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# University Graduate Teaching Assistants


Policies, trends and perspectives

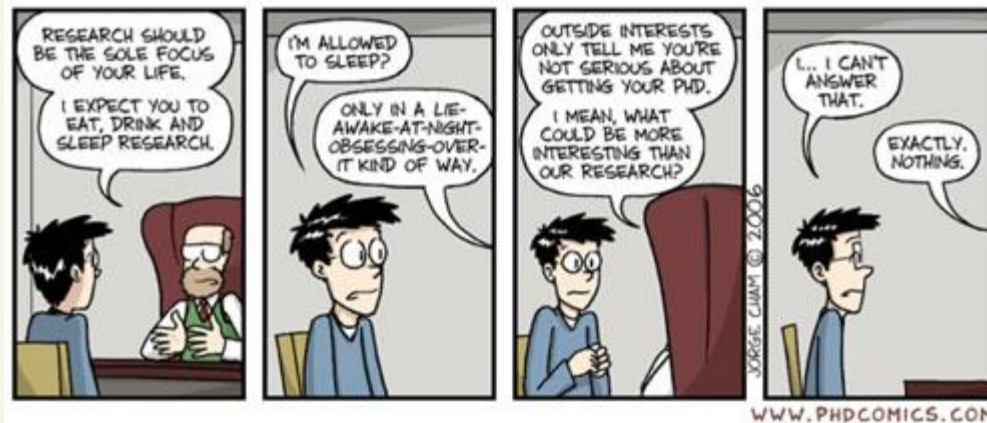
Fran Beaton, University of Kent





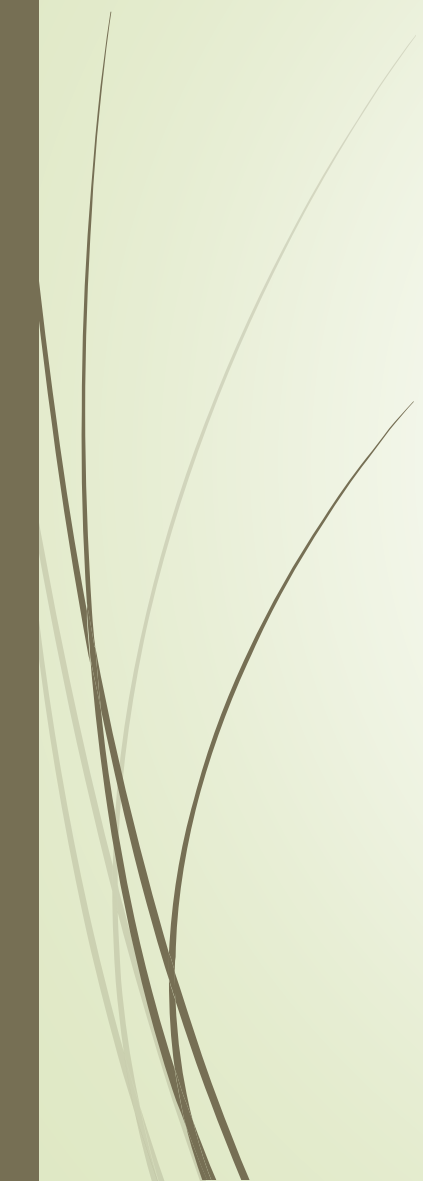
# Challenges of definition for GTAs

- how they are recruited and recorded
  - what they are asked to do, how and when
  - their support needs
  - shifting/multiple identities
- 





# Changing universities

- Degrees incorporating professional experience e.g. nursing, social work, business
  - Greater student numbers; more diversity
  - Changing 'stakeholder' expectations
  - Increasing emphasis on student employability (including yours!)
- 



# Expectations influenced by

- Policy
- Funding arrangements
- External scrutiny (KIS, HESA data, NSS, PTES/PRES)
- Perceptions of institutional prestige e.g. league tables
- Proxies to define/identify excellence (TEF)



# The UK HE environment: **K**ey **S**ets

Publicly available information, including

- Course fees (typically £9,000/€12,000 per year), payback begins once graduated and in work
- Other associated costs e.g. accommodation
- Amount of contact time by course and contact type e.g. seminars, lectures, workshops
- Graduate employment data

<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/unikis/>





# And.....

- ▶ National Student Survey: student satisfaction with **quality**
  - teaching; feedback on assessment; study support and resources; personal development
- ▶ The proportion of staff who are **qualified** to teach e.g. have Higher Education Academy Associate Fellowship or Fellowship

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/information-on-staff-teaching.pdf>



# Qualified? UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF)

‘....to provide students with an excellent learning experience..... We believe that the UKPSF is essential to driving improvement in, and raising the profile of, learning and teaching in HE.’

Higher Education Academy



# Perspectives on belonging

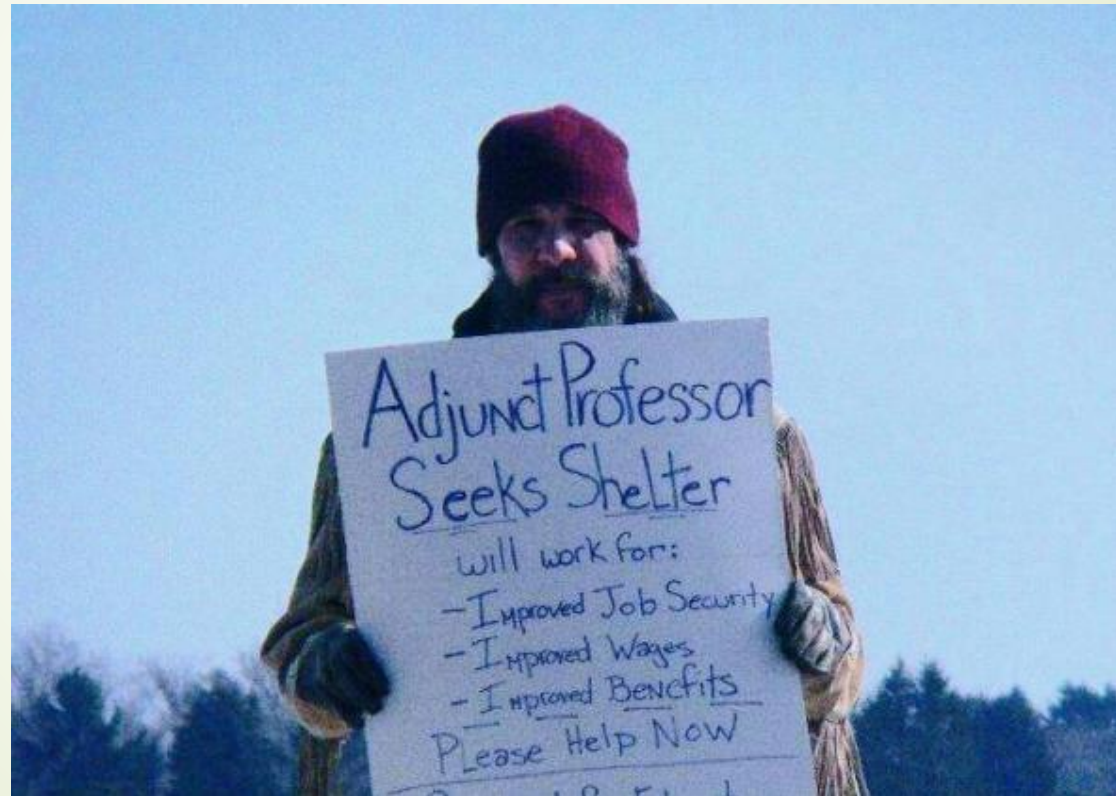
**Socialisation/acclulturation into HE** e.g. Akerlind 2004;  
Knight & Trowler 1999:24

*'Good mentoring and induction routines.....are most potent within activity systems, such as departments, that constitute professional communities and which are sites of professional learning.'*

**Individual identity** e.g. Lave and Wenger 1998; Clegg 2008; Shreeve 2011:87

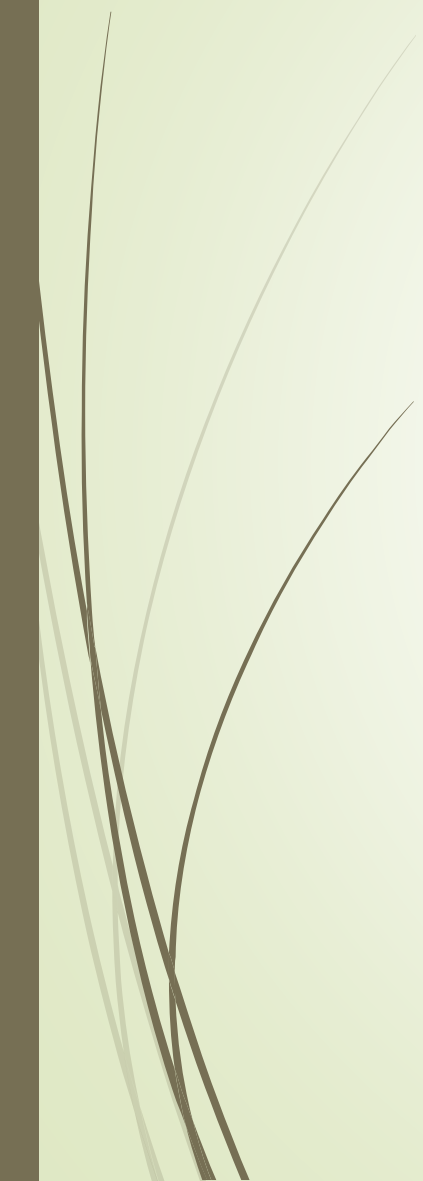
*'Where .... different aspects of one's identity are not reconciled, there appears to be less than satisfactory engagement in academia.'*


# The 'Precariat' (Standing, 2014)





# Particular concerns for GTAs

- **Risk** of semi-detached relationships with the university, fulltime and other part-time staff
  - **Responsibility** for teaching students, but limited access to space and resources
  - **Conflicting** roles and identities
  - **Limited** information, access, time to undertake appropriate professional development
- 



# Implications for professional development

- ▶ TEF is potentially helpful, as nationally reported data requires
  - Increased institutional thoroughness to identify **all** relevant staff
  - An institutional commitment to appropriate, accessible professional development to develop teaching



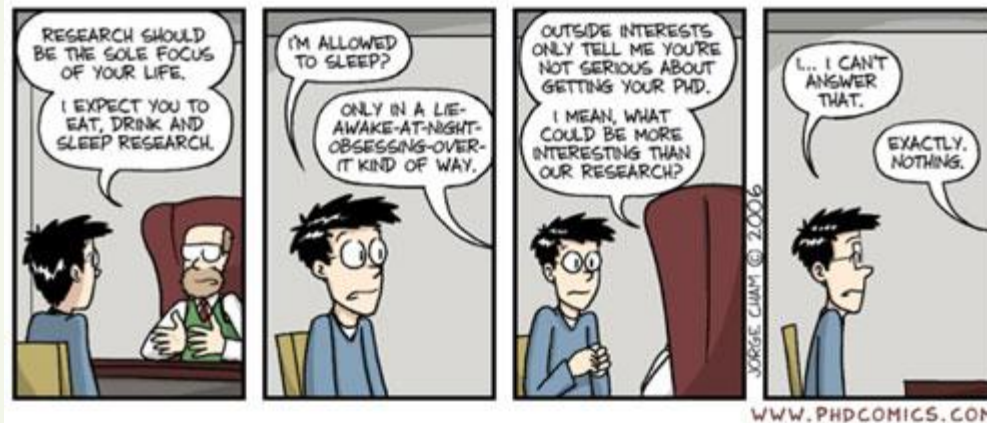


## Furthermore....

- ▶ TEF may influence individual universities' prestige in teaching-related league tables

But.....

- ▶ TEF may underscore relative prestige of research and teaching
- ▶ Teaching development may be perceived as distracting from other work







## To conclude

- ▶ A system of national recognition/credentials in relation to teaching may assist both the visibility of GTAs and their access to professional development
- ▶ Integration of GTAs and other part-timers is best practically effected day-to-day at 'local' level and more broadly at institutional level
- ▶ Professional development needs to combine disciplinary input, prepare GTAs both for current role and future aspirations (future-proofing)



# Reading and resources

## Books

Beaton F and Gilbert A (eds) 2013 *Developing Effective Part-Time Teachers in Higher Education* Routledge

Becher T & Trowler P (2001) *Academic tribes and territories* Milton Keynes, SRHE /Open University Press

Henkel M (2000) *Academic identities and policy change in higher education* London and Philadelphia, Jessica Kingsley

Lave J & Wenger E (1991) *Situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation* Cambridge University Press

## Journal articles

Akerlind G (2004) A new dimension to understanding university teaching in *Teaching in Higher Education* 9 pp 363- 375

Clegg S (2008) Academic identities under threat? *British Educational Research Journal* 34: pp 329- 345

Jawitz J (2009) Academic identities and communities of practice in a professional discipline *Teaching in Higher Education* 14:3 pp 241- 251 DOI 10.1080/13562510902898817

Knight P, Tait J & Yorke M (2006) The professional learning of teachers in higher education *Studies in Higher Education* 31:03 pp 319- 339 DOI 10.1080/03075070600680786

Santoro N & Snead S (2012) "I'm not a real academic": a career from industry to academe *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 37:3 pp384- 396 DOI:10.1080/0309877X.2011.645-457

Shreeve A (2011) Being in two camps: conflicting experiences for practice-based academics *Studies in Continuing Education* 33:1 pp71-91 DOI 10.1080/0158037X.2011.521681

## Websites

Quality Assurance Agency <http://www.qaa.ac.uk/en/Publications/Documents/information-on-staff-teaching.pdf>

Higher Education Academy (The UK Professional Standards Framework) [https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/UKPSF\\_2011\\_English.pdf](https://www.heacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/UKPSF_2011_English.pdf)

Higher Education Funding Council (Key Information Sets) <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/it/unikis/>

Thank you! Questions?

