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Reciprocity in Mentorship: Exploring the Benefits for Peer Mentors in Guiding Graduate Teaching Assistants

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Introduction : Who are GTAs?

Graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) are graduate students who play a crucial role in supporting undergraduate teaching and learning.

- Why are GTAs important?
 - Bridge the gap between faculty and students, offering a unique peer-to-peer learning experience.
 - Play a crucial role in supporting undergraduate teaching and learning.
 - Enhance the quality of undergraduate education through their direct involvement in tutorials, labs, and grading.
 - Contribute to student retention and success by providing personalized support and guidance.

They face distinct challenges in navigating their dual responsibilities and developing effective teaching practices.



Mentoring in Higher Education

- Mentoring is a learning partnership that fosters growth for both mentor and mentee.
- It involves positive socialization and the sharing of knowledge and experience.
- Effective mentoring programs consider the matching process, training, and interaction frequency.

Mentoring Excellence Program

A peer-mentoring initiative at The University of Manchester designed to support GTAs in gaining recognition for their teaching practices through the UK Professional Standards Framework (UKPSF) and application for Associate Fellow of Advance HE.

Pairs GTAs with mentors who are also GTAs but have already achieved their AFHEA.

Structured around the main semesters, with each intake consisting of approximately 80 GTAs.

Mentoring Excellence Program cont.

- Themed Mentor Sessions
- Online Virtual Learning Environment (VLE)
- Core Team and Mentor Recruitment
- Mentor Meetings and Training
- Assessment and Moderation.

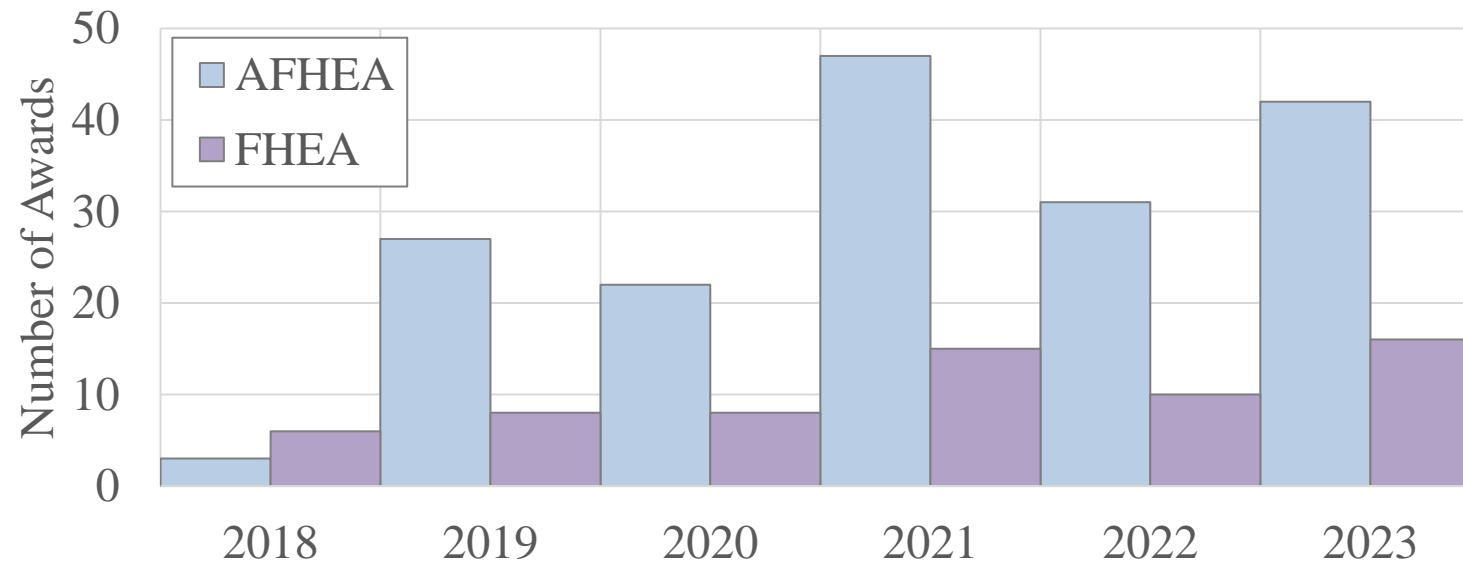
Mentoring Excellence Ethos

- Specific to the GTA pathway, aligned with teaching semesters
 - Low-barrier to assessment but still provide robust assessment for accreditation (training sessions must be taken)
 - Simple submission mechanism
 - Structured independent work with peer mentoring
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- Increased confidence (Mentees and Mentors)
 - Enhances CVs (CPD)
 - Provides further opportunities



Mentoring Excellence (HEA Accreditation)

- FSESS8210 Introduction to Accreditation Workshop for GTAs



Total so far:
172 - AFHEAs
63 - FHEAs

- January – May 2023 – Pilot with 15 FBMH GTAs
- September 2023 – 65 FSE and 21 FBMH already signed up (with no advertising yet)



Benefits for Mentees

- Professional development
- Improved teaching skills
- Emotional and psychological support
- Enhanced research productivity
- Career guidance

Reciprocity in Mentorship: The Mentor's Perspective

While mentee benefits are well-documented, this study explores the often-overlooked advantages for mentors.

Key Questions

- How does the program design benefit mentors?
- What do mentors gain from the experience?
- What practices do mentors bring from their own mentee experiences?

Findings: Benefits for Mentors

- **Professional Development.**

- Refined teaching practices through reflection and observation.
- Enhanced understanding of pedagogical theories and their application.
- Development of leadership, communication, and feedback skills.

Personal Growth.

- Increased confidence and self-efficacy as educators.
- Satisfaction from helping peers succeed.
- Expanded professional network and collaborative opportunities.

Challenges and Solutions

Challenges.

- Time constraints for both mentors and mentees.
- Misconceptions about the program's purpose and requirements.
- Varying levels of teaching experience and disciplinary backgrounds.

Solutions

- Clear communication and expectation setting.
- Flexibility in scheduling and meeting formats.
- Ongoing support and guidance from program coordinators.
- Training for mentors on effective communication and feedback strategies.

Implications for Teaching and Learning

- **Reciprocal Learning:** Mentoring programs create a culture of shared learning and continuous improvement in teaching practices.
- **Building Community:** Peer mentorship fosters a supportive community among GTAs, promoting collaboration and knowledge exchange.

Implications for Practice.

Recommendations for Effective Peer Mentoring.

- Establish clear goals and expectations.
- Provide comprehensive training for mentors.
- Foster a supportive and inclusive community.
- Recognize and reward the contributions of mentors.

Value of GTA Mentorship.

- Enhances the quality of teaching and learning.
- Supports the professional development of GTAs.
- Creates a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement.

Conclusion

Reciprocity in Mentorship ;

- Mentors, while guiding GTAs, experience significant personal and professional growth.
- This reciprocal relationship not only enhances the quality of teaching and learning but also fosters a supportive community of educators.
- By recognizing and nurturing this reciprocity, we can create a more enriching and sustainable mentoring environment in higher education.

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