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Developing role of teaching staff in Zoology at the University of Glasgow

I. Coombs* & A. Le Vin

Graham Kerr Building, University of Glasgow,
Glasgow G12 8QQ

*E-mail: isabel.coombs@glasgow.ac.uk

Prior to 1970, undergraduate numbers in Zoology at the University of Glasgow were typically low and teaching was managed by academic staff. However, widening access to universities throughout the 1970s brought an increase in student numbers in Zoology and resulted in the recruitment of postgraduate students to assist with undergraduate teaching. Postgraduates were typically employed as laboratory demonstrators. Duties involved assistance with laboratory teaching and marking laboratory reports, some examination questions and essays. Demonstrators were paid an hourly rate with no contract.

Student numbers continued to increase throughout the 1980s alongside changes in university staffing. The introduction of the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) put academic staff under increasing pressure. The role of postgraduate students broadened to include Level 3 tutorial groups, some lectures, assistance with honours projects and setting examination questions. In addition, with the introduction of computers in teaching, funding was becoming available for short-term contracts for teaching-only staff to develop and assess, with the University's Teaching and Learning Service (TLS), new technologies to aid in student education. The development and assessment of computer-assisted learning (CAL) was an exciting time in university teaching. Some teaching staff were employed on part-time, short-term contracts to develop new CAL programs for student courses. These programs were assessed in-house and by the University's TLS, thus giving an academic approach to changes in teaching practice. A number of Zoology teachers were also involved in trials of Problem Based Learning (PBL) sessions for Parasitology students, before PBL was used in Medical teaching.

The Institute of Biomedical and Life Sciences (IBLS) formed in the mid-nineties. From 1994, teaching staff were employed by the IBLS Undergraduate Teaching Unit (UTU) as Teaching Assistants (TAs), but the title was soon changed to Associate Lecturers (ALs), as this was deemed a more appropriate reflection of their duties, qualifications (most had PhDs) and their contributions to teaching and the development of teaching. Associate Lecturers were employed on a yearly basis and on 75%

of the salary scale for research and analogous staff. However, in Zoology, field-courses and summer project work involved working all year round. The duties of TAs/ALs involved the organisation and delivery of teaching, examinations and administration of courses. They were employed to strengthen teaching in Zoology (and later across IBLS) whilst enabling other members of staff to concentrate on research, with the aim that the units within IBLS should sustain their excellent position in future RAEs.

Primarily, Associate Lecturers in Zoology were assigned to support and contribute to the educational provision based in the Division of Environmental and Evolutionary Biology (DEEB), including all forms of teaching, examining and assessment. ALs were expected to contribute to student support as Advisers of Studies (often with loads of more than 100 students) and to participate in collaborations between the Undergraduate Teaching Unit and the University's Teaching and Learning Service (some ALs had prior experience in the development and assessment of computer-assisted learning projects in association with the University's TLS). ALs were also expected to train as Facilitators and participate in the Problem Based Learning Programme on which the new Medical Curriculum was based.

Initially, two Associate Lecturers were assigned to DEEB. Most ALs employed across IBLS were women. However, in DEEB from 1999-2014, the gender balance was 50/50. The temporary nature of their contracts was generally seen as a problem by ALs. Renewal of the nine-month contracts was often delayed and this made job planning difficult and caused much anxiety. Associate Lecturers were also expected to maintain a research profile.

In 2003, the title of Associate Lecturer reverted to Faculty Teaching Assistant (FTAs), seen by some as a retrograde step, and ALs had to reapply for their own posts. There were several issues with this, especially as a number of ALs/FTAs were performing senior roles in their respective units, as Course Coordinators and Examination Officers, and in contributing to curriculum development and to educational and subject based research. However, in 2004 a number of FTAs successfully applied for the new post of University Teacher (UT), but were then placed on a two-year probation, following which, in 2006, a few successfully applied for the post of Senior University Teacher. It was now considered that a career structure had been put in place that reflected the significant contribution University Teachers made to the high standing of Zoology (and Marine and Freshwater Biology) degrees in both the National Student Survey (NSS) and in the Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA).

University Teachers have made a valuable contribution to the education of Zoology and Marine and Freshwater

Biology students over the years. Their role as Course Coordinators and Examination Officers for DEEB degrees has been crucial in reviewing the effectiveness of teaching and in keeping in touch with the academic needs of students, including responding to student feedback, thus keeping our courses fresh and academically excellent. New courses have been introduced and continue to be developed to meet changing needs. The pastoral duties of University Teachers (often overlooked by other staff) have also been important in ensuring students are supported to achieve their academic potential and enjoy their educational experience. Some of this development work has resulted in publications in the biological education field. These may report on a case that others could take advantage of (Coombs *et al.*, 2013), or a practice innovation in a general area like graduate employability (Zainuddin *et al.*, 2022), or on procedures that help the development of staff expertise (Bailey *et al.*, 2022), to give just a few examples.

In 2010, a dramatic shift in University structure resulted in a number of voluntary staff redundancies in DEEB. Much of the teaching carried out by these long-term staff was picked up by University Teachers. In 2011, we employed a further UT (Dr. Le Vin) and in 2012 Drs. MacGregor, Bellingham and Paterson. In 2012, with the departure of Professor Ruxton, Dr. Coombs took on the role of Head of Subject for Animal Biology (Zoology and Marine and Freshwater Biology degrees), steering our degrees through the developments needed to keep up with the major changes in structure.

After the retirement of Dr. Coombs in 2014, Dr. Lindstrom took over as Head of Subject for Animal Biology with Dr. Spatharis as his Deputy. In 2017, the post of University Teacher was renamed University Lecturer and promotion to Senior University Lecturer, Reader or Professor became possible. Dedicated career tracks were established, namely Learning, Teaching and Scholarship (LTS) and Research and Teaching (R&T) with LTS staff expected to carry out pedagogical research.

The Graham Kerr building (GKB) has been a home from home for our undergraduate students for many years, with a large proportion of teaching taking place in the GKB and students using the Zoology Museum and the Computer Cluster as a base to study and meet their peers. Dedicated social rooms for undergraduate students were also available in the past. However, as student numbers, including postgraduates, continued to grow, and staffing increased in the Research and Teaching track, less space was available to use as social and study space and much of our undergraduate teaching now takes place across campus, resulting in a possible loss of community. A redeeming feature, however, is our field courses in Year 3 where students start the year at our custom-built Scottish Centre for Ecology and the Natural Environment (SCENE) at Loch Lomond. Our field courses help to build a sense of community among our students as they make friendship groups that can last a life-time, and many find a sense of belonging among

their peers. That, and the fact that most of our laboratory teaching continues to take place in the GKB, help to maintain a great student experience.

The COVID pandemic in 2020 brought a multitude of challenges for teaching staff and students alike. The swift switch to home working and online learning involved a steep learning curve for all involved. However, it has brought positives in creating additional online teaching resources to back up in-person teaching as well as allowing students with disability needs, or even short-term illness, to use these resources to support or catch up with learning. In Zoology, all teaching has returned to face-to-face and thus the student experience has been maintained. The benefits of working from home for staff have also been embraced, where possible, thus contributing to the maintenance of a good work/life balance.

As discussed, there have been sweeping changes in University structure and workforce in the last 25-30 years (not least the recent change in 2022 with Animal Biology being incorporated into the School of Biodiversity, One Health and Veterinary Medicine (SBOHVM)), with an increase in teaching-focused and administrative staff to free up academic time for research. Initially, changes were at a pace where the effect on quality of student education could be monitored but, more recently, a lack of formal analysis could be seen as a retrograde step. However, despite this, Zoology has consistently been rated in the high 90s in the National Student Survey. Pleasingly, 2023 saw the University of Glasgow Zoology degree rated the highest for student satisfaction in the U.K., which would indicate that, for Animal Biology, the current balance is working.

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