



University of Essex

School of Life Sciences

Graduate Laboratory Assistant (GLA) Handbook

2020-2021

General Information

Training and Preparation

In order to receive your Graduate Laboratory Assistant (GLA) contract, you must have attended the GLA training sessions run by the Learning and Development Unit as well as completing Level 2 and 3 training from within the School. The laboratory supervisor will normally advise you of any preparation you are expected to undertake before the practical. Note that briefing sessions with laboratory supervisors are not paid. You must attend any training sessions that the laboratory supervisor recommends. If you are in further completion or about to enter further completion you are not allowed to undertake the role of Graduate Laboratory Assistants.

You are expected to prepare yourself in your own time before the practical in order to be of maximum assistance to the undergraduate students. Failure to comply with the requests of the laboratory supervisor and failure to adhere to the Code of Practice may preclude you from further employment in the School.

Obtaining Employment

GLAs must submit their notice of interest along with CV and skills template to Emma Revill - emma.revill@essex.ac.uk. **YOU MUST NOT WORK IN A LAB UNLESS YOU HAVE BEEN ISSUED WITH A CONTRACT**

Arrangements for Payment

GLAs will be issued with a contract of employment by the School. You will not be issued with a contract without a certificate of attendance proving you have attended and successfully completed the GLA training as stated above.

Please note that the University cannot pay you without a National Insurance number. If you do not have a National Insurance number, you must apply for one by ringing the National Insurance number, please see <https://www.gov.uk/apply-national-insurance-number> you will then be sent an email with details of the documents you need to provide and sent an application form in the post for completion. It can take two weeks to be issued a national insurance number.

You will need to complete a P46 Tax Declaration form the first time you are employed in each tax year. The tax year runs from April to March. Failure to comply with any of the above will mean you cannot be paid.

Rates of Pay

The rate of pay for GLAs (as at August 2020) is £13.82. Field courses are paid at the same rate up to a maximum of 8 hours per day.

Maximum Working Hours

A full-time graduate student may not work as a GLA for more than 6 hours per week during term time. This includes preparation and marking time. The supervisor signing the GLA time-sheet is agreeing that any extra hours have been confirmed and discussed by yourself and your supervisor. If your funding council has more stringent rules about paid work, then you must abide by them. You should obtain your Supervisor's permission before undertaking GLA work. You must also keep a log of your hours during the year.

Teaching Sessions

At the end of each session you will be required to check that students have left their workplace tidy. This will be done in one of the following ways:

1. If the practical involves the use of a worksheet with a space for the Graduate Lab Assistants to sign, you must sign to confirm that the student has tidied their workspace.
2. In all other cases you should collect a form during the practical from the prep room and at the end ask your students to write their name on the form, which you must then sign off. The completed forms should then be left in the box in the prep room.

Code of Practice for Graduate Laboratory Assistants (GLAs) in the School of Life Sciences

Failure to comply with the Code of Practice may result in payment being withheld. All Graduate Laboratory Assistants must attend the University of Essex Training Programme and have a current contract of employment before being allowed to work as a GLA.

Before the Practical Session

1. Graduate Laboratory Assistants should be fully briefed on the practical session they will assist in, and should be given the undergraduate practical schedules and lecturer's notes in advance.
2. It is the Graduate Laboratory Assistant's responsibility to ensure that they are adequately prepared for the practical, and if they are unsure of anything should consult the lecturer in charge.
3. Prior to the practical session the lecturer responsible should talk to the Graduate Laboratory Assistants through the aims and objectives, and outline the running order and the location and availability of material.
4. The lecturer responsible should ensure that the Graduate Laboratory Assistant is able to use the equipment prior to the practical, and if not the Graduate Laboratory Assistant should be fully briefed and given the opportunity to have a trial run.
5. The Graduate Laboratory Assistants should be aware of the Health and Safety Regulations with respect to:
 - (a) good laboratory practice;
 - (b) being briefed on particular hazards associated with the practical they are involved in.

During the Practical Session

1. Professional educational etiquette should be adhered to throughout the practical. The Graduate Laboratory Assistants and the lecturer should conduct themselves in a professional manner.
2. The Graduate Laboratory Assistants should be approachable to the students and communicate well with them.
3. The Graduate Laboratory Assistants should have access to the lecturer in charge throughout the practical session in case problems should arise.
4. The Graduate Laboratory Assistants should take a pro-active role in order to stimulate the interest and probe the understanding of the students but should not supply answers to worksheets.
5. Graduate Laboratory Assistants should ensure that, before the students they have been responsible for during the practical leave the laboratory, they (the students) have left the benches and equipment in the condition in which they found them at the start of the practical.

After the Practical Session

A debriefing session can be useful and would aim to evaluate the need for changes or improvements in the running of the practical and the effectiveness of the Graduate Laboratory Assistants.

Marking

1. All markers must have demonstrated, or at least attended the practical they are going to mark.
2. When work has been submitted by the students a meeting involving the practical supervisor and all Graduate Laboratory Assistants should be scheduled. This meeting should be used to allocate work, go through marking procedures and agree in advance how many scripts the Graduate Laboratory Assistants should be marking per hour and a deadline for returning the work to the Supervisor. The expectation is that Graduate Laboratory Assistants should mark at a rate of around 7 to 10 scripts per hour (1st year work) but this will vary according to the type of coursework set.
3. If the Graduate Laboratory Assistants feel the number of scripts they are being asked to mark in the time allocated is unreasonable, they should discuss this with the practical supervisor in the first instance. If concerns remain, they should contact the School Administrator.
4. Once the number of scripts and the amount of marking time has been agreed, no further funds for marking will be made available, even if the time spent marking is longer than the time agreed.
5. All marking should be completed by the deadline set by the practical supervisor and should be returned in an orderly state. A further meeting may be required to reconcile problem scripts and discuss any problem areas.
6. The coversheet and marking grid (if appropriate) must be completed and feedback provided both on the coversheet and on the text. Feedback should be constructive and provide the student with guidance as to how to improve their work. All pages of the submitted work should, as an absolute minimum requirement, be ticked to indicate that the work has been properly scrutinised. It is recommended to use coloured (preferably green) pen.

You may also like to refer to the Twelve top tips for student feedback:

1. Good communication;
2. Managing expectations;
3. Always start feedback with a positive comment;
4. Mark in green;
5. Limit correction of grammar;
6. Avoid the word 'effort';
7. Relate feedback to the text and be specific;
8. Beware of the use of ticks and question marks;
9. Give good marking criteria;
10. Ask what area they want you to focus on;
11. Give oral feedback;
12. Invite them to see you.

If you would like to see the whole power-point presentation for the Twelve top tips for student feedback, please contact the Graduate Administrator (Research).

GLA JOB DESCRIPTION

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Job Title and Grade: | <p>Graduate Laboratory Assistant</p> <p>Grade 5, sp 21</p> |
| Contract: | <p>Fixed term employment contract until the postholder completes or withdraws from postgraduate studies or enters further completion or an extension to completion period.</p> <p>Although an overarching contract will be in place for the duration of postgraduate studies, GLAs will need to apply for individual posts and will have no entitlement to future engagements beyond their initial post. The reason the contract is fixed term is that these posts provide an opportunity for postgraduate research students to develop interpersonal, communication and practical skills.</p> <p>This job description will form part of and will activate the employment contract.</p> |
| Hours: | <p>Hours are likely to vary from week to week but will be an average of 6 hours per week. Additional hours to undertake marking may be offered on appropriate modules only with agreement from the relevant module and research supervisors. This will be on a case-by-case basis depending on student numbers, the nature of the module and other external circumstances.</p> <p>Any restrictions on hours set out in the University's Principal Regulations for Research Degrees, RCUK training grant or any other scholarship will apply. Tier 4 student visa holders will have restrictions on the number of hours they are permitted to work each week. Research supervisors will also need to agree</p> |

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| | that the student can apply for GLA roles and agree the number of hours. |
| Salary: | Grade 5 |
| Department/Section: | School of Life Sciences |
| Responsible to: | Prof Leo Schalkwyk – Head of School |
| Reports on a day to day basis to: | The module supervisor |

Background

The School of Life Sciences is one of the largest science departments in the University. The School's research covers the whole spectrum of biology – from the cell right through to communities and ecosystems. Staff have expertise in the areas of environmental microbiology, plant productivity and photosynthesis, biophysics, biochemistry, genomics, computational biology, cellular and molecular biology. This broad-based structure provides for a strong multidisciplinary environment which enables us to offer a wide range of modular, interdisciplinary taught undergraduate and postgraduate courses which provide targeted training in specialist areas of life sciences.

Purpose of the job

This GLA post will contribute to the School's teaching programme by providing support to academic staff in the provision of teaching and learning to help students meet their learning outcomes. GLAs are required to offer assistance to the students in the laboratory (but also in other contexts such as computer laboratories or field settings) to ensure that health and safety regulations are complied with and, if requested, to undertake marking of coursework assignments, and related administrative work.

Duties of the Post: *(Please indicate the main tasks and responsibilities below)*

The main duties of the post will be:

| | Yes | No | Additional information (may include more detail about what is expected. It is not necessary to detail the hours) |
|--|-----|----|--|
| Assisting students in the laboratory by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Demonstrating how to solve lab exercises ▪ Discussing aspects of open-ended lab questions ▪ helping with training in use of specialist equipment, explaining | | | |

| | | | |
|---|--|--|--|
| methodologies, helping with data analysis | | | |
| Assisting the lead academic to run and mark work from laboratory classes. | | | |
| Maintaining contact with the laboratory supervisor | | | |
| Undertaking related administrative duties | | | |
| Attending training courses and briefing meetings. | | | |
| Undertaking preparation as requested by the module supervisor | | | |
| Making students aware of all relevant health and safety procedures | | | |
| Where required, mark scripts associated with the laboratory session, and provide students with appropriate constructive written feedback. | | | |
| Any other duties that may from time to time be assigned by the Head of School or her/his nominee | | | |

On being appointed as a GLA all students must complete a programme of training, provided by Learning and Development, to prepare them for their role. In addition, there will be the Departmental induction and training.

Under some circumstances it may be possible for a GLA to achieve Associate Fellowship of the HEA (CADENZA).

PERSON SPECIFICATION

JOB TITLE: Graduate Laboratory Assistant

Qualifications /Training

| | | |
|--|------------------|------------------|
| | Essential | Desirable |
|--|------------------|------------------|

| | | |
|---|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| ▪ An undergraduate degree in a relevant subject area | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▪ Studying for a PhD in year 2 or above in a relevant area but not in further completion. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▪ Good knowledge of the subject area being taught. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▪ Willing to undertake training to the requirements of the post. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Experience/Knowledge

| | Essential | Desirable |
|---|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| ▪ Good working experience of the technical skills to be used and taught during the practical. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▪ Previous experience of teaching or evidence of other activity requiring similar skills | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| ▪ Evidence of the ability to show flexibility and adaptability in teaching style | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

Skills/Abilities

| | Essential | Desirable |
|---|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| ▪ Able to communicate clearly and effectively with a wide range of students. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ▪ Adequate English language competence for teaching and assessing a wide range of students who are both native and non-native English speakers. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Other

| | Essential | Desirable |
|--|-------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| ▪ Ability to meet the requirements of UK 'right to work' legislation | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Duties may be changed from time to time to meet changing circumstances.

Terms of Appointment:

For a full description of the terms and conditions for this post please visit:

<http://www.essex.ac.uk/hr/current-staff/terms.aspx#>