

Practical Issues

car parking, email, e-learning, library, resources etc

Unless you receive a detailed induction, it's easy to miss out on some of the practical things that will make your life easier as a part-time lecturer. Again, details will vary between institutions, but here are some examples:

On starting, you should be issued with a Personnel Number. This may be needed to enable you to apply for an identity card, which allows access to restricted areas and will probably entitle you to borrow resources from the library/learning resource centre, and to set up a staff email account. Depending on institutional guidelines and the hours you work, you may also have access to the institution's "managed learning environment" (such as Blackboard), which enables you to post course notes, access information and communicate with students. Parking is a problem at most institutions so do check the arrangements when you first start, there may be an option to buy an annual permit at a pro-rata cost.

Communication can be an issue for part-time lecturers, particularly if you are not invited to meetings or cannot attend because of time constraints. Staff email is likely to bombard you with lots of unwanted messages, but can also be essential to keep in touch with departmental information. You may not be allocated an individual pigeonhole, but find out whether there is a shared one available. It's also a good idea to check central notice boards regularly for relevant information.

It's also essential to find out when you start about arrangements for room-bookings, equipment and photocopying. Some course leaders will arrange these on behalf of their lecturers, but you may well be expected to organise them yourself so you will need to know the procedures. Many well-planned sessions have been ruined by double-booked rooms or missing equipment!

To use the facilities you obviously need to ensure that you are a recognised member of the institution's Library or Learning Resources Centre – this is sometimes linked with getting an ID card, sometimes not.

Then identify and contact the subject specialist librarian for your subject area. There will usually be someone in the library or LRC who has the specific role of liaising with academic staff in your Department, School or Faculty. A meeting with this individual will invariably be more helpful than ploughing your way through rules, regulations, help-sheets and other booklets. This is usually the person who orders material for the library and to whom queries and requests can be made.

All academic libraries will have an online catalogue (sometimes described as an OPAC – On Line Public Access Catalogue) which can go under a variety of names such as Voyager, Webcat, Talis etc. You can access catalogues via the web, either inside the institution or from external locations. Many web catalogues will allow you to look at your user account and renew items on-line, extremely useful in order to avoid fines and most of them now have the facility to put in on-line recalls for items on loan and to apply for Inter Library Loans.

In addition to the usual books, journals, slides, videos and other AV collections institutions will have on-line access to a variety of information resources. These can include periodical databases such as Art Bibliographies Modern, Design & Applied Arts Index, Art Abstracts and Bibliography of the History of Art as well as reference works such as Oxford Reference Online and Grove Dictionary of Art and specialist resources such as the advertising database Creative Club. Although most art & design magazines and periodicals still only appear in print versions some journals are now appearing on-line, for example all of the Berg publications such as Fashion Theory and Textile, Wiley's Architectural Design and Blackwell's Art History have electronic versions, to which your institution may subscribe.

These on-line resources are licensed to specific colleges or universities and although usually automatically accessed from that institution's workstations you'll find that you can't get to them from your home computer unless you set yourself up with an ATHENS username and password. The majority of licensed on-line resources use this method of allowing members of subscribing institutions to access their resources outside of campus. Ask your subject specialist how to set up an ATHENS account and while you're about it ask them about the SCONUL Research Plus scheme. This is a card available to academic staff and postgraduate researchers across the UK and normally gives you visitor's borrowing rights at the majority of academic libraries in the country.