



Graduate Teaching Assistant Workshop – Guide for participants

The Economics Network's Graduate Teaching Assistant workshop has been developed in consultation with a network of experienced economics lecturers from across the UK. The workshop has also been developed with reference to the UK [Professional Standards Framework](#), and as such should complement any institutional postgraduate training you may engage with.

Economics Higher Education Teaching in the UK

Economics undergraduate teaching in the UK usually consists of the following for each module or unit:

- One or more lectures (large group teaching) per week – which is usually a talk or a presentation but can involve interaction and activities.
- Weekly or fortnightly seminars (small group teaching) - which often focus on economic papers, problem sets or activities to deepen students' understanding of the module subject.
- Assessments – including formative assessment (where students receive feedback but the mark does not formally count) and summative assessment (where the mark does count). Typically, economics summative assessments consist mostly of end of term written exams, but can also include coursework (such as essays) and other activities such as wikis, projects, online tests etc.
- Independent study by students (including formative assessment activities and reading etc). Most economics students are expected to spend around 70% of their overall study time engaged in independent study. A key component of designing and delivering a course is to structure and motivate this independent work.
- There might be additional computer labs, exercise lectures, clinics, drop-in sessions or other support sessions aimed at providing practice at key skills and techniques employed in the module.

In terms of the overall design of economics courses and programmes, you need to be aware of the national framework that shapes the structure and content of curricula provided by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), the regulatory body for UK HE institutions. The QAA economics subject benchmark statement provides guidance about the aims of degree programmes in economics, and specifies the subject knowledge and the subject-specific and other skills that students are expected to accrue during their studies. The economist's way of thinking and the importance of transferable concepts are also emphasised.

Key resources/reading:

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/Publications/InformationAndGuidance/Pages/Subject-benchmark-statement-Economics.aspx>

Workshop content

1. Being a GTA: roles, responsibilities and expectations.

A discussion on common fears, expectations etc of what the role of GTA should and does involve. Also an opportunity to raise any specific issues you would like covered during the workshop.

2. Delivering effective classes

Small group teaching can be complex and demanding, and in economics can take a number of forms:

- Quantitative classes where working through problem sets is the focus
- Qualitative classes where discussion of key concepts, questions and journal articles may be the focus
- 'Workshops', including computer workshops, rather than classes where individual or groups of students may need support

Whatever the context, this class time should *not be* a mini-lecture where student participation and engagement is minimal. Engaging students actively in these classes is key to supporting deeper student learning and encouraging students' independent learning and critical thinking.

Various aspects of learning, and class planning will help you deliver effective classes which will be covered during this workshop, including:

- an overview of how students learn (and how different students learn differently) and how you can plan your classes accordingly
- developing effective facilitation skills ((listening, questioning and clarifying appropriately)
- dealing with common problems (e.g. one student dominates, no-one prepares work, everyone is silent)

3. The first tutorial

Your first class or tutorial is key in terms of setting expectations and ground rules at the beginning of a module. Ensuring you and your students have a shared understanding, for example about the nature of the tutorials; participation required; preliminary work required each session, respect for others etc) is crucial to making your small group teaching effective. This session will provide practical tips to making the first tutorial effective.

4. Assessment, Marking and Feedback

Assessment is key to students' learning and is required for:

- judging performance against intended learning outcomes
- providing useful feedback to support students in improving their work

- identifying how successful teaching approach and content has been in supporting learning, and what changes could be made

It is unlikely that as a graduate teaching assistant you will be setting assessments for a module but quite likely that you will need to mark some formative and possibly summative assignments:

- *Formative* assessment is when the grade/marks do *not* contribute to the final mark for the module: its purpose is to support students' learning by giving them feedback, and to give you and the module leader feedback on the effectiveness of teaching.
- *Summative* assessment does contribute to final module marks, demonstrating to what extent students have succeeded in meeting the assessment criteria and the intended learning outcomes of the module.

Giving useful feedback, which is both timely and helps students to improve their work (rather than just telling them they were right or wrong) is particularly important.

In this session, the importance of assessment and feedback in the learning process will be discussed. Practical tips on giving effective feedback (including, for example, feedback that tells the student where to go next not just that they were wrong or right and feedback that is timely) will be shared.. Different ways of providing feedback and their relative advantages will also be considered (e.g. group feedback; peer feedback; videos etc), as will the importance of marking criteria, especially in essays.

5. Internationalism and diversity

This session will explore the issues involved with teaching mixed ability groups, students with disabilities and groups with international students. Issues such as the following will be discussed and explored: the importance of the language used in class and double checking that students have understood what has been said; writing up difficult words and references on the board; using international examples and drawing on the diversity of experience; sensitivity to cultural differences (e.g. international students may be less confident speaking in class).

This session will also introduce aspects of the HE system in the UK to these participants if required.

Useful References

Brookfield, S.D. and S. Preskill (1999). *Discussion as a Way of Teaching: Tools and Techniques for University Teachers*. Buckingham: SRHE and Open University Press.

Brown, S. and P. Knight (1994) *Assessing Learners in Higher Education*. Kogan Page.

Dolan, M. (2012) Supporting International Students of Economics in UK HE. In *Handbook for Economics Lecturers*. Economics Network. URL: http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/handbook/international_support

Entwistle, N. (2009). *Teaching for Understanding at University*. Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke.

Exley, K and R. Dennick (2004). *Small Group Teaching*. RoutledgeFarmer.

Exley, K and L. Barnett (2006). *The Handbook for Teaching Assistants*. Economics Network.
URL: <http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/handbook/gta/>

Fry, H., S. Ketteridge and S. Marshall (2008). *A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*. Kogan Page.

Morss, K. and R. Murray (2005). *Teaching at University*. Sage.

Northedge, A. (2003). Enabling Participation in Academic Discourse, *Teaching in Higher Education*, 8:2, 169-180

Schunk, D. (2011). *Learning Theories: An Educational Perspective* . Pearson.

Strawson, H., S. Habeshaw and T. Habeshaw (2013). *53 Interesting Things To Do in your Seminars and Tutorials*. Allen and Unwin.

Taylor, R. (2002). Seminars. In *Handbook for Economics Lecturers*. Economics Network. URL: <http://www.economicsnetwork.ac.uk/handbook/seminars/>

Tiberius, R. (2012). *Small Group Teaching: A troubleshooting guide*. Routledge.