

Supervision pay rate for Self-Employed Undergraduate Supervisors

Cambridge UCU and Cambridge SU.

Paper for Anti-Casualisation Working Group and STEC

Background: the current situation

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. 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%). These workers are treated as self-employed, they are paid only through the standard per-supervision pay rate, and they report being severely underpaid for the time they spend preparing the supervision - [see CUCU 2019](#).
3. In 2018, UCU launched an anti-casualisation claim which identified the 'underpayment of hourly-paid college teachers for preparation time' as a '[major problem](#)';
4. In July 2020, the Senior Tutors Committee approved a paper on the revision of the supervision pay rate, which aimed to make the rate increase more linearly according to the number of students' supervised. The paper sets the pay rate according to the following calculation:

$$\text{Cost} = (\text{Hourly rate}) * (1.5 \text{ hr} + (\text{Number of students}) * (1/3) \text{ hr})$$

Where 1.5 hr is considered to 'include the cost of the time for general preparation and for the supervision itself', and that 'does not depend on the number of students' and 1/3 hr is the amount of time spent marking the written work of each student. The paper sets 17£/hr as the hourly pay rate for supervisions.

5. This calculation, however, clearly underestimates the amount of time that preparing a supervision takes. Given that the average supervision lasts 1 hour, the paper implies that supervisors spend 30 minutes preparing the supervision independently from the number of students supervised (including administration - i.e. arranging the supervision and filling in CAMCORS reports) and 20 minutes of marking per student;
6. [In a survey run by UCU in 2017](#), 66% of undergraduate supervisors who filled in the questionnaire said that they were working at least 2 hours preparing the supervision for every hour of contact time spent with the student(s). It is worth noting that 31.2 % of respondents said that they were working at least 3 hours for each hour of contact time;
7. This revision of the supervision pay rate was not conducted in consultation with UCU;

Recommendations

8. The supervision pay rate should be revised so that it differentiates contact time [1 hour], preparation time [2 hours], and marking [$\frac{1}{3}$ hr for each student] in a way that reflects the actual time that supervisors spend working. The rate should be calculated as follows:

$$\text{Cost} = (\text{Hourly rate}) * [1 \text{ hour} + 2 \text{ hours} + (\text{number of students}) * (\frac{1}{3} \text{ hr})]$$

9. Such revision should be conducted in close consultation with both the UCU and the SU

References

CUCU, 2018. Cambridge UCU anti-casualisation claim - November 2018. Available at:

<http://www.ucu.cam.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/Anti-casualisation-claim.pdf>

CUCU, 2019. Hourly-paid teaching Report. Available at:

<http://www.ucu.cam.ac.uk/hourly-paid-teaching-report/>