



# **Navigating opportunities and recognising practice: Supporting Postgraduates who Teach**

**Academic Development Centre, University of Warwick**

[https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross\\_fac/academic-development/](https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/cross_fac/academic-development/)

**Sara Hattersley SFHEA: [S.Hattersley@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:S.Hattersley@warwick.ac.uk)**

**John Kirkman SFHEA [John.Kirkman@warwick.ac.uk](mailto:John.Kirkman@warwick.ac.uk)**

Postgraduates and early career researchers play an **important role** in learning and teaching in Higher Education in general (Fadia Nasser-Abu Alhija & Barbara Fresko, 2020).

However, PGR teachers **occupy a liminal space** between staff and student and as such may not have full access to the information, resources and support of more senior colleagues.

PGR teachers are very commonly invited (or mandated) to **attend institutional provision**, often Advance HE accredited.

However, Chui and Corrigan (2017) note that PGR teacher **self-efficacy declines after initial training has concluded**, therefore supporting ongoing practice beyond initial professional learning opportunities is important.

# Postgraduates who teach

**QAA states that doctoral students should be afforded opportunities for professional development**

Characteristics for Doctoral Degrees (2020):

*"doctoral graduates are able to prepare, plan and manage their own career development while knowing when and where to draw support."*



# Warwick context and scale

- Undergraduate population: 18,250
- Postgraduate population: 10,810  
(all of these people need teaching...)
- Warwick academic staff: 2,691
- Warwick offers around 500 new PhD places every academic year.
- There are currently **1250 postgraduate researchers who have a GTA teaching contract** (a two year employment contract for those with 20 hours of teaching or more). Also STP and Unitemps employment for teaching.

# Opportunities to explore teaching

## Individual?

- **Mentorship in departments** or on APP EXP
- **Observation of teaching**
- Dialogue around drafts of Professional Narratives
- Reflective journals and exploratory tasks
- **Writing journal articles (JPPP)**

## Collaborative?

- APP PGR and PGA programmes
- APP EXP Associate Fellow Network
- Pedagogical Journal Club
- Warwick Postgraduate Teaching Community
- Cultivate/CPD
- **Departmental peer groups**

# Ecosystem? Map to navigate?

APP EXP

Preparing to Teach  
in Higher  
Education

WIHEA Fellowship

WIHEA project  
funding

APP PGR

PGR Pedagogic  
Journal Club

Departmental  
mentoring and  
peer dialogue

Warwick PGR  
Teaching  
Community

Postgraduate  
award in Teaching  
and Learning in HE

Teaching Tips CPD

Cultivate funding

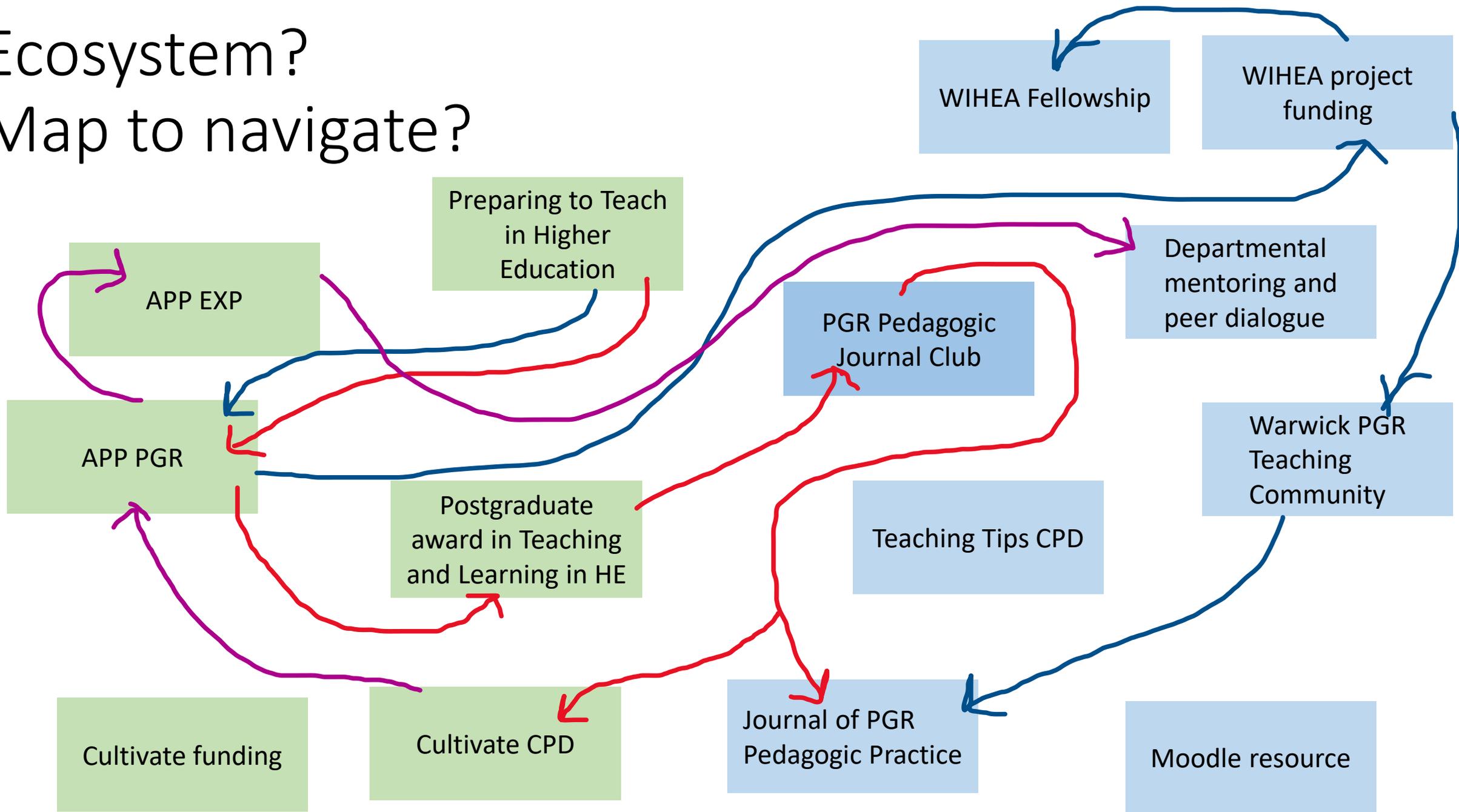
Cultivate CPD

Journal of PGR  
Pedagogic Practice

Moodle resource

# Ecosystem?

## Map to navigate?



# Ecosystem? Map to navigate?

WIHEA Fellowship

WIHEA project  
funding

Preparing to Teach

APP EXP

Are any individual students or groups of students less well provided for?

Departmental mentoring and peer dialogue

APP PGR

e.g. those with previous teaching experience or with experience of less common forms of student support.

Warwick PGR Teaching Community

Cultivate funding

Cultivate CPD

Journal of PGR  
Pedagogic Practice

Moodle resource

# HEA Fellowship

- Professional recognition.
- Encourages professional learning through reflective process.
- Currency in sector for appointment and promotion.
- Four categories of fellowship: [Associate Fellow](#), [Fellow](#), Senior and Principal.

# Fellowship as professional recognition

- Recognise – or acknowledge experience or achievements. Reports of increased confidence and feelings of validation on gaining recognition (Cathcart et al. 2021).
- Learning about *and* from practice.
- Using Dimensions of the Framework to describe and reflect upon practice.

# Opportunities for PGR students

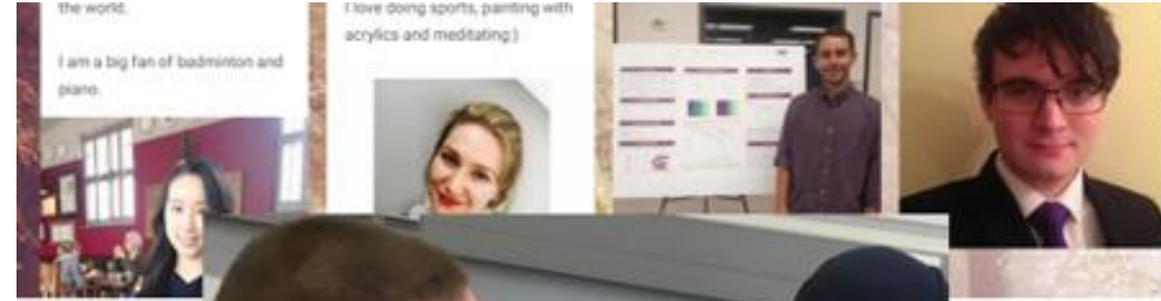
Academic and Professional Pathway (APP)	
Post-graduate research students (PGR)	Experienced staff (EXP)
Leads to AFHEA	Leads to AFHEA or FHEA (in exceptional circumstances)
6-month programme	Self-directed – timeframe determined by participant (and duration of student status)
Online with some in-person teaching	Range of support offered including online resources
Reflective portfolio produced	Reflective claim for fellowship made verbally (in a dialogue) or in written narrative
Cohort based	Individual approach
Mentor support	Mentor support

# APP EXP

- Self-guided – this is both an advantage and a challenge
- Highly flexible with range of opportunities
- Mentor offering individualised support
- Range of support to understand application process and develop application.
- Timescale dependent upon student – another strength and challenge.
- Awareness that need to be student or employed to apply.
- Less material or support on specific pedagogies etc. Support based on process of applying.

# APP PGR

- Cohort based peer to peer interaction
- Interdisciplinary opportunities
- Tasks based approach complete – guided
- Taught element – modelling practice
- Specified timings and time scales
- Challenges in relation to PGR workload
- Self-selecting/opportunities for all?
- Mentorship experience variable



# Warwick Postgraduate Teaching Community

A new community of practice for PGR teacher should help to provide opportunities and support:

<https://warwick.ac.uk/pgrteachers/>

- Moodle space with resources
- Website, Twitter and newsletters
- Buddy scheme
- CPD sessions and networking opportunities
- Survey of PGR Teaching Experience
- Journal of PGR Pedagogical Practice

<https://journals.warwick.ac.uk/index.php/jppp>



## ▶ Task 1.4: Challenging the status quo

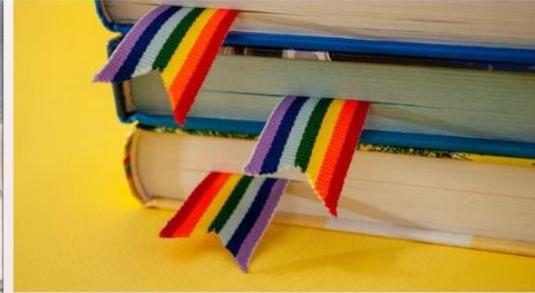
### How to bring about inclusivity - change and challenge

In this section, you have the opportunity to explore ways in which we can re-think learning and teaching work and or challenge the status quo or our current perceptions and practices. It is difficult to become fully conversant with all of the current conversations around equality, diversity and inclusivity, but this activity offers an opportunity to explore these issues in more depth. This activity can be broken down into one or more themes.

Being "queer" myself, I find that the Warwick Introduction to Queer Pedagogy, Warwick practice examples, and the University of Birmingham's best practice guide are really well-devised and touch upon very important issues.

When I was studying at University and high school, **the curriculum was heteronormative, and this made my coming out very difficult and my queer identity was difficult to make peace with.** I feel that heteronormative language and exempla are particularly damaging for students, even for those who conform to the "standard".

There we are -  
100% decolonised.



**Task: Choose at least one of the themes below. Spend some time reading and accessing the linked materials to more fully understand the issues at stake and the possible solutions in practice. You should complete an entry on your e-portfolio journal about this investigation, drawing directly on the content (citing it in some way) and making explicit connections between what you have learned and how this relates to your context. This kind of synthesis is**

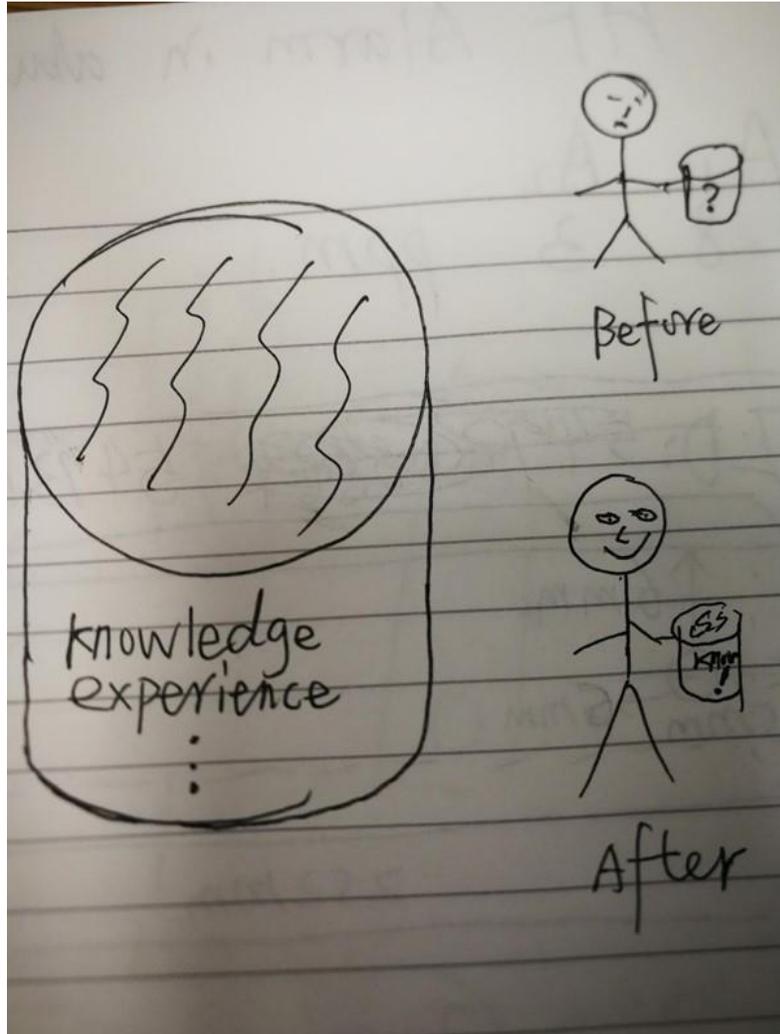
key to the final Narrative for the APP PGR portfolio.

yourself to explore something you know little about, to expand your understanding or challenge your perceptions.

## The lens of literature

Extract from the reflective journal of an APP PGR participant, following online asynchronous learning on the theme of inclusivity and diversity.

# Developing a teaching philosophy



As someone who teaches science, I see myself as having an **important role to play in students pursuing truth**. The nature of our field means that there is a correct answer and there are many incorrect answers, however I do not see this as a limit to the ways in which students learn. **Encouraging students to think for themselves and form their own constructs** is key to how I teach, encouraging them when they are correct, and facilitating alterations to their construct when they have misunderstandings. **Science can be quite brutal in its disregard for anything that is not exactly correct and, to counter this, I try to be as friendly and understanding as I can, taking time to sit down with students and explain things in detail until they completely understand.**

Extract from summative assessment of an APP PGR participant

# Peer dialogue and observation

I was a little nervous at the beginning of the seminar... I didn't articulate the task as well as I could have done, though fortunately the prior email meant that students understood what they were asked to do. Jane and I discussed **how I might better frame activities going forwards**, particularly referencing what students get out of it, and why we are doing things in a certain way. **This connected to the discussion of getting student buy-in from a CPD session I attended on alternative assessment**, and I will strive to improve this as I go forward.

When I was observed I felt supervised and guided in reflecting on what worked well and what could be improved. I also received suggestions about considering alternative methods that could be more appropriate in the specific realm of the discipline I was teaching. **This also worked as a good moment to confirm what I was doing well, alleviating some doubts and allowing me to focus more clearly on the areas where I could intervene more effectively.** **When I observed one of my more experienced colleague, I also found this duality.** I felt reassured in noticing similarity in our practices and I found really helpful to exchange some thoughts about the ratio behind the choice of activities and re-arrangement of exercises.

Extracts from observation reflections

# Personal pedagogical scholarship

I found it surprising that I, as a rather conservative seminar tutor, reacted much more positively to teaching virtual classes than to teaching face-to-face classes when social distancing constraints were imposed. The forced switch to virtual spaces meant that I had no choice but to familiarise myself with their features. Perhaps, more importantly, it provided **a unique incentive to break my routinised practice**, as experimentation became a strict necessity. **I concluded that making use of small-group-focused teaching style and layouts, physical and virtual, is an entirely suitable option for Mathematical courses**, even though **I had never encountered them in my experience as a student.**

<https://journals.warwick.ac.uk/index.php/jppp>

## In Search of Lost Space

The Changing Affordances of Physical and Virtual Teaching Spaces During the Pandemic

Matteo Mazzamurro

PhD Student, Department of Computer Science, University of Warwick

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31273/jppp.vol1.2021.927>

**Keywords:** Teaching spaces, Online teaching, Seminar teaching, COVID-19

Abstract

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PGR  
PEDAGOGIC  
PRACTICE

Pilot Launch Issue

Volume 1 (Autumn 2021)

POSTGRADUATE  
PANDEMIC PEDAGOGIES

Warwick PGR Teaching Community

# Positionality

*"This reflection comes at an interesting time as over the past few weeks I have been discussing the roles and expectations of GTAs as well as our struggles and concerns with colleagues in various forums. For most GTAs, a consistent and pressing concern is the fact that **we are often expected to do significant amounts of work with little support and for minute compensation** or any other kind of incentive. **This issue has also come to the forefront in the media over the last few years as GTAs at various universities and their equivalents around the world have spoken out about these conditions** (Walicek, 2021; King's College London, 2021)."*

What does, or might prevent you from taking teaching opportunities?	Number of responses (%)
Time commitments – PhD related	53 (50.0)
Feelings of lack of subject knowledge	35 (33.0)
Unaware of opportunities	20 (18.9)

*I feel that some students (White) do not trust my knowledge and experience as a non-native English speaker.*

*Like everyone I have had to move to online teaching and PGR teachers were given no guidance on this...*

Data from the recent Postgraduate Teaching Survey

Academic staff are working on average 51.3 FTE hours per week – again, more than 2 unpaid days each week. **Teaching Assistants/Graduate Teaching Assistants work a staggering 64.4 FTE hours per week.** In many cases, this FTE figure will have been multiplied up from a small fractional contract, but nonetheless indicates that Teaching Assistants/GTAs are **working almost double the hours they are paid for.**

**UCU Workload Survey, June 2022**

# Challenges

- Disciplinary professional learning opportunities and mentorship
- Awareness and communication about provision and activities
- Relative value and status of PGR teachers
- Uncertainties around available opportunities
- Identifying appropriate pathways...good but not perfect
- Small team in centralised provision
- Very large pool of PG students who teach
- Measuring impact of the range of activities, beyond personal, immediate gain

# Bringing the threads together

- Recognition by others – fellowship assessment as peer review process, affirmation of practice, sharing of good practice.
- Internal recognition:
  - Acceptance of self as teacher in HE
  - Identity formation: being and becoming
  - Self-efficacy: judgements of capabilities (conscious in/competence?)
  - Language use
- Personal epistemologies – how view knowledge and teaching (e.g. conceptions of learning and teaching shifting)

# Conversations and reflections

- Has anything resonated with your own work?
- Have you seen what might be called 'internal recognition'?
- How might internal recognition manifest itself in other postgraduate provision or professional programmes?

# References

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UCU (2022) Workload Survey 2021: A report by University and College Union: <https://www.ucu.org.uk/media/12905/WorkloadReportJune22/pdf/WorkloadReportJune22.pdf>