

## **GUEST EDITORIAL**

### **SPECIAL ISSUE - Supporting GTAs Who Teach**

This special issue of PESTLHE offers articles and case studies demonstrating a range of practices from different institutions and locations, highlighting the importance which is attached to the support and development of postgraduates who teach. These offer practical inspiration for all who are concerned with the quality of postgraduate education and the need for aspiring academics to engage in teaching as well as research in preparation for an academic career in the 21st century.

Our own experiences, and that of many of our colleagues, suggest that although approaches are tailored to individual institutions there are many common aspects which apply across the sector. These reflect the growing numbers of Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs) who teach and, potentially, the need to reconsider the nature of postgraduate education for aspiring academics in the 21st century.

The short papers which provide the Foreword to this special edition are written by three educational developers, guest editors for this special edition, with different perspectives on the development of postgraduates who teach. The first short paper in the Foreword offers the policy and background to postgraduates who teach and the benefits to individuals and institutions. The second paper by Fran Beaton provides a perspective on the practice within one UK institution which complements Sandy Cope's reflection on the decisions made in selecting the most appropriate level, qualification or professional recognition. Having set the context in the Foreword, this special edition examines postgraduates who teach within the UK and Australia, disciplinary expectations and their preparation for teaching practice.

The first paper by Chadha explores the expectations and disciplinary differences of postgraduates undertaking training. Whilst there is a requirement for development of teaching skills, there are also expectations based on their disciplinary background - transferable skills or characteristics of teaching in their discipline. In the second paper McCready and Vecsey focus on postgraduate demonstrators within Medical Sciences. Here postgraduates provide very specific support with academic IT skills to undergraduates and postgraduates, the importance of this role is illustrated by their recruitment and continuous development. The benefits are seen by both the demonstrators and the students they support.

The third paper, by Partridge, Hunt and Goody, provides a cross institutional case study on an award winning Postgraduate Teaching Internship Scheme in Australia. The pedagogy behind the constructivist learning model is also explored in this paper, recognising the postgraduates who teach as adult learners. The fourth paper, also Australian based, by Winning, Greenwood and Lekkas, demonstrates the importance of Postgraduate students as part time staff in higher education in their role as clinical teachers. The paper examines

the development needs of the postgraduates and the design of the programme to support their development. The final paper, by McKiggan-Fee, Walsh, Hacking and Ballantyne, reminds us that postgraduates who teach are not a forgotten tribe as demonstrated by their response in the recent UK National Union of Students survey. However, the authors point out that there is still room for improvement in the training and development of postgraduate tutors and demonstrators.

The message emerging from the papers is that postgraduates who teach are increasingly being recognised for the contribution they make to the student experience, not just in the UK but Australia. Providing development opportunities for postgraduates who teach also provides a "win win" situation for institutions and students alike.

So thank you to all our contributors in this issue. To those of you reading, we would urge you to get writing and submit a paper to us.

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