all job descriptions before release and ensuring affordability.
- Ensuring that selection is undertaken appropriately, including the development of a full job description.
- Integration of ALs into the teaching team and department.
- Provision of effective induction, guidance, and networking opportunities.
- Ensuring that teaching quality is monitored.

- Approving the suitability of ALs to undertake lecturing or marking duties with the Head of Doctoral Programmes.

12. Examples from other Universities

12.1. This policy has been benchmarked against comparable policies at Bristol, Oxford Brookes, King's College London, Southampton, Liverpool John Moores University and other higher education institutions to align with sector standards.

- [University of Bristol](#)
- [Oxford Brookes](#)
- [King's College London](#)
- [Newcastle University](#)
- [University of St Andrews](#)
- [University of Nottingham](#)
- [Imperial College London](#)