Teaching Support Staff - Policy Consultation
Bob Fisher, Teresa Ironside, Alex Lascarides, Neil McGillivray, Michael Rovatsos, Alex Simpson, Colin Stirling, Kate Weston; Strategy Committee, 27th August 2014

1. Background
We recently brought a proposal to introduce a policy that sets out clear rules for managing Teaching Support Staff (TSS), who represent a significant stakeholder group within the School (the 10,000 hours of paid work are equivalent to around 7 full-time staff members, at a total cost of around 2 full-time teaching staff). The purpose of this policy was to improve transparency, fair treatment, pay, and accountability, and to establish a clear line management and support structure for TSS. This was done in consultation with the Graduate School, Teaching Organisation, PhD student representatives, and the School Administration. We are presenting the suggested policy here again in an abridged format to consult with members of the Committee before discussing the matter again at the next meeting.

2. Proposed policy
1. Teaching Support Staff Roles
We propose to introduce five main TSS with specific job descriptions. The roles are mutually exclusive, but the same individual can be appointed to several of them. Appropriate training opportunities should be highlighted in all job advertisements, clarifying whether this takes the form of scheduled training courses, or instruction by the course lecturer. Line management responsibility for these lies with the course lecturer by default except where otherwise specified. These roles are remunerated at a fixed hourly rate.

1.1 Course Tutor and
1.2 Lab Demonstrator
Prepares and delivers tutorial/lab sessions from existing material, reports student attendance, answers tutees’ questions and provides oral feedback/feedforward on tutorial/lab material.

1.3 Demonstrator
Hosts lab sessions and responds to student queries, providing oral feedback/feedforward during the scheduled lab session.

1.4 Teaching Assistant (TA)
May perform some or all of the following tasks: Designs assessed and unassessed coursework, designing tutorial materials, preparing slides and lecture notes, creating and updating course information materials, answering course-related student queries, occasional delivery of or supporting role in delivery of lectures.

1.5 Marker
Marks assessed or formative coursework (including tutorial-style assessed coursework with periodic submission deadlines), provides feedback and responds to student queries on marks and feedback. Is provided with a detailed marking guide by the course lecturer, and submits initial marks for approval by the lecturer.

1.6 Exam Marker
Similar to Marker, but involves marking exams with the same provisions as under 1.5.
1.7 Other
Creation of any other TSS role requires a precise description of concrete tasks and name a teaching or administration staff member who has full line management responsibilities for the appointee.

2. Teaching Support Allocation Policy and Procedure
2.1 Teaching support
The School provides teaching support through allocations of Teaching Support Staff in terms of a set of defined roles for a course and numbers of hours allocated to each role. The level of support allocated to a course is agreed prior to delivery of a course.

2.2 Responsibilities
Teaching Support Staff are responsible for reporting the total number of hours worked to the ITO in a timely fashion. The ITO monitors the total number of hours claimed by support staff for a course and alerts lecturers when there is a danger of exceeding agreed limits. Where claimed hours exceed the agreed allocation by more than 15%, course lecturers have to carry out any outstanding course-related tasks.

2.3 Very small courses
By default, courses with fewer than 10 students or courses that are taught voluntarily by a lecturer over and above their normal duties are not allocated a teaching support budget.

2.3 Tutor and Lab Demonstrator allocation
Unless specified during the bidding process, the allocation of Tutor and/or Lab Demonstrator effort to a course is calculated automatically, based on an average tutorial size of 12 or the specified lab group size, the number of tutorial/lab hours delivered by a Tutor/Lab Demonstrator plus an equivalent number of hours for preparation, and 4 hours of paid training per semester.

2.4 Demonstrator allocation
The allocation of Demonstrator effort to is calculated on a course by course basis, based on information provided during the bidding process (e.g. availability of kit, lab space, timetabling restrictions etc), the number of lab sessions to be delivered by a Demonstrator, and 4 hours of paid training per semester.

2.5 Teaching Assistant (TA) allocation
The standard tariff for a TA is 30 hours for every 10 points of a standard course, 50 hours for a new course or for significant redesign of substantial course materials (coursework, tutorials), or if the coursework on the course accounts for at least 40% of the total mark, plus 5 hours for coordination with the course lecturer. The increased tariff will be granted as a matter of course if substantial changes have been formally approved by the relevant committees.

2.6 Marker allocation
The standard tariff for Marker allocation is 0.5 hours per student in the class plus 2 hours per marking task (i.e. piece of coursework, midterm, exam, etc) for coordination with the course lecturer.

2.7 Exceeding approved allocations
A general allowance will be made to exceed approved allocations by up to 15% with appropriate justification.
2.8 Exceptions
Course lecturers may request higher allocations for a course than those described above providing appropriate justification. These will be considered by the Director of Teaching on a case-by-case basis, giving priority to very large courses.

3. PGR student employment rules

3.1 PGR student engagement in teaching
Every PGR student is encouraged to undertake paid work in TSS roles in accordance with their overall skills profile and career development needs. Every student is entitled to do 40 hours of paid TSS work per academic year, assuming that suitable positions are available. Doing up to 40 hours of paid teaching support does not require permission from the supervisor. Engagement with TSS activities should be reported in the annual formal PGR progress reports, and can be included automatically in these reports through Theon.

3.2 Restrictions
Unless a PGR student has been allocated a higher allowance (e.g. in the case of PCD studentships), they are not allowed to exceed a 132 hour limit per year. Additional hours will not be remunerated and the issue will be escalated to Deputy Director of Graduate School and Director of Teaching. The ITO monitors whether students are staying within this limit across courses.

4. TSS support

4.1 Duty of care
The course lecturer has full line management responsibility for all TSS staff on their course, and is responsible for providing them with appropriate guidance, reviewing their performance, and supporting them so that they can fulfil their roles to the best of their ability.

4.2 Academic oversight for courses
The course lecturer and the relevant School and University Committees have ultimate academic responsibility for courses. This cannot be devolved to TSS employees, for example by asking them to be the sole contact point for students, expecting them to represent the lecturer at exam board meetings, or determine final course marks independently.

4.3 Complaints and grievances
TSS staff need to be provided with a clear escalation path for grievances and complaints. In the first instance, resolution of any problems should be sought with the course lecturer, but if this is not possible or leads to a positive outcomes, they should contact the respective Year Organiser, who may escalate this further to Directors of Teaching and the Graduate School.

4.4 Peer support networks
The Informatics Graduate School should help establish a “buddy network” for TSS staff which PGR students can use to obtain peer support, and to represent their interests toward the School and University.

3. Consultation process
We invite comments on the above items and proposals for improvement, which we will present to Strategy Committee alongside the proposed policy. Introducing a clear policy for
how the School organises its provision of Teaching Support and supports Teaching Support Staff is a matter of urgency as we are facing increasing regulatory scrutiny, lack of TSS resources to cover current demand, and evidence of non-compliance with legal obligations toward these staff members. In parallel, ISS are working with Corporate HR on a University-wide review of all teaching support contracts, and will advise as necessary. This paper is intended to capture local practice, and is not intended to address the wider issue of these contracts and associated terms / conditions. While we recognise that some of the proposed policy elements will be contentious, it is important to achieve consensus on at least some parts of this proposal to respond to these challenges.