



Member Handbook

KNOW YOUR RIGHTS.

Graduate Student Workers & Postdoctoral Associates at
Western University



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HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

This handbook is your practical guide to membership in PSAC Local 610. Start with the Quick Reference section for day-to-day needs, or use the contents above to jump directly to what you need. **For the most current information, always check psac610.ca.**

QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

Key Timelines

Action	Deadline
Report a Potential Violation	Within 21 days of occurrence
Employer Informal Response	Within 5 days of being informed
File Formal Grievance	Within 10 days of informal discussion

Hours and Workload (GTAs)

Rule	Limit
Average Weekly Hours	10 hours/week
Maximum per term	140 hours/term
Maximum per day	8 hours/day (unless otherwise agreed to)

Key Documents

LETTER OF OFFER

Confirms your employment conditions which are governed by the Collective Agreement. Keep a copy on file.

DUTIES SPECIFICATION AGREEMENT (DSA)

Divides your contracted hours among assigned duties each term. Both you and your supervisor sign it.

Contacts

WORKPLACE ISSUE OR GRIEVANCE

- GTAs should contact their Departmental Steward or Chief Stewards.
- GSAs should contact the GSA Chair.
- Postdocs should contact the Postdoc Chair.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For the most up to date information, please visit our website psac610.ca



OUR UNION

What is PSAC 610?

PSAC Local 610 is the labour union for Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), Graduate Student Assistants (GSAs), and Postdoctoral Associates and Fellows at Western University. We are a Directly Chartered Local of the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC), one of Canada's largest unions.

As a member of PSAC 610, you are part of a collective of over 2,500 academic workers at Western who have come together to negotiate better working conditions, wages, and benefits.

What does the union do?

The union represents members through collective bargaining, workplace grievances, and ongoing advocacy. Rather than each worker negotiating individually with the employer, unionizing allows members to speak with one strong voice. The results of that bargaining are written into the Collective Agreement, a legally binding contract that governs your employment.

Beyond bargaining, the union supports members facing workplace issues, engages in broader labour and social justice advocacy, and administers benefits.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Many of the rights workers have today, such as minimum wage, overtime pay, parental leave, workplace health and safety protections, were won through union action. In Canada, unions are legally protected, and every worker regardless of citizenship status has the right to union membership and representation.

The union is only as strong as its membership. Being informed and engaged makes the collective stronger for everyone.

THE COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT

The Collective Agreement (CA) is a legally binding contract **renegotiated every three years** between PSAC Local 610 and Western University. It defines the rights and responsibilities of Graduate Teaching Assistants, Postdoctoral Associates, and Graduate Student Assistants. Below are some of the rights included in the CA. Please note, this is not an exhaustive list of rights and responsibilities. **The latest CA is available at psac610.ca.**

GTA Rights Include

Compensation

Overtime Pay, TA appointment terms

Health Benefits

Extended Health Plan, Mental Health Fund

Personal Leave

Sick days, pregnancy/parental leave, bereavement leave

Summer Support Program

Financial Support for members without program funding during the summer term

Postdoc Rights Include

Compensation

Overtime Pay, paid travel, and research expenses

Benefits

Extended Health Plan, employee assistance plan, professional allowance

Personal Leave

Sick days, pregnancy/parental leave, bereavement leave

GSA Rights Include

Compensation

Overtime Pay, appointment terms

Personal Leave

Sick days, pregnancy/parental leave, bereavement leave



Scan to visit our resources page

YOUR RIGHTS & BENEFITS

Your Rights

All members have the right to a workplace free from harassment and discrimination, to file a grievance without fear of retaliation, and to union representation in disputes. These rights are protected under the CA, the Ontario Labour Relations Act, and the Ontario Human Rights Code.

Benefits

As a union member, you have rights protected under the Collective Agreement and benefits administered by the local. **Benefits are administered based on your unit and Collective Agreement. Find out which benefits you are eligible for on our website psac610.ca.**

Extended Health Plan (EHP)

A rebate supplement to your existing health insurance covering eligible physical and mental health expenses.

Mental Health Fund

Won during the 2017-18 bargaining round, this fund helps members afford vital mental health services.

Financial Assistance

Supports members facing unexpected financial need. Eligible expenses include medical emergencies, personal emergencies, academic/conference travel, and childcare.

Summer Support Program (SSP)

Provides financial support to members who will not receive program funding during the summer term.

UHIP Assistance Fund

A fund available to TA members who pay University Health Insurance Plan (UHIP) fees.

Food Support Fund

Aids members who are experiencing unexpected financial need that diverts income from their food budget.

EXIGENCY FUND - IMMEDIATE EMERGENCIES

The Exigency Fund is available for members facing extreme, immediate financial emergencies. **This fund exists for urgent situations where members need rapid support, such as immediate risk of homelessness, loss of essential belongings due to catastrophic events, support following intimate partner violence, etc.** Applications are evaluated on a case by case basis.

WORKPLACE ISSUES & GRIEVANCES

Resolving Workplace Issues

If you experience a workplace issue or a violation of your Collective Agreement, contact your Departmental Steward or the relevant chair for your unit first. Many issues can be resolved informally without filing a grievance. **Even if your concern isn't a grievable offence, raising it helps the union address patterns over time.**

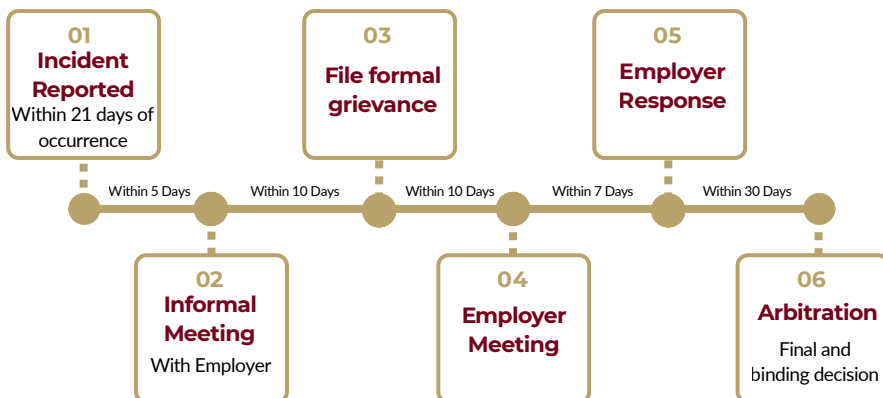
ACT QUICKLY

Any potential employment violation must be reported to the employer **within 21 days** of its occurrence, or from the date you became aware of it. Missing this window may affect your ability to file a grievance.

What is a Grievance?

A grievance is any work-related dispute involving the interpretation, application, or violation of the CA or applicable law. **Filing a grievance is your right.** You cannot be disciplined for doing so, regardless of domestic or international status

GRIEVANCE PROCESS TIMELINE





BARGAINING

Bargaining is how the union negotiates your Collective Agreement. Each CA has an expiration date, after which PSAC Local 610 and Western University must renegotiate the terms. PSAC Local 610 has three bargaining units: Graduate Teaching Assistants (GTAs), Graduate Student Assistants (GSAs), and Postdoctoral Associates & Fellows. Preparation for bargaining begins before the CA expires. Each unit bargains its own CA.

How Bargaining Works

Members communicate their priorities through surveys, union events, and conversations with Stewards. This information shapes the demands your bargaining team brings to the table. A new CA is ratified only once members vote to accept it.

YOUR ROLE IN BARGAINING

A strong outcome requires strong membership. Attend events, fill out surveys, talk to your Steward, and consider joining the **Mobilization Committee or Bargaining Committee**. The more members who participate, the stronger our union's position.

What Members Have Won

Past bargaining rounds have delivered meaningful gains including wage increases, improved health benefits, the Mental Health Fund, the Summer Support Program, and more. Collective action at the bargaining table is how these gains are made and protected.

STAY INVOLVED

Watch for bargaining surveys and events in your email. Your input directly shapes what the union prioritizes. Visit psac610.ca to stay up to date.

PSAC & LOCAL 610

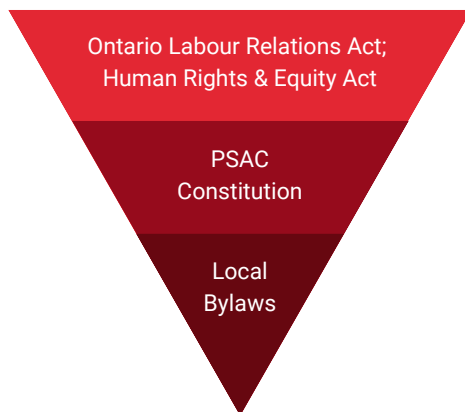
Public Service Alliance of Canada

PSAC represents over 230,000 employees across every province and territory in Canada and internationally. Members work in federal government departments, Crown Corporations, universities, and beyond. PSAC is headquartered in Ottawa with 23 regional offices.

PSAC 610 is a Directly Chartered Local within PSAC, meaning we are represented directly through PSAC rather than through a component. The Local is where members seek help, discuss workplace concerns, elect representatives, and vote on contracts.

Governance Hierarchy

Local 610 is governed by the Ontario Labour Relations Act, the Human Rights & Equity Act, the PSAC Constitution, and Local Bylaws. The bylaws define officer selection, responsibilities, and how decisions are made. Amendments are approved by members at General Membership Meetings.



Policies are annually reviewed by committees, and are endorsed or amended if necessary by the Executive Committee. For more Information, you can review the PSAC Constitution and the local's bylaws on our website.

PSAC 610 STRUCTURE

Executive Committee

The executive committee is comprised of elected representatives that help to maintain the smooth operation of our local union. Roles include:

- President
- Administration Chair
- Communications Chair
- Equity Chair
- Co-Chief Stewards
- GSA Chair
- Postdoc Chair

Chief and Departmental Stewards

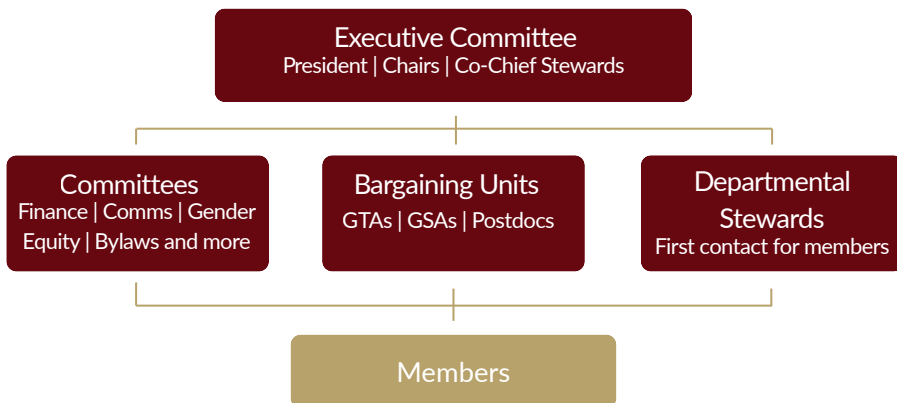
Local members elect Chief Stewards that represent each division within the union. The Chief Stewards are tasked with maintaining Departmental Steward networks within each division.

Stewards are elected or appointed within each department. Departmental Stewards solicit information from members of their departments to assist with the work of their Chief Steward.

BECOME A DEPARTMENT STEWARD

Stewards are an essential part of the union. They communicate union information, organize solidarity events, and advocate for their department. Consider becoming a Departmental Steward.

Union Structure



ONTARIO LABOUR RELATIONS ACT (OLRA)

Labour Movement In Canada

Canada's labour movement has a long history of improving the lives of workers. Unions have fought and won labour rights that are now enjoyed by all Canadians. This includes minimum wages, overtime pay, workplace health and safety, vacation pay, maternity and parental leave, as well as protections from discrimination and harassment.

Ontario Labour Relations Act

Most employees and employers at Western are bound by the Ontario Labour Relations Act (OLRA). The Act establishes the legal framework for union activity in Ontario. All members are encouraged to read it.

Key Purposes of the OLRA

- Facilitate bargaining between employers and trade unions that are the freely-designated worker representatives.
- Recognize the importance of workplace parties adapting to change.
- Promote flexibility, productivity, and employee involvement.
- Encourage communication between employers and employees.
- Encourage co-operative resolution of workplace disputes.
- Promote the expeditious resolution of workplace disputes.

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR YOU

The OLRA gives your union its legal standing and protects your right to organize, bargain collectively, and participate in union activities without reprisal.

GRIEVANCE PROTECTION

Under the OLRA, you cannot be disciplined for filing a grievance. This protection applies to all workers regardless of citizenship or immigration status.

GET INVOLVED

The union is only as strong as its membership. Getting involved is one of the most meaningful ways to support your colleagues and strengthen the collective.

Join a Committee

Committees are open to all members. Current standing committees:

Bylaws Committee

Reviews and proposes bylaw amendments

Finance Committee

Collects data related to the financial goals and spending and assists the finance chair

TA Financial Assistance Committee

Reviews TA financial assistance applications monthly

Food Support Committee

Administers food support resources

Political Action & Social Justice Committee

Addresses labour & social justice issues

Communications Committee

Coordinates member outreach and assists Communications Chair

Gender Equity Committee

Advocates for equity and inclusion of for women, trans, non-binary, and genderqueer individuals

PDA Financial Assistance Committee

Reviews Postdoc financial assistance applications

Health & Safety Committee

Promotes member health and safety

Mobilization Committee

Coordinates member engagement during bargaining

Ad hoc committees also form as needed: Pride Committee, Accessibility Committee, Data Mapping Committee. To join, visit psac610.ca or contact the relevant chair.

STAY INFORMED

Check our website regularly. **Ensure union emails don't go to spam.** Follow @psac610 on Instagram.



CONTACT INFORMATION

Executive Committee

President

prespsac610@gmail.com

Administration Chair

adminpsac610@gmail.com

Communications Chair

commpsac610@gmail.com

Equity Chair

equity.psac610@gmail.com

GSA Chair

gsa.psac610@gmail.com

Postdoc Chair

postdocpsac610@gmail.com

Co-Chief Steward

artschiefstewardpsac610@gmail.com

Co-Chief Steward

bioscichief610@gmail.com

Staff

Office Manager

staffpsac610@gmail.com

Bookkeeper

staff2psac610@gmail.com

Non-Executive Officers

Chief Returning Officer

cropsac610@gmail.com

WEBSITE

psac610.ca

Office

Address

1313 Somerville House, Western
University, London ON N6A 3K7

Tel

519-661-2111 ext. 84137

GTA TIMELINES

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

- ▶ Department must issue contracts at the beginning of the term or prior to the start of employment.
- ▶ Duties Specification Agreement (dsa) must be completed by the third week of the term.
- ▶ It is expected that there will be ongoing communication between the course supervisor and the GTA, including performance feedback, and evaluation if requested.

COURSE SUPERVISORS

Department plans for upcoming term and assigns GTAships as per Article 13.



CONTRACT START DATE

Deadline for DSA completion — all assigned duties are outlined in the DSA

WEEK THREE

Shall convey a meeting with the GTA to review the DSA and re-distribute hours if required

MID-POINT REVIEW

Advise GTA of proctoring duties

FIVE BUSINESS DAYS PRIOR TO SCHEDULED EXAM

If more work is needed beyond the terms of the original contract, refer to the overtime process (Article 17:07).

CONTRACT END DATE

GTAs

GTA signs the contract prior to start of employment.

Acknowledge the completed DSA — track hours weekly to ensure alignment with the DSA

Attend meeting to review the DSA and re-distribute hours if required

- If you expect to finish your contracted hours earlier than planned in the DSA, notify your course supervisor.
- Stop working when total contracted hours are complete.
- If more work is needed beyond the terms of the original contract, refer to the overtime process (Article 17:07).

GTAs who have questions for their union executive can contact staffpsac610@gmail.com.



