Interpretation of data from Lent Term 2024
Undergraduate Supervisor Workload Survey

<u>Background</u>

1. A survey to collect data concerning undergraduate supervisor workloads was made available in Lent Term 2024, to assist a <u>programme of work</u> to address issues raised by <u>the Justice for College Supervisors (J4CS) campaign</u> and to provide information for <u>the Review of Teaching</u>. <u>An initial report of the survey responses</u> was published on 22 April 2024, displaying data from the first twelve questions of the survey and without any analysis of what the data showed. This paper presents an interpretation by lead representatives of the intercollegiate committees of what the information that initial report provides.

<u>Relevance of survey responses</u>

2. The survey is the most comprehensive ever undertaken of supervisors, who supervise on behalf of the Colleges. The survey response rate was high enough to give a reasonable level of confidence that the data represents the views of undergraduate supervisors: the 1,878 responses represent 39% of the average number of supervisors in an academic year, with most response rates per subject or supervisor status being proportionally representative of their estimated populations. However certain categories of supervisor (Doctoral Students, those supervising for the Natural Sciences Tripos, and supervisors with less than a year's experience) received a significantly greater number of responses compared to any other categories, therefore any overall analysis of the data does not fully capture the broad variation of experiences for supervisors (especially supervisors with experience).

3. Given the circumstances leading to the survey, the ongoing programme of work and the recently-launched Review of Teaching, responses may be biased towards those who are not content with the current system. The findings of the initial report do not analyse the data in the context of the remaining survey questions, which might shed light on the respondents' views of the J4CS campaign and the supervision system in general.

4. The requirement to limit responses to one per supervisor meant that supervisors who taught for more than one paper could not provide precise answers to many of the survey's questions. Certain questions, such as Question 10's "How much time does it take for you to mark the work of one student?" did not allow supervisors to provide different answers depending on the style of supervision they gave. The use of descriptive, rather than numerical, answers for questions regarding preparation time meant that only an approximate totalling of the amount of time to prepare for a supervision could be attempted. Questions regarding preparation time could be interpreted in a manner that did not reflect the actual time experienced, for example the time needed to cover course material in preparation for a supervision is lessened when supervising multiple groups of students on the same topic. For these reasons some of the data presented in the initial report has a low degree of precision.

<u>Findings</u>

5. Overall, the data shows that the time input of a supervisor is incredibly varied, and there is no parsing of the data to identify obvious trends in the amount of time it takes for a supervisor to deliver one or more supervisions. We do not find this surprising, based on the known variance in practice across and within subjects, but express concern at the significant spread of variance even for small subjects or experienced supervisors.

6. The following points are based on data that in our view can be seen to have trends that are at least broadly applicable across most supervisors:

   a. A large majority of supervisors are paid the intercollegiate re-charge rates for supervising. There isn't a particular College or subject which pays most supervisors a higher rate for supervising than the standard intercollegiate re-charge rates (Table 9).

   b. The time to mark the work of one student varies considerably, but tends towards 30 minutes (Tables 21-26).

   c. The time to write and submit a CamCORS report also varies considerably but tends towards 10 - 20 minutes (Tables 27-32).

   d. The time taken for e-mail exchanges in preparation of one supervision is in most cases less than 20 minutes (Tables 39-44).

   e. The time taken to book a room for one supervision is in most cases less than 10 minutes (Tables 45-50).

   f. The total time taken to prepare and mark the work for one supervision, given it is a result of summation of other answers, varies to such a degree it is difficult to identify a summary metric (Table 62). We would note that the most common time for the summation of midpoints of ranges is 1 hour and 10 minutes. The report outlines a number of different contributory factors to this wide variation (Figures 8-21).

7. In reviewing the data presented in the report, there appeared to be a number of responses that were significant outliers (e.g. responses where 2+ hours were needed to write a supervision report, for email exchanges or to book a room). We exercised caution in using mean or median figures in these findings.

8. We also suggest that the findings support the importance of the ongoing work to clarify the expectations and boundaries of supervisor work, with the aim to reduce the wide variance of practice to a more reasonable level.

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