

Imperial College Union
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Supporting GTAs: Advocating for Employment Contracts

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Seconders: Nico Henry – Union President
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Decision: To approve

Union Notes

1. Graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) are usually Postgraduate research (PGR) students who assist with teaching, such as leading seminars, marking, and providing academic support.
2. GTAs are contracted on casual worker agreements, meaning they do not benefit from statutory employment benefits like sick pay, guaranteed hours, maternity leave, or protection from unfair dismissal.
3. The Government's Employment Rights Bill¹ aims to offer casual workers, including GTAs, formal contracts with guaranteed hours after 12 (the exact number will be determined during regulatory framework implementation) weeks of employment. This would grant access to statutory employment rights like guaranteed hours, sick pay, and protection from unfair dismissal.
4. The Bill has passed all Committee stages. Some salient points are being debated between the two Houses of Parliament, but the transition away from casual agreements will most likely remain in the final version of the eventual law.
5. Casual workers have reported informality and inconsistency across faculties, with variations in how central guidelines are applied.
6. Casual worker agreements do not provide the guaranteed hours or employment stability required for income to be considered reliable when applying for mortgages, loans, or when applying to rent a place to live in London (some landlords require that your rent makes up at most 30% of your income).
7. There were 4,954 active work assignments on 1st January 2025 across the College (Appendix A).
8. The "4,954 active assignments" figure doesn't mean there are 4,954 casual workers. Some casual workers will have multiple "assignments". Because each department might define "assignment" differently, it is hard to know exactly how many casual workers there are from the number of assignments. The author had 2 active assignments in Term 1, for example.
9. Other Higher Education institutions like UCL, the University of Warwick, and the University of Manchester, employ GTAs (and equivalents) as full employees.
10. Casual positions vary in expected number of working hours per assignment, from one-off sessions to year-long commitments.

Union Believes

1. As workers integral to teaching, GTAs deserve access to statutory employment benefits like sick pay, maternity pay, and protection from unfair dismissal.
2. Given the rising cost of living, the University should support students by providing job security, allowing them to focus on their studies without the stress of financial instability. Stable employment will enable GTAs to dedicate more time and energy to their academic and teaching responsibilities.
3. GTAs should be able to plan their lives with financial stability. The University should support them in housing and career development, allowing them to declare their income for purposes like applying to rent a property, for a mortgage, or other financial commitments.

¹ <https://bills.parliament.uk/bills/3737>

4. GTAs deserve consistent treatment across faculties to ensure fair pay, clear expectations, and adequate support. Standardized practices should be applied across the University to ensure equality and transparency.
5. The University should align its GTA employment practices with those of peer institutions such as UCL and LSE, which offer more formalized and supportive contracts.
6. Despite clear frameworks for GTAs, factors like departmental culture, supervisor engagement, and resources lead to differing teaching loads, support, and compensation.

Union Resolves

1. To take the stance that the University should offer GTAs fractional, open-ended employment contracts where the pay is indexed to a pay spine (as defined by University Administration²), with added benefits like eligibility to bonuses when one-off bonuses are awarded to staff.
2. To mandate the Union President and Deputy Presidents to advocate for the employment contract type outlined in Union Resolves 1 of this paper at relevant meetings with University Administration.
3. To work alongside the University to support GTAs in moving towards a new contracting model, to ensure their employment terms provide added stability to focus on their academic progress and career development.

Appendix A

1-page document – two tables issued by the University which break down the number of active casual working assignments per faculty on the 1st of January 2022 through 2025.

Reference: IMPFOI-25-385

² <https://www.imperial.ac.uk/human-resources/employee-experience/pay-and-pensions/salaries/teaching/>