

## Paper on contracts for undergraduate supervisors

### Background

1. Undergraduate supervisions constitute a core part of the teaching offered at Cambridge University. In 2017-18, each student at the University of Cambridge received an average of 43.9 hours of supervision teaching - [see CUCU 2019](#).
2. With the exception of College Teaching Fellows (CTOs) or Fellows which provide supervisions covered by a contract, undergraduate supervisors are treated as independent contractors;
3. In 2017-18, 45% of total undergraduate supervisions were provided by casualised staff, specifically graduate students (24%), postdocs (10%) or staff members categorised as 'other' (11%) - [see CUCU 2019](#). However, UCU knows that many UTOs are also conducting supervisions as self-employed, so the percentage of the workforce providing undergraduate supervisions as self-employed is likely to be much higher;
4. UCU and the SU believe that the status of independent contractor is not a true reflection of the reality of the relationship between supervisors and colleges. First, the employer exercises a tight control on undergraduate supervisors (the pay rates are set by the Colleges, undergraduate supervisors are told on what to teach and they can't make autonomous arrangements with the students to offer the same service outside of the collegiate system). Second, many undergraduate supervisors have been teaching for the same colleges for years. This establishes a mutuality of obligation that is not consistent with self-employment;
5. UCU and the SU also believe that the current system does not provide any job security to undergraduate supervisors. As the recruitment system is opaque and student complaints can be met with a change in supervisor, undergraduate supervisors have no visibility over the number of hours they will teach over a certain year or term. This situation is particularly distressful for members of marginalised communities, women and staff with disabilities, and stands in stark contrast with the work on widening participation that the collegiate university is pursuing;
6. Other Universities - such as [Sheffield](#) and [UCL](#) - have undertaken policy revisions to provide hourly-paid teachers with secure contracts;
7. UCU and the SU are actively campaigning to improve the working conditions of hourly-paid staff at the University and the Colleges. Especially in light of the collapse of the academic job market due to COVID19, Colleges risk a big reputational damage if the structural casualisation of undergraduate supervision teaching is publicly exposed.

### Recommendations

1. Everybody who supervises undergrads should be offered a contract of employment;
2. UCU and the SU oppose the use of zero-hours contracts. The contract of employment offered to undergraduate supervisors should be either a guaranteed-minimum hour contract or a fractional contract;
3. Such policy revisions should be conducted in close consultation with UCU and the SU;
4. UCU and the SU acknowledge that such a policy revision will take some time as the Colleges would need to undertake more advanced workforce planning than they are currently doing. In the transition period, everybody who supervises undergrads as

independent contractors should be provided with a contract of service establishing the terms and conditions for the work they do, as [is standard practice in other](#) institutions.