

A recommended code of good practice for temporary contracts, as written by a working group of postgraduate and early-career researchers in German Studies

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Colleagues who are in a position to negotiate the terms of temporary contracts are asked to give due consideration to this document.

This document, inspired by the Royal Historical Society's 'Employing Temporary Teaching Staff in History: Code of Good Practice' (2014), aims to set out recommendations and principles for sustainable, fair employment of early career researchers and temporary teaching staff in German Studies in the UK. The authors are aware of the fact that these recommendations represent an ideal guideline and that not all colleagues have a say on their faculty's and school's recruitment policy. Similarly, not all early career researchers are in temporary teaching posts, and not all those on temporary teaching posts aspire to permanent, full-time academic employment. However, staff in both groups are often confronted with challenging employment conditions. Adhering to the following basic principles, wherever possible and applicable, will help support and encourage early career researchers and temporary teaching staff – particularly those who increasingly face financial difficulties as a result of their student loan debt – and ensure the sustainability of our profession.

Any questions, suggestions or comments relating to this document should be sent to stephan.ehrig@durham.ac.uk.

Recruitment and conditions of employment

Temporary staff should be offered formal contracts, with standard employment rights, including those in hourly employment.

Employment contracts should make clear scope of the role, either as proportion of FTE or as an hourly paid rate (with a clear estimate of the number of hours required, including teaching, preparation, contact hours and marking). ECRs may not be aware of institutional and/or professional norms, such as how many contact hours constitutes a full role, how much time they can expect additional responsibilities to take, etc.

Wherever possible, employers and institutions should aim to package contracts and available hours in order to provide a full-time salary appropriate to cover the cost of living, so that ECRs and temporary teaching staff do not need to seek additional employment, and have proof of an adequate income to use to secure housing, etc.

This could mean combining teaching responsibilities with research, outreach, administrative or other duties. This condition applies only where ECRs/Temporary staff do not also hold a full-time, paid research post (e.g. PhD studentship, JRF, Leverhulme ECF, etc.)

The use of nine-/ten-month contracts and contracts at 0.8 FTE involving a full-time teaching load during term-time should be avoided.

Where fractional contracts are used:

1. Fractional teaching contracts should include realistic preparation and marking time, especially for course convenors.
2. Fractional teaching contracts should allow for any administrative roles allocated to the member of staff, including time spent attending any required meetings.
3. Fractional teaching contracts should include payment for time spent attending staff development/training sessions.
4. When hours required for preparation, marking and administrative work are taken into account, it should be ensured that temporary staff are paid at least the Living Wage.

5. Departments should be flexible and aware that staff are likely to need to fit other forms of employment around their fractional teaching contracts.
6. Temporary staff should be put on the payroll, so that they are paid on time, regularly, without prompting and at the level promised.
7. In ordinary circumstances, temporary teaching staff should be offered contracts and informed about the courses they are teaching at least a month before the teaching term begins. Wherever possible, this should be done earlier.
8. Extremely short-term contracts, for example when REF deadlines are imminent, are not acceptable.
9. Where staff are required to be research-active in order to be eligible for a role (including roles delivering research-led modules and jobs where the person specification requires active researchers), they should be paid for time spent researching and offered institutional support for their research.

Integration into the department

1. Introduce junior staff to academic and administrative colleagues, especially those in their own area of research interest, and to each other.
2. Include them on staff email lists and invite them to staff events, both academic and social.
3. Give them representation on teaching committees (or other appropriate bodies).
4. Give them a guide to all administrative procedures, a list of key contacts and of important dates.
5. Make sure they know who to contact about any difficulties, especially: a) receipt of their pay; b) the conduct of teaching; c) rooms/equipment; d) the content of their teaching; e) classroom management; f) student problems.
6. Make sure they have a clear route to raise concerns about the terms of their employment to an appropriate colleague e.g. if asked to undertake unpaid additional work.
7. Allocate a mentor, ideally someone in their own research area.

Staff development

1. Temporary staff should be included in any peer-review or personal development processes within the department, including peer-review of teaching.
2. Temporary teaching staff should be offered training, and paid for the time required. They should be encouraged and supported in working towards becoming Associate Fellows of the Higher Education Academy.
3. Advice should be available regarding research and career plans, probably from the people assigned the mentoring role.
4. Facilities such as library access and institutional affiliation should be offered during vacations; this should include during the summer to people on 10-month or term-time only contracts.
5. Wherever possible, institutional support should be available to temporary staff preparing funding applications and small grants should be available to cover the cost of conference travel, for example.