



Cambridge University Students' Union

# Quality of Supervisions Report

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April 2004



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Every undergraduate student at Cambridge University will experience the supervision system during their time at the University. Supervisions are a central part of the University's education provision and a feature that marks the University apart from other Higher Education Institutions. It is important to know what experiences of the supervisions system undergraduate students have, how students rate it as a form of teaching and what areas of weakness and good practice are highlighted. This information can then be used to strengthen the system further.

CUSU undertook to survey the undergraduate student population in order to find out what they thought of the education that they receive. The aim was to discover what general perceptions were and also to investigate whether factors such as school background, gender, ethnicity, disability and subject affected experience of supervisions. The survey was intended to complement both the student feedback mechanisms that already exist in the colleges and the work that the University Education Section, the General Board Education Committee, the Senior Tutors Committee and the Joint Committee on Academic Performance do to monitor education standards and disseminate good practice.

## 1.2 Method

The survey was conducted through a questionnaire. The questionnaire was split into five main areas; size of supervision group, preparation for supervisions, experience in supervisions, supervision reports and feedback on supervisions. It was designed to elicit a mixture of anecdotal and statistical responses. The questions were based on the summary of expectations students should have of their supervisions produced by the Senior Tutors Committee. Students should expect the following:

- as far as is practicable, a full hour of teaching (provided that they have done the work expected of them in preparation for the supervision)
- to be taught in a reasonably sized group in which they have the opportunity to participate fully
- guidance about how best to prepare for supervisions
- to be set reasonable amounts of work and to receive constructive feedback on it
- their work to have been marked, with advice for improvement, before the supervision where this is the usual arrangement in the subject
- teaching that is relevant to the course and helps them understand the subject
- discussion of their questions and problems, with constructive comment
- respect for their opinions, and questions to be dealt with thoroughly and effectively
- opportunities to discuss with the supervisor, in privacy and in full confidence, any problems they perceive in the quality, relevance, or dynamics of the supervisions they are receiving.

See Appendix 1 for a full copy of the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was put online and was accessible through the CUSU website. It was advertised on the front page of the website, on the CUSU term card, in emails sent throughout the term via college JCR / student union lists and through announcements at CUSU Council. Responses were anonymous and collected on a database. The survey ran throughout the Lent term and closed with 1085 responses (roughly 10 % of the undergraduate population).

Responses came from a range of subjects, colleges and year groups. Although the number of students from ethnic minorities who responded was small, this reflected relatively accurately the number of students within the University<sup>1</sup>.

This report seeks to look at a general picture of how students experience the supervision system before investigating whether subject, gender, ethnicity, school background and disability affects this experience. As is the nature with a survey of this scope, the report is intended to show trends rather than conducting in-depth investigations of each factor. Separate investigations might need to occur to investigate more closely any trends that are identified.

Separate reports have been produced for individual colleges to indicate the particular experiences of students in their college and how they compare to the general trend.

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<sup>1</sup> Asian students make up 4.5% of the undergraduate student population and made up 2.5% of respondents to the survey. Black students make up 0.8% of the undergraduate student population and 0.6% of respondents to the survey. Chinese students make up 4.3% of the undergraduate student population and 1.8% of respondents to the survey. Students from a mixed race background make up 2.6% of the undergraduate student population and 1.7% of respondents. Students from a white other background make up 5.3% of the undergraduate student population and 4.9% of respondents. Statistics are taken from Student Statistics 2003 – 2004.

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## 2 Summary of Findings and Recommendations

Student responses give an indication of how they experience the supervision system in all areas. The following areas are focused on: how well students feel they are prepared for supervisions, how students experience supervision teaching, how well students rate the feedback that they receive on their supervision work and how students rate the feedback on the supervision system that they provide to their colleges.

**The report makes the following findings:**

### 2.1 General Overview

**Many students at Cambridge University value the supervision system highly, and the responses highlight this:**

- **95% of respondents believe that their supervisions relate very well or fairly well to their course content**
- **82% of students would feel very comfortable or comfortable approaching their supervisor with a problem**
- **86% of those who filled in the survey believe that their supervision group is the right size**
- **85% receive supervision reports from all or most of their supervisors**

**It is clear that the majority of students have a positive experience of the supervision system.**

Small group teaching offers students close and individual attention from an expert in their field, and this is something that students value. Supervisions give students a deeper understanding of their course, allow difficulties in understanding to be addressed and provide students with ideas and guidance on how to best realise their academic potential. For many students, supervisions are the most important part of the undergraduate teaching that the University provides, setting high standards of teaching quality.

Although teaching quality is generally high, it appears difficult to monitor and control. **In many instances, students report isolated cases of very poor teaching or state that their experience of supervisions has varied widely.** 115 individual comments were made by students that directly refer to a variation in quality and experience (this accounts for 14% of all the comments received). There is a perception amongst students that the quality of supervision teaching is an important factor in deciding academic success. It therefore concerns students when they feel that some of their teaching does not meet the required standards, or that other students appear to access better teaching. A number of students commented on the need for 'standardisation' across the system, and training in areas such as providing guidance on supervision work, providing feedback on supervision work and equipping supervisors with the necessary skills to be good teachers.

Although the majority of students report positive experiences of their supervisions, **groups of students who participated in the survey reported having a consistently more negative experience than others.** Female students, black students and Chinese students who participated in the survey consistently report a more negative experience of aspects of the supervision system than other students. Asian students who participated in the survey are also more likely to report negative experiences of supervisions (although are also more likely to report very positive experiences). There are also some cases where students with disabilities feel that more effort could be made to enable them to get the most out of the supervision system. School background is not found to have a significant effect on students' experiences of supervisions.

### 2.2 Preparation for supervisions

**An overwhelming number of students (95%) report that their work relates closely to course content.**

**The majority of students know what is expected from them in their supervision work (81% of all respondents have a good idea of what to do, or know exactly what to do),** although several students commented that they would like more guidance. Female students are less likely to know what is expected of them (23% of women know exactly what is expected compared to 36% of men), as are students from some ethnic minorities who participated in the survey (Black students = 0%, Chinese students = 15%, compared to the general trend of 28%).

**Whilst a majority of students state that they are more likely to be able to manage well or fairly well, 32% find that they sometimes or always struggle with the work that is set.** Managing the work load appears to be problematic for some students for a variety of reasons; their supervisions are not well organised, resources are not available, clear guidance is not given or there is too little time. Students' experiences can vary according to which subject they study. Female students, black students and Chinese students who participated in the survey are all more likely to report that they struggle with their workload.

## 2.3 Experience in supervisions

**More students are likely to report having a positive experience in supervisions than a negative one, yet some students find that quality of teaching can vary.** Whether a student has a positive experience can depend on a number of factors such as the subject they study, their individual supervisor, the college they attend, other students and their own levels of confidence. Female students and black and Chinese students who participated in the survey are more likely to have an overall negative experience in supervisions than students in general.

**Students tend to rate supervisors highly when they are able to explain complex ideas clearly, can ensure that students understand, are able and willing to answer questions and can facilitate discussion between students.** Students tend to agree on the importance of these qualities regardless of subject, gender, school background, ethnicity or disability. Although there is general agreement on what qualities students value in a supervisor, there is variation in how likely students find that supervisors possess these qualities, with influencing factors including subject, gender, ethnicity and disability. Other issues such as individual personalities and different supervisor capabilities are also an influence.

**The majority of students find that their questions are answered well in supervisions (90% of all respondents believe that their questions are answered very well or fairly well).** Individual responses depend on subject and possibly also ethnicity; black students (14%), Chinese students (20%) and students from a mixed background (28%) who participated in the survey are less likely to find their questions are answered very well (34% of students from all backgrounds).

**The majority of students feel comfortable making a contribution to supervisions (96% feel that it is very easy or fairly easy to make a contribution);** they do not feel that supervisors or other students actively prevent them from contributing. However **this can vary.** In some subjects (Maths, Natural Sciences, Economics, Medical Sciences), students are less comfortable making a contribution. Reasons given for this include a lack of confidence, not being given an opportunity by other students to contribute, supervisions being more like lectures than discussions, and large group sizes. Female students are less likely to contribute than male students are (18% of women contribute often, compared to 31% of men) and are more likely to find that other students and supervisors make it difficult for them to contribute (55% of women compared to 65% of men). Black students who participated in the survey are less likely to contribute than other students (0% compared to 24% contribute very often). Chinese students who participated in the survey are also less likely to contribute (40% do not contribute that often compared to 23% of students from all backgrounds) and point to both supervisors and other students making contribution more difficult. **It appears that some students do not find the supervision environment as comfortable as others do.**

**The majority of students receive good feedback on their work (56% receive good or very good feedback), but this is an area where students would like to see improvement.** Several students comment that they would appreciate an indication of the standard at which they are performing, along

with ideas as to how they can improve their work. Students from Economics, Archaeology and Anthropology, English, Law, Mathematics, Geography, Natural Sciences, Medical Science, SPS and Theology would like to see improved feedback on their work. Classics and MML students rate the feedback that they receive very highly.

## 2.4 Supervision reports

**The majority of students find that the CAMCORS system works very effectively with a large number of students receiving reports from all supervisors (85% of all respondents receive reports from some or all of their supervisors).** Criticism of the supervision report system stems from the belief that all students should be able to access their own reports online, and that reports could be more detailed. Some students also commented that they would appreciate feedback more regularly than once a term.

**A majority of respondents use their supervision reports as a basis for constructive discussion with someone in their college (73%),** either with their Personal Tutor or their Director of Studies or both.

## 2.5 Feedback to colleges

**Although 70% of respondents are invited to provide feedback to their colleges, 38% believe that the feedback that they provide has little or no effect.** Reports were received that some colleges deal efficiently with problems. However, a number of students lack confidence reporting problems, find action is not taken when problems are reported, and feel that no action is taken on the basis of student feedback.

Several students' comments drew attention to the need for an anonymous feedback system in colleges, and for colleges to give some indication of what happens to the feedback students provide.

**The report identifies the following areas of good practice:**

## 2.6 Areas of general good practice

### 2.6.1 Preparation for supervisions

- Work is emailed to students in advance of their supervision
- Pre-supervision examples classes
- Supervisors make themselves available to answer questions about the work that has been set
- Detailed reading lists are provided
- Termly supervision plans are provided
- Students' supervisors communicate with each other to ensure that students' work loads are manageable
- Supervision work relates closely to the course

### 2.6.2 Experience in supervisions

- Supportive and approachable supervisors
- Supervisors who explain issues, ideas and theories clearly
- Supervisors who answer students' questions clearly
- Supervisors who facilitate a discussion and exchange of ideas
- Supervisors who ensure that all students have an opportunity to contribute to the supervision
- Detailed plans of a high quality essay are provided
- Students who are provided with constructive comments and ideas on how to improve their work
- Students who are provided with a mark or an indication of the standard of their work

### 2.6.3 Feedback

- Efficient use of the CAMCORS system results in a large number of students receiving supervision reports
- Problems that students raise with the quality of teaching or experience in supervisions are addressed quickly and efficiently in some cases

## 2.7 Subject-specific good practice

### 2.7.1 Organisation of supervisions

- Medical students and Philosophy students find that their supervisions are more efficiently organised than students from other subjects.

### 2.7.2 Preparation for supervisions

- Maths, History, Economics, Classics, Engineering, Philosophy, Theology and Medical students tend to know exactly what is expected from them in supervision work.
- In History, SPS, Geography, Classics, Veterinary Medicine, Philosophy and Medical Sciences, students find their workload manageable.
- Students in Classics, Mathematics, History, Geography, Philosophy, Theology, Natural Science and Medical feel that their supervision work relates particularly closely to their course.

### 2.7.3 Experience in supervisions

- Archaeology and Anthropology, History, Classics, Philosophy, Computer Science and Theology students are generally positive about their supervision environment.
- Law, Classics, MML, SPS, History and Philosophy students find supervisions particularly useful to understanding course content.
- Classics, Philosophy and History students find supervisors to be especially supportive and understanding.
- English, Law, SPS and Veterinary Medicine students are particularly confident about contributing to supervisions.
- Geography, MML, Veterinary Medicine, History and Classics students' questions are answered particularly well.
- Classics and MML students are particularly satisfied with levels of feedback.

## **The report makes the following recommendations:**

## 2.8 General recommendations

### 2.8.1 Good practice

- The good practice identified by students in the report should be disseminated in order to ensure that as many students as possible have a consistently positive experience of the supervision system.

### 2.8.2 Group size

- As far as possible, supervision groups should have fewer than four students.

### 2.8.3 Organisation of supervisions.

- The means by which supervisors are assigned should be made more transparent to students.
- Equality of provision across colleges should be assured as far as possible.

- As far as possible students should be able to have supervisions spread throughout the term and not 'bunched' together.

#### 2.8.4 Preparation for supervisions

- All supervisors should be provided with an outline of course content.
- There should be a reasonable amount of time between work being set and the supervision.
- Faculties and departments should give an indication of what is a reasonable amount of work to set.
- As far as possible, supervisors should give clear guidance to students of what is expected from them.
- Students should be able to contact their supervisor prior to their supervision if they are struggling to understand their work.

#### 2.8.5 Experience in supervisions

- Students should find that their questions are fully answered in the supervision.
- Students should be given clear feedback on their supervision work with constructive comments and ideas for improvements.

#### 2.8.6 Training

- The colleges and the University should ensure that all teaching officers receive some form of training in effective teaching and communication skills.
- Training for supervisors should include some guidance on how best to prepare students for supervisions.
- When designing training courses, the skills that students value in individual supervisors should be taken into account. This includes: the ability to explain clearly and ensure that students understand complex ideas and theories, the ability and willingness to answer questions, and the ability to facilitate a discussion between students and the supervisor.
- Training should include some guidance on creating a learning environment where all students feel at ease.
- Training should include sessions on gender awareness, cultural awareness, racial awareness and disability awareness.

#### 2.8.7 Feedback

- Colleges should use student feedback to address problems caused by variable quality in the supervision system.
- Colleges should use student feedback to monitor the minority who have a more negative experience in their supervisions.
- Students should be aware of what happens to the feedback that they provide.
- Colleges should put anonymous feedback or reporting systems in place.

### 2.9 Subject-specific recommendations

#### 2.9.1 Group size

- In MML, Medical Sciences and Natural Sciences supervision groups should be as small as possible.

#### 2.9.2 Organisation of supervisions

- In Archaeology and Anthropology, Geography, Natural Sciences and Computer Science the organisation of supervisions should be improved.
- In Computer Science and Economics all supervisors should be aware of course content.

- In Economics and Medical Science the means by which supervisors are assigned to students should be transparent to students.

### 2.9.3 Preparation for supervisions

- In Law and SPS students should be given more guidance on what is expected of them in their supervision work.

### 2.9.4 Experience in supervisions

- In Economics, Archaeology and Anthropology, English, Law, Mathematics, Geography, Natural Sciences, Medical Science, SPS and Theology, students should be provided with constructive feedback on their supervision work.
- In Mathematics, Medical Science and English students' queries should be addressed in supervisions.

### 2.9.5 Training

- In Natural Sciences, SPS, Computer Science, Economics, Mathematics, Medical Sciences, Engineering and English supervisors should attend supervisor training sessions to enhance communication and teaching skills.

### 2.9.6 Feedback

- In History, Computer Science, Archaeology and Anthropology, Economics, English, Law, Philosophy, MML, Natural Sciences, Veterinary Medicine and Medical Sciences student feedback should be monitored to address the issue of variable quality.

### 3 General Overview of how students find the supervision system

The responses to the questionnaire allow us to build up a general picture of the experiences that Cambridge students have of the supervision system, and how they rate it as a form of teaching.

It is clear that many students find the supervision system to be an excellent form of teaching and one that they clearly value. They see the supervision system as one of the strengths of the Cambridge education system. In all areas students are more likely to have positive experiences than negative experiences. For students, it is the supervisions which set their Cambridge education apart from the education they might receive at other universities:

*"I think that the supervision system is excellent and it is the integral part of the education we get here at Cambridge".*

Yet another clear trend is that students report their experience of supervisions as being 'varied'. 115 students made comments that directly refer to a variation in quality and experience (14% of all comments made). Several students stated that they found the CUSU questionnaire difficult to fill in because individual supervisors can vary so widely:

*"The variation in quality of supervision is huge. Some of my supervisors are really enthusiastic and very helpful whilst I feel some supervisions are a waste of time and unproductive."*

*"Quality of supervisors varies significantly in terms of how they structure their supervisions, how they respond to questions and how clear they are in making arguments or summarising material."*

Students are likely to make a distinction between the 'system', which they rate very highly, and individual supervisors, who they rate as 'varied' in quality.

*"There's a great variety of different supervisors ... however I believe that the current system is working well."*

*"I find the supervision system very helpful however the standard of supervisors varies greatly."*

What makes these findings even more pertinent is the perception that several students have that their supervisions are important in determining how academically successful they will be. Students' comments indicate that they believe there is a direct relationship between who supervises them and how well they will do in examinations, which suggests why they are so concerned when they experience varying quality of supervisions.

*"The supervision system is amazing but somehow it needs to be standardised – especially when a supervisor can have such an effect on your academic performance".*

*"I believe that the quality of a supervisor is so so important in our understanding and enthusiasm for a course and will ultimately determine the quality of our written work and our examination grades."*

*"Exam results depend not only on your aptitude and hard work but also how well connected your supervisor is!"*

A further (and widespread) perception is that whether or not a student is assigned the 'best' supervisor can depend on such factors as what college you are at, who your Director of Studies is and whether you are just lucky.

*“There often appears to be a big difference from college to college. Some people are supervised specifically for the exam, others are supervised in a more general way.”*

*“I think the most important thing is to have a good DoS – the one at [college] is fantastic and knows which supervisors would be suitable for which people.”*

*“Some colleges have supervisors who are the course examiners whereas others have PhD students who haven’t done the course before. Therefore when going into the exam it’s not a level playing field and I think this makes a big influence on the final grade of the student.”*

Although it is difficult to guarantee that every student in every subject in every college has access to teaching from the course organisers, students should feel confident that every student has equal access to the highest quality education.

**Recommendation: The means by which supervisors are assigned should be made more transparent to students. Parity of provision across colleges should be assured as far as possible.**

It is clear that students would feel reassured if all supervisors were trained or monitored in some way, so that there would be some ‘standardisation’ in the system. It is not always the case that students find that the course organisers and academics are better equipped to teach than the PhD students; what matters to them is that all supervisors have had some teaching training and are well acquainted with the course materials and examination structure.

*“I think that supervisors need more training and it should also be checked that they are acquainted with the topic that they are teaching.”*

*“I find it incredible that supervisors can begin supervising without any instruction on how to go about the job.”*

The University’s Staff Development section already runs comprehensive training sessions for supervisors and an increasing number of supervisors are participating in training sessions. However, training is not mandatory for all supervisors and students cannot be sure that their supervisors have received any form of training. Students appear to believe that no matter how much knowledge their supervisor has in a subject area, it is still important that they have been trained to communicate this knowledge in an effective way.

*“Supervisors should receive mandatory supervisor training as they might be well researched in a subject field however they cannot teach it in a way that is accessible to people who are obviously nowhere near their standard.”*

**Recommendation: That the colleges and the University ensure that all teaching officers receive some form of training in effective teaching and communication skills.**

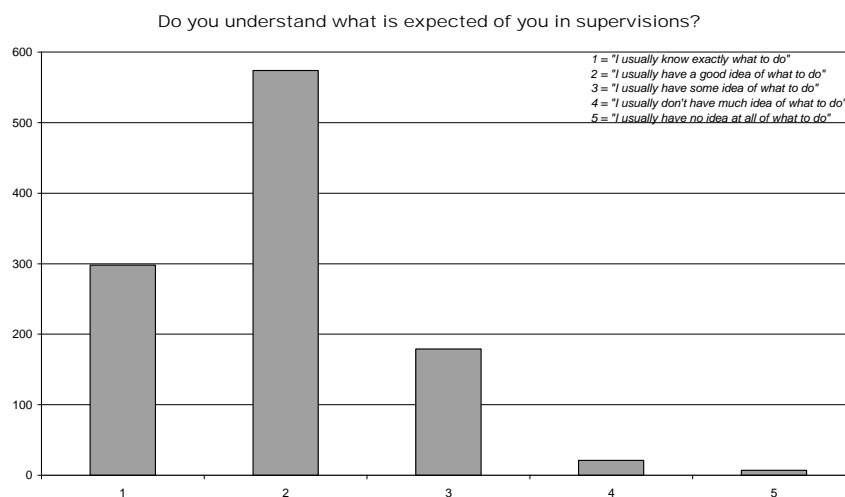
The following issues will now be addressed to investigate further how students rate and experience supervisions:

- Preparation for supervisions
- Experience in supervisions
- Supervision reports
- Providing feedback on supervisions

## 3.1 Preparation for supervisions

Guidelines produced by the Senior Tutors' Committee recommend that students should be set a 'reasonable amount of work' that is relevant to their course and that they should be given guidance about how best to prepare for supervisions. It is, furthermore, important that students find it easy to organise supervisions and are able to access the resources that they need to complete their work.

### 3.1.1 Preparing work for supervisions



Many students have a good idea of what is expected of them in their supervision work. 81% either know exactly what to do or have a good idea of what is expected of them. In responses to the questionnaire, students mention several examples of good practice including their work being emailed to them in advance with clear explanations of what to do, pre-supervision examples classes and supervisors being available to answer questions about the work that has been set. Several students mention that detailed reading lists help them prepare for their supervisions, especially when these reading lists include some indication of the most useful and relevant sources.

Yet, even though the vast majority have a good idea of what is expected from them, only 28% know exactly what is expected of them. Many students feel that they are not sure how much work is expected of them and do not know if they are spending too much or too little time on work. They mention that it would be useful to have some indication of how much time or what volume of work the supervisor reasonably expects.

*"I don't really know how much is expected of me. I read a lot from different sources for my essay and use the lecture notes but this takes me a lot of time."*

Students also mention that they would appreciate better clarification of the work that has been set for them, including explanations of new definitions, clearer explanations of what questions mean and guidelines on what the key issues are.

*"Often the questions are so wide ranging that it is hard to know where to look"*

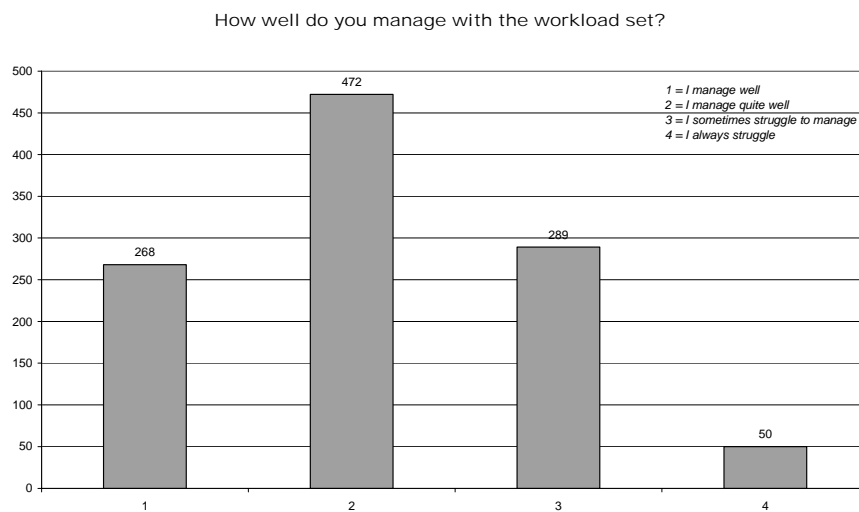
Sometimes preparation is made more difficult by factors which are sometimes out of supervisors' control. One example is that books on reading lists are not available, either because the supervisor has not checked that they are available in faculty libraries or the UL, or because there is a large demand for the books resulting in several students needing the books at the same time.

*“It would help if all supervision topics (and reading lists) were distributed at the beginning of term thus allowing us to read for a particular topic across a longer period of time rather than in the few days preceding the supervision and the situation where there are 80 people all wanting to read the same four books in the space of five days could perhaps be avoided.”*

### 3.1.2 Managing the work-load

It is a feature of the Cambridge education system that terms are short and work-intensive, and therefore demanding of students. However, it is important that students feel that they are set a ‘reasonable’ amount of work that they can comfortably complete in the time available.

The graph below indicates the answer to the question ‘do you feel you are able to manage with the amount of work set?’



Whilst 25% manage well with the amount of work set, 32% sometimes struggle or always struggle. Comments from students give some indications of why this might be the case.

In many cases, pressure arises because of the amount of time that it takes for students to complete their work. Some students acknowledge that this might be because of other activities that they are involved in, which places competing pressures on their time. Others state that there is a lot of work, but that this is to be expected from Cambridge and that they can usually ‘manage’. For some however, it appears that the pressure on their time from work alone is considerable

*“There is a lack of time and working is intense because of short terms.”*

*“Sometimes there is too little time to prepare everything.”*

*“It’s just very, very difficult to manage it all!”*

A factor affecting whether students can effectively manage their work load appears to be how well their supervisions are organised. Several students comment on the benefits of supervisions being organised efficiently. One example of good practice is the provision of a termly supervision plan. A student describes how their supervisor does this and includes essay titles allowing students to plan their work appropriately and making the term much less stressful and easier to manage. Another example of good practice is when students’ supervisors communicate between each other and ensure that students’ work load is spread over the term.

*“Our supervisors are really good about finding out what other work we have on at any particular time so that they don’t overload us.”*

Pressure is placed on the student when supervisions are not organised, when sufficient time is not given to students to prepare for the supervision or when there is poor communication between supervisors.

*“Work is emailed late in the week and because of this I always feel I do not have enough time to fully prepare for the next supervision.”*

*“Supervisors don’t communicate so I get all my essays at once.”*

*“Last term the supervisors mostly waited until further on in the courses before arranging supervisions so I had none in the first four weeks then two or three a week after that which was too much to manage effectively.”*

**Recommendation: As far as possible, students should be able to have supervisions spread throughout the term and there should be a reasonable amount of time between work being set and the supervision.**

For other students, difficulty in managing their work-load is more closely related to the difficulty of the task rather than issues of time-management.

*“I often find myself getting stuck and spending time trying to make sense of the notes but to no avail.”*

It appears that the issues of guidance for students and management of work-load are related. Out of the 297 students who know exactly what is expected of them in supervisions, 45% manage well with the amount of work set. Out of the 574 students who usually have a good idea of what is expected of them, 20% manage well with the amount of work set. Out of the 20 students who do not have much idea about what is expected from them, only 5% manage well with the work they are set. For these 20 students who do not have much of an idea about what is expected from them, 75% sometimes struggle or always struggle with the work that is set. It clearly benefits students to be able to clarify with their supervisors both what is expected of them and to be able to approach supervisors if they feel they are struggling with the work prior to the supervision.

**Recommendation: As far as possible, supervisors should give clear guidance to students of what is expected of them and that students should be able to contact a supervisor prior to their supervision if they are struggling to understand their work.**

### 3.1.3 Relation to Course Content

Students overwhelmingly state that they find that their supervision work relates well to their course content. 95% find that supervision work relates very well or fairly well to their course content. Students appreciate how their supervision work seems to reinforce their understanding of issues raised in lectures and allows them to go into issues in greater depth.

*“I feel that the work set is always related directly to what I need to achieve at the end of the year”.*

Students do mention that there are occasional problems when lecture courses do not coincide with supervisions on the subjects that they cover, this can make understanding the subject difficult.

*“The work relates well to the course but is often ahead of lectures, which makes it harder.”*

For students who experience difficulties in preparing work for the supervision, they find that the supervision helps to explain the issues, and the relation of the work to the course becomes clearer.

### 3.1.4 Conclusion

For several students, preparation for supervisions is not problematic; they have a good idea of what is expected of them, they find work manageable and they can see a clear relation between their supervision work and course content. For others, preparation is hindered by pressures on time, needing more guidance on the work that has been set and organisational problems.

Whilst many more students report positive experience, students find ease of preparation can depend very much on the individual supervisor. They report that their supervisors expect different amounts of work from them, that some supervisors offer clear explanations of work whilst others offer none and that some supervision work relates much more to course content than others. Several students comment on the need for 'training' and 'standardisation'.

**Recommendation: That training for supervisors should include some guidance on how best to prepare students for supervisions. Faculties and departments should give an indication of what is a reasonable amount of work to set for students. All supervisors should be provided with an outline of course content.**

## 3.2 Experience in Supervisions

It is important to establish students' experience of their supervision environment, and how effective they believe their supervisors are at teaching. There are a number of important factors in determining student satisfaction with supervisions and these include the relationship with the individual supervisor, the skills that students identify as positive in a supervisor, how confident the student feels in their supervision, and the quality of feedback that students receive on their work.

### 3.2.1 Individual supervisors

It is clear that the nature of the supervision system makes individual supervisors crucial to the students' experience. As with comments about preparation for supervisions, students have a variable experience with supervisors. Many report that their supervisors are excellent teachers and, more than that, supportive and approachable.

*"Without supervisions I would be lost ... Almost all of my supervisors are excellent and really help me to understand the material."*

*"My supervisors are all excellent and very supportive and friendly, which makes the learning experience pleasant and easier."*

When asked if they would feel comfortable approaching their supervisor with concerns, 82% of students said they would feel either very comfortable or comfortable. Several students comment on this more personal aspect of the supervision experience, and the value of having a close relationship with their teachers.

*"They are very approachable. If I have any problems with my work they are very helpful and are willing to give their time to explain any difficulties I might have."*

For those who do not enjoy such a good relationship with their supervisors, some students describe occasions when this clearly affects both the enjoyment and usefulness of supervisions for them.

*"Some supervisors I've had are very hard to approach with problems and are insulting if you fail to understand things."*

The issue seems to be less of a personality clash as much as a sense that some students' supervisors are not skilled teachers and that this therefore limits the effectiveness of supervisions. Whilst recognising that many supervisors have significant knowledge of their subject, students comment that these supervisors do not always possess the communication skills to effectively convey this knowledge.

*"It seems as though the supervisors know a lot about their subject, but little about how to teach it."*

Students seem to broadly agree on what skills they value in supervisors. They value supervisors who can convey the information to them in a clear manner and give full explanations of issues, ideas and theories. Several students comment that it is important that the supervisor makes sure the student understands, and that the student should feel confident in asking for clearer explanations if they do not understand.

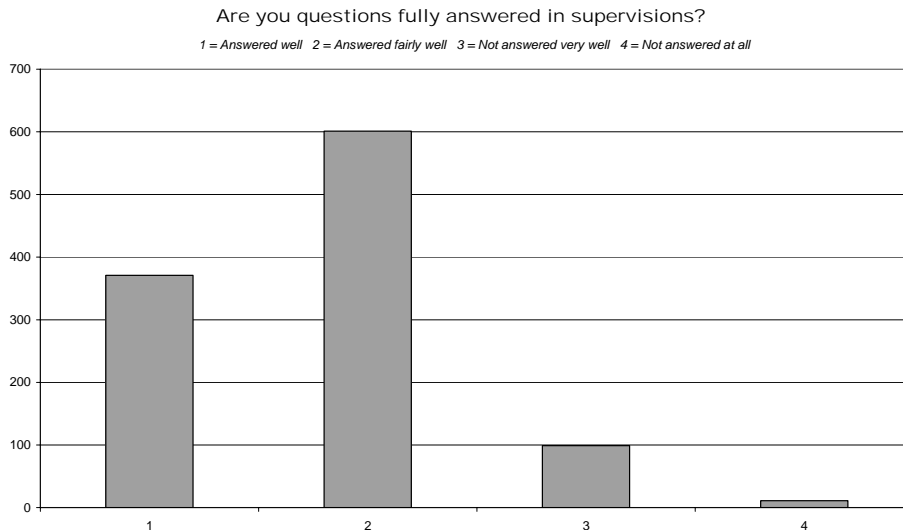
*"I think the best supervision approach is to go through all the questions that students may have ... Supervisors really have to make sure that everybody understands an explanation but not just move on regardless."*

It is also important to students that supervisors are able to answer questions. As students tend to see supervisions as an opportunity to gain a greater understanding of their course, it is important to them that explanations are clear and, if they still do not fully understand, they can feel confident that their

supervisor will be willing and able to answer questions. When this happens, students find supervisions very helpful.

*“Supervisions are very, very useful things indeed. They allow you to ask all of your questions.”*

When asked the question ‘Do you feel that your questions are fully answered in supervisions?’ 34% stated that questions are usually answered well, but 10% found that they were not answered very well or not answered at all.



It concerns students when they feel that either supervisors do not possess the knowledge to answer their questions or that supervisors are unwilling to answer their questions.

*“Certain supervisors won’t answer questions directly or even make any attempt to research the topic if they can’t answer the question.”*

Students comment that they find supervisions most useful when they are discussion-based and there is a process of exchanging ideas between students and between the students and supervisor. Several students comment that they do not find a ‘lecturing’ style in supervisors helpful. They feel that this imposes the supervisors’ agenda and ideas onto them and makes it more difficult for them to seek clearer understanding of the subject. They tend to criticise supervisors whom they feel just want to “tell us everything they know.”

*“Some supervisions feel more like lectures in a way – one supervisor in particular doesn’t let us discuss things in any sort of depth. The only questions she asks us are the kind of questions where either you know the answer or you don’t and there’s no room for discussion.”*

One student summarises how many students view the role of the supervisor and what they see are the most useful aspects of supervisions:

*“Having weekly or fortnightly contact with a supervisor is a good way of ensuring that discussions are held, questions are asked and answered and problems can be addressed.”*

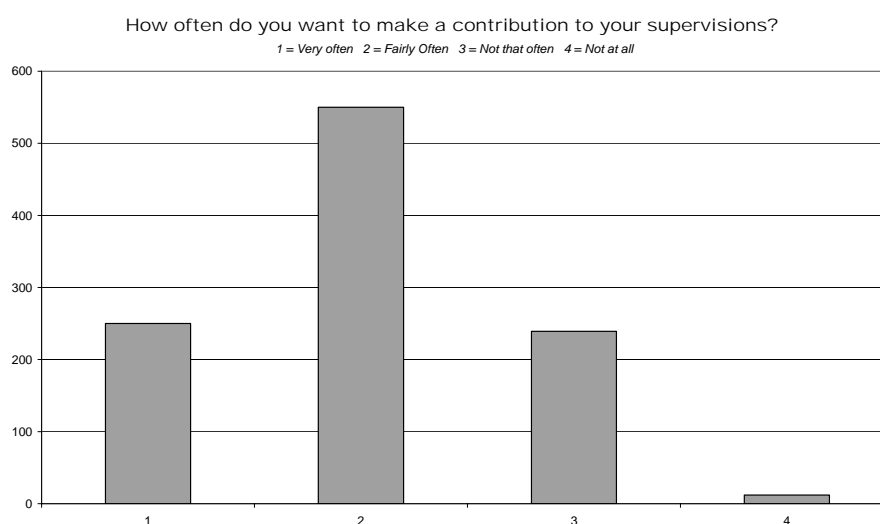
**Recommendation: When designing training courses, the skills that students value in individual supervisors should be taken into account. This includes:**

- The ability to explain clearly and ensure that students understand complex ideas
- The ability and willingness to answer questions
- The ability to facilitate a discussion between the students and the supervisor

### 3.2.2 Making a contribution in supervisions

The Senior Tutors' Committee recommends that students should be expected to "contribute actively to the supervision". It is important to establish how confident students feel in making a contribution, and what factors might affect this.

The following graph indicates students' answers to the question 'How often do you want to make a contribution to supervisions?'



24% state that they want to make a contribution 'very often' and feel they have a lot of useful things to say. However, 24% state that they do not contribute often or do not contribute at all, feeling that they never or only occasionally have something useful to say. Several students comment that they do not feel confident in supervisions and do not want to feel 'stupid' in case their answer or idea is not accurate.

*"One thing holding me back from asking questions tends to be my own embarrassment of sounding stupid."*

*"I tend to remain quiet unless asked a direct question even though I sometimes feel that I could contribute more."*

It is not necessarily the case that individual supervisors are preventing students from making a contribution. When asked 'how easy do your supervisors make it for you to make a contribution, if you wish to, to supervisions?' 96% state that their supervisors either make it very easy or fairly easy. However, there may be a difference between supervisors creating an environment where it is easy for students to contribute, and one where students are comfortable with contributing. Some students comment that they find their supervisors quite intimidating and that this can deter them from contributing.

*"Some supervisors are excellent at teaching but others ask too many questions before we have been taught the information, making us feel uncomfortable and not wanting to contribute."*

*"I'm still getting over feeling a bit intimidated by the brain power of Cambridge fellows, who perhaps don't fully understand this, but are blameless."*

Students also do not seem to prevent each other from contributing to supervisions. When asked 'how easy do the other students in your supervisions make it for you to make a contribution, if you wish to, in supervisions?' 94% of respondents state that other students make it very easy or fairly easy to contribute. However, again, students' comment, that although others 'allow' them to contribute, some students appear more confident than others about making a contribution, and this has an impact on those around them.

*"I just happened to be in groups with some very powerful speakers in my first term so it was quite intimidating when I wasn't quick enough to get my answer in and someone was already answering."*

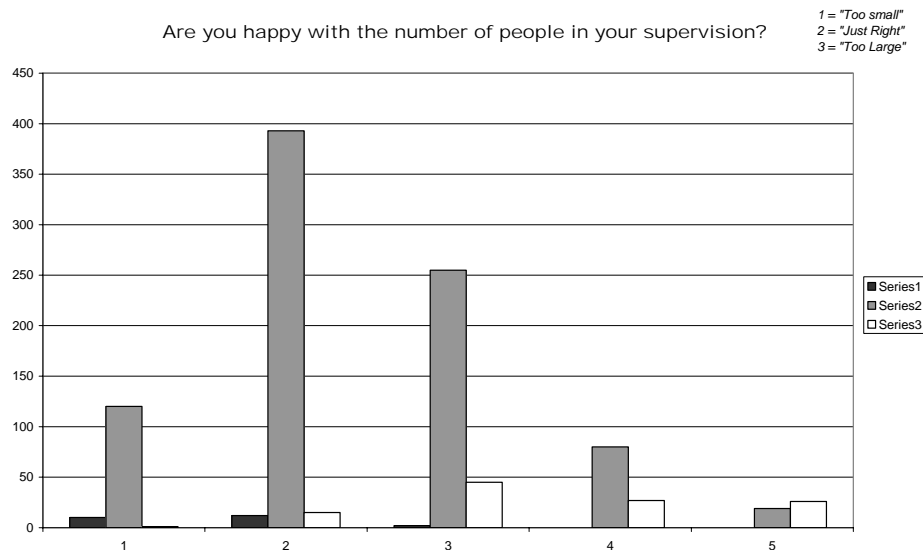
*"There's sometimes a tendency for one or two people to dominate with clever sounding arguments, but such is Cambridge."*

Students comment that supervisors can be useful when they ensure that each student in the supervision has an equal chance to contribute. In a sense, they see one of the supervisors' roles as being to 'manage' discussion so that no one student dominates.

*"Possibly the supervisors could make sure both parties have equal airtime and gain equally from supervisions."*

Even though the vast majority of students find that their supervisors and other students do not actively prevent them from contributing to supervisions, there is a link between how often students contribute and how easy supervisors and other students make it for them to do so. Amongst the 800 students who often make contributions to supervisions, 80% state that their supervisor makes it very easy to contribute and 84% state that other students make it very easy to contribute. By contrast, out of the 251 students who do not contribute often, 38% state that their supervisor makes it very easy to contribute and 45% state that other students make it very easy to contribute. This indicates that there are some students who feel more confident and comfortable in the supervision environment than others.

The size of the supervision group was also investigated as a potential influential factor in whether or not a student contributes to a supervision. Overall, students appear happy with the size of their supervision groups, 86% of students believe that their supervision group is the right size. However, amongst students who have larger supervision groups there is an increasing amount of dissatisfaction.



When students are in supervision groups of 2, 94% find this to be just the right size compared with 75% for students who are in groups of 4 and 42% who are in groups of 5. Several students comment on the effect that larger group size has on their ability to contribute to supervisions. Issues arising in larger groups include there not being enough time to address everyone's concerns and issues, difficulties in ensuring that all students benefit equally from the supervision and certain students dominating and limiting others from contributing (or allowing others to 'hide' in the background).

*"Being in such large groups (4-6) makes it difficult to make comments and ask personal questions. There isn't time and there are always one or two students who dominate the supervisions."*

When students are in smaller groups, contribution is made much easier and it is much easier for the supervisor to monitor who is contributing.

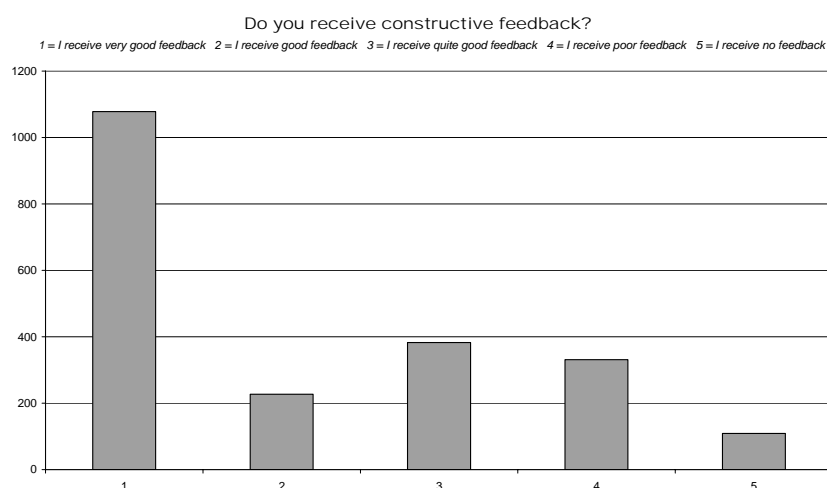
*“Last year when supervisions were in groups of two or three I found I learnt a lot this way. However, in the larger groups this year it is really hard to be able to ask questions.”*

*“I’ve always had one to one supervisions – this means that it is easy to contribute (vital in fact). It can be very daunting at first and you don’t get to hear the opinions of other students but it does mean you cannot rely on anyone else to save you.”*

**Recommendation: Supervisor training could include some guidance on creating a learning environment where all students feel at ease in recognition of the fact that some people find supervisions to be intimidating. As far as possible supervision groups should be kept to less than four students to allow the opportunity for every student to contribute.**

### 3.2.3 Feedback on supervision work

For supervisions to be useful to students, it is important that there is some indication of how well they are doing, as well as constructive suggestions for how they can improve.



In answer to the question ‘Do you receive constructive feedback with suggestions for improvements?’, 57% received either very good feedback with plenty of suggestions for improvements or good feedback with some suggestions for improvements. 13% received either poor feedback with few suggestions for improvements or none at all.

Several students comment on the issue of receiving feedback on supervision work. Good feedback is clearly something that they value. Examples of good practice include supervisors providing detailed plans of a high quality essay and supervisors providing students with tips on how to improve work. Students also appear to appreciate it when supervisors give some sort of mark or indication of class.

Several students comment that they would like to see improvements in the feedback they are given, with more constructive criticism and ideas for how they can improve. Students are disheartened to receive criticism with no indication of how their work could have been better or to receive no feedback when they have put a lot of effort into their work.

*“Very rarely is there any feedback on my essays which can be quite depressing when I have spent many hours reading for and then writing the essay.”*

Results from the survey indicate that students appreciate clear guidance rather than ‘vague comments’ about how they might improve; this could include giving some indication of the class level that they are performing at, to define more specifically what is ‘good’ or ‘fairly good’ or to produce some form of ‘model answer’. Some students feel that they are doing well, but could do better if given a bit more guidance.

Others report having 'no idea' how well they are doing and whether they are expected to get a first or a fail. It is only when they receive their supervision reports at the end of term that they gain any indication of how well they are doing.

*"It's sometimes difficult to gauge how well I'm doing; supervisors often make quite generic comments about essays and don't expand on them well enough to let me know where I should be improving or how much."*

*"I have been trying for the past three years to get useful feedback – sometimes it is difficult to know what is expected of you / how to do well when no one will tell you how to improve. It would be more helpful if supervisors graded essays, then at least you would have a vague idea of how you were progressing."*

**Recommendation: all students should be given clear feedback on their supervision work with constructive comments and ideas for improvements.**

### 3.2.4 Conclusion

Students often have positive experiences in supervisions. Many students find their supervisors to be supportive (82%), receptive (96%) and that students are able to learn a great deal about their course (95%). A significant number do not feel that their supervisor or other students would prevent them from making a contribution if they wanted to and feel confident approaching their supervisor if they had a problem.

The skills that students value in supervisors are an ability to explain issues and ideas clearly, being willing and able to answer students' questions, being a facilitator of discussion and allowing issues to be explored in depth. Students find their supervisions less useful when supervisors show a tendency to leave issues unexplained and questions unanswered and instead 'lecture' students.

There are some students who experience difficulties in the supervision system and for a small number, supervisions are a "scary" and "intimidating" experience, either because of their supervisor, other students in the group, or because they simply lack the confidence to make a contribution for fear of appearing "stupid." These students leave their supervision feeling that they have not learnt much. It is important that this small minority of students feels confident that their supervisor can address any problems, and that supervisors are aware that not all students will be naturally comfortable in a supervision environment.

Students indicate their appreciation for receiving feedback on their supervision work. Whilst a majority receive very good or good feedback, this is an area that 43% of respondents identify as needing improvement.

The huge number of teaching officers and the localised nature of the supervision system means that it is probably not surprising that students have variable experiences of supervisions. Several factors can affect students' experience, including size of supervision group, the personality of individual supervisors, which students they are being supervised with and their own levels of confidence. However, a significant number report that their experiences of supervisions and individual supervisors ranges from poor to absolutely excellent. Students are most likely to state that as a general rule their supervisions are excellent, but then provide an exception to the rule. For example:

*"Quality of supervision varies. Most of them are fine but some are exceptionally bad."*

*"All of my supervisors are informative and helpful except one who seems unwilling to teach me."*

*"Varies according to supervisor. Some are more intimidating and offer less constructive comments. On the whole very good though."*

It is difficult to centrally monitor the supervision system but closer attention to student feedback on supervisions might give indications of areas where there are weaknesses and reduce the number of

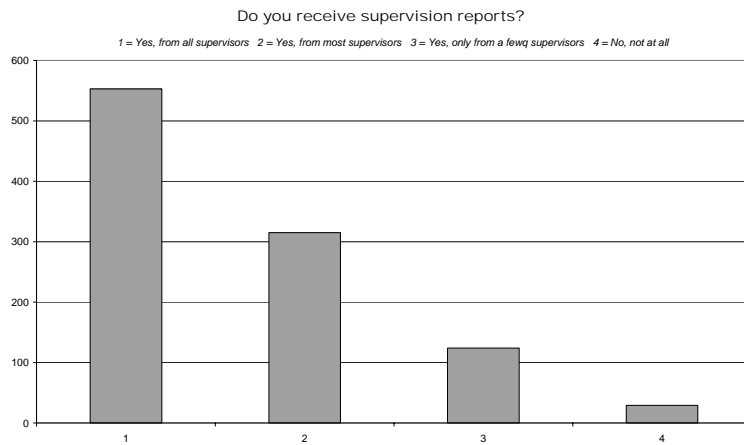
students who experience isolated poor teaching. Furthermore, following through some of the recommendations from this report may assist in providing a minimum standard which every student can expect from their supervisions.

### 3.3 Feedback: supervision reports and student feedback

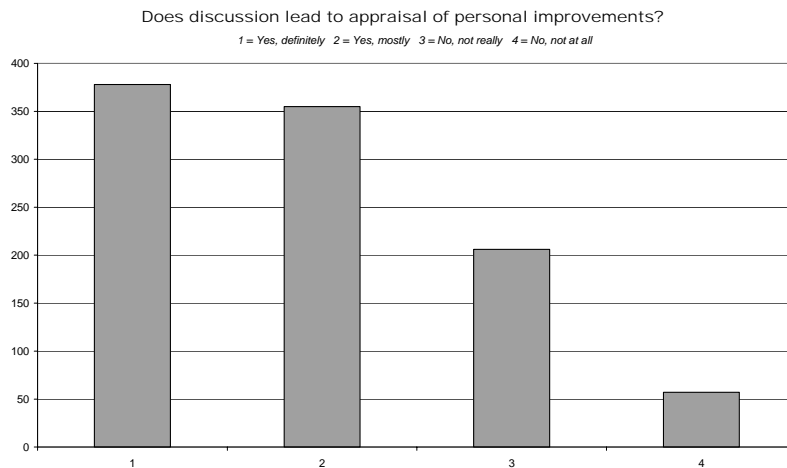
At the end of every term students should receive supervision reports from their supervisors via the CAMCORS system. This also provides an opportunity for students to provide feedback to their colleges about the supervisions they have had that term. These two mechanisms are clearly important to ensuring students gain the most out of the supervision experience.

#### 3.3.1 Supervision reports

Supervision reports are a form of feedback that can nicely complement the feedback on supervision work which students receive on a weekly basis. Given that students are anxious to have feedback on their supervision work, it can be inferred that termly feedback through supervision reports will be equally valuable. The CAMCORS system (the online system through which supervision reports are collected) is clearly effective - 85% of students receive reports from either all or most of their supervisors. Only 3% receive no reports.



Not only is it important that students receive these reports, but that their content is helpful, allowing some form of discussion between students and their Director of Studies and Personal Tutors. 86% of students are provided with a password to enable them to access their supervision reports whilst 89% of students discuss their reports with either their Tutor or Director of Studies. The graph below indicates responses to the question ‘Are your supervision reports used as a basis for constructive discussion with your Director of Studies or Personal Tutor about how you are doing and what improvements can be made?’



74% of students give a positive response to this question, with 26% answering more negatively. From students’ comments, it appears that problems arise when they are not able to directly access their reports.

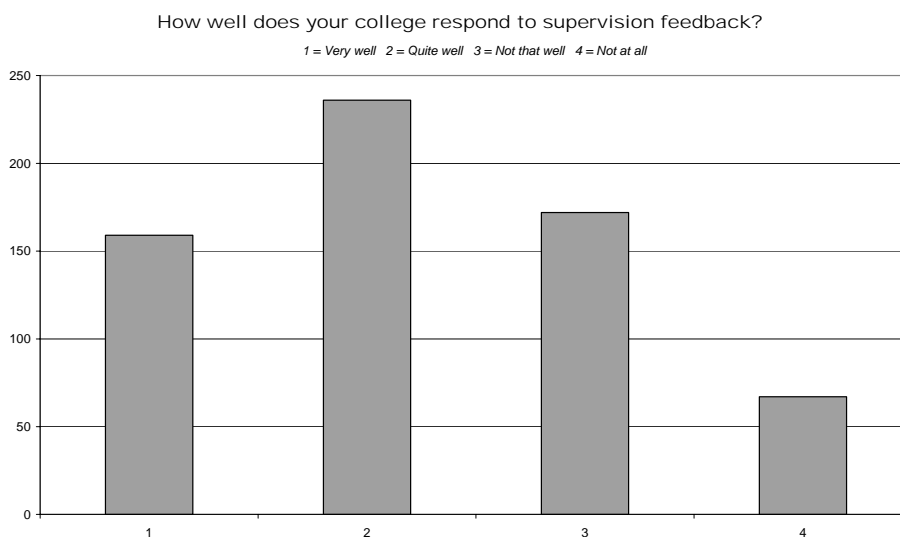
*“We have supervision reports but not all of them are accessible, which is a bit pointless I think.”*

*“My DoS has not made my supervision reports accessible to me. I think it would be good to remove the DoS’s facility to block access. After all the reports are written about me, so why the secrecy?”*

Some students mention that their supervision reports were not as detailed as they could be, and that a useful addition might be an end of term meeting with supervisors. Others comment that continual feedback would be most effective. In general, students are very positive about the CAMCORS system.

### 3.3.2 Feedback to college

In order that the consistency and quality of supervisions can be maintained, it is extremely useful for students to feedback to their colleges about their supervisions, and to feel that the college acts upon this. 70% of respondents are invited to provide feedback. The graph below indicates responses to the question ‘how well does your college respond to the feedback that you provide?’



25% feel that student feedback makes a real difference and 37% believe that it has a smaller effect. Students refer to problems with supervisors that were resolved quickly by their colleges.

*“College always acts immediately to improve things if I have any trouble with a supervisor.”*

*“This year complaints were made by every member of a particular supervision group about the poor standard of teaching. Within a week we had a new supervisor.”*

However, 38% of respondents believe that feedback has made little or no effect. Student comments suggest that students either do not know whether feedback makes a difference, or they are not confident in college feedback mechanisms.

*“The college system of gathering feedback is poor, infrequent and often makes little difference.”*

*“We do provide feedback on supervisions but we have no idea whether any changes were made on the basis of this.”*

Perhaps more worryingly, several students give examples of cases where they consciously avoided making a complaint or they made a complaint that was not acted upon.

*“Supervisors seem to be ‘friends’ or work mates of the DoS. This means that making a complaint about bad supervisors is difficult and when they are made the supervisor is never changed.”*

*"I complained once about a supervisor and my DoS wanted to help but he said it was difficult to tell a colleague about these criticisms. Nothing changed so I assumed my DoS broached the subject, the supervisor defended his approach and then it was left."*

*"With student feedback, the supervisors are still supervising with no apparent change of approach."*

*"I always provide feedback but feel this is ignored because often the supervisors are too senior or established to make the changes."*

For many students, problems arise because feedback is not anonymous. Therefore this can mean that sometimes students avoid being honest, as they are worried about the repercussions of making a complaint.

*"Most people I know find it very difficult to complain about a supervisor they know they will have future contact with in their college or department."*

*"Feedback should be anonymous and go to the teaching office of the college and not the DoS who is mates with all the supervisors."*

*"Due to unfortunate circumstances my tutor also supervises me which makes it hard when filling in supervision assessment forms, as they have to read them!"*

*"It's impossible to complain about things unless you want to create a huge problem"*

It is clear that students would appreciate and benefit from some form of anonymous feedback system where it is possible to inform college of problems with supervisions without feeling that there would be repercussions. Students would also appreciate information about what happens to their feedback, and what action is taken on the basis of it. This could convince students that their feedback is valuable and worth giving to college, ensuring a greater response rate. This would also make feedback more honest and more genuine, thereby making it more beneficial to the college and to the students.

**Recommendation: Colleges should use student feedback to address problems caused by variable quality in the supervision system. Colleges should put anonymous feedback systems in place and students should be provided with 'feedback from their feedback'.**

## 3.4 Conclusions to the General Overview of the Supervision System

From looking at students' experience of supervisions, several trends have been identified:

- Students are more likely to have positive than negative experiences in supervisions and they are more likely to view supervision teaching as being of a high quality.
- However, students have variable experiences of supervisions and find that the standard of teaching between individual supervisors can vary. Several students mention the need for mandatory training of supervisors and for some 'standardisation' across the system.
- When preparing for supervisions, most students know what is expected of them, although some would appreciate clearer guidance. Some students find managing their work-load problematic. The vast majority of students find that the work that they have been set relates closely to their course.
- Students rate supervisors highly when they are able to explain complex ideas clearly, can ensure students understand, are able and willing to answer questions and are able to facilitate a discussion between the students and the supervisor without 'lecturing'.
- The majority of students feel comfortable contributing to their supervisions; they do not feel that supervisors and other students actively prevent them from doing so. However, 24% of students are not as willing to contribute, and they often cite this is because they lack confidence, or feel intimidated. The size of supervision group can also affect whether or not students contribute to supervisions – less than 4 students seems to be ideal.
- A majority of students receive very good or good feedback on their work, but this is an area that many feel could be improved. Constructive feedback on supervision work is clearly important to many students.
- The CAMCORS system appears to work efficiently with the vast majority of students receiving termly supervisions reports from all or most of their supervisors. On the whole, students appear satisfied with their supervision reports and the way they are handled, although some would appreciate more detailed reports and the ability to access their reports directly.
- The majority of students are invited to provide feedback to their colleges about supervision quality, however a significant number of students believe that this feedback has little or no effect. Whilst some students report that problems are dealt with efficiently in their college, many are either not confident at reporting problems, or action is not taken when they do. Students mention the need for anonymous feedback systems in college and emphasise the importance of being made aware of what happens to the feedback they provide.

### 3.4.1 Good practice

The following areas of good practice are identified:

#### 3.4.1.1 Preparation for supervisions

- Work is emailed to students in advance of their supervision
- Pre-supervision examples classes
- Supervisors make themselves available to answer questions about the work that has been set
- Detailed reading lists are provided
- Termly supervision plans are provided
- Students' supervisors communicate with each other to ensure that students' work loads are manageable
- Supervision work relates closely to the course

### 3.4.1.2 Experience in supervisions

- Supportive and approachable supervisors
- Supervisors who explain issues, ideas and theories clearly
- Supervisors who answer students' questions clearly
- Supervisors who facilitate a discussion and exchange of ideas
- Supervisors who ensure that all students have an opportunity to contribute to the supervision
- Detailed plans of a high quality essay are provided
- Students who are provided with constructive comments and ideas on how to improve their work
- Students who are provided with a mark or an indication of the standard of their work

### 3.4.1.3 Feedback

- Efficient use of the CAMCORS system results in a large number of students receiving supervision reports
- Problems that students raise with the quality of teaching or experience in supervisions are addressed quickly and efficiently in some cases

## 3.4.2 Recommendations

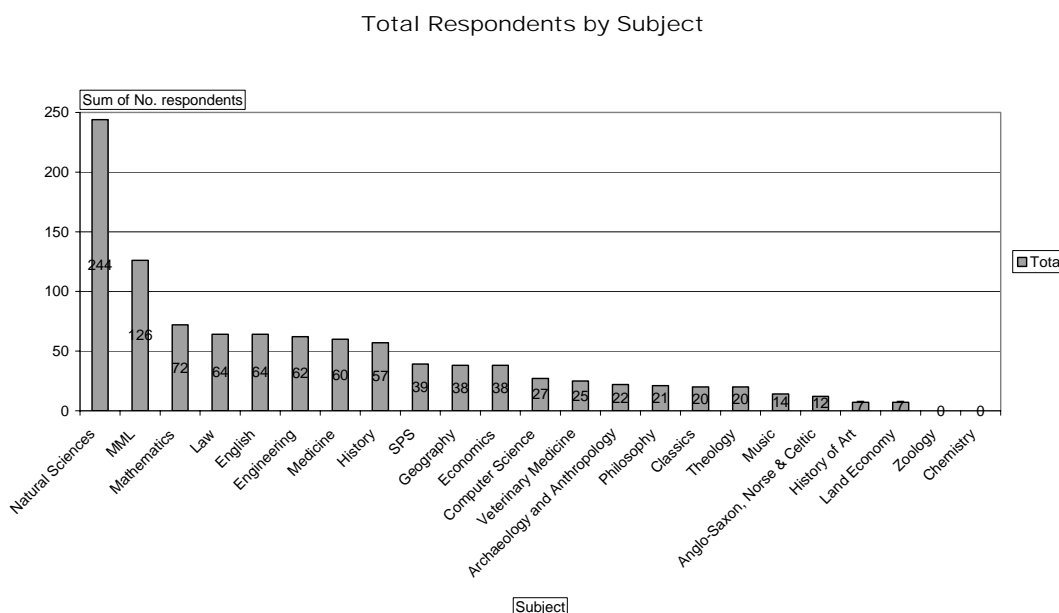
The following recommendations are made:

- The means by which supervisors are assigned should be made more transparent to students. Equality of provision across colleges should be assured as far as possible.
- As far as possible, students should be able to have supervisions spread throughout the term. There should be a reasonable amount of time between work being set and the supervision.
- Faculties and departments should give an indication of what is a reasonable amount of work to set for students.
- All supervisors should be provided with an outline of course content.
- As far as possible, supervisors should give clear guidance to students about what is expected of them. Students should be able to contact a supervisor prior to their supervision if they are struggling to understand their work.
- As far as possible, supervision groups should be kept to less than four students.
- The colleges and the University should ensure that all teaching officers receive some form of training in effective teaching and communication skills.
- Training for supervisors should include some guidance on how best to prepare students for supervisions.
- When designing training courses, the skills that students value in individual supervisors should be taken into account. This includes the ability to explain clearly and ensure that students understand complex ideas, the ability and willingness to answer questions, and the ability to facilitate a discussion between the students and the supervisor.
- Supervisor training could include some guidance on creating a learning environment where all students feel at ease in recognition of the fact that a minority find supervisions to be intimidating.
- All students should be given clear feedback on their supervision work with constructive comments and ideas for improvements.
- Colleges should use student feedback to address problems caused by variable quality in the supervision system. Colleges should put anonymous feedback systems in place and students should be provided with 'feedback from their feedback'.

This report will now break the results down in terms of other factors that might influence a students' experience of the supervision system. This includes subject, gender, ethnicity, school background and ethnicity. Conclusions will be inferred in each case before the results in their entirety are drawn together and considered in a holistic manner.

## 4 Subject

The survey elicited responses from students studying a range of subjects. The graph below indicates the number of responses:



It is important to note that for some subjects although there appears to be a very small number of responses, this is still a significant proportion of the students studying the subject due to its small size (for example Anglo Saxon, Norse and Celtic). However, for the purposes of this report only the subjects which had more than 20 students responding will be studied in depth.

### 4.1 Archaeology and Anthropology

22 students from Archaeology and Anthropology responded to the survey (11.06% of the students studying Archaeology and Anthropology). As is the experience of students in general, they tend to comment on the variable quality of their supervisions.

*“The grad student supervisors are either really excellent or really very poor. There doesn’t seem to be any middle ground.”*

*“There is a huge variability in the quality of supervisors who range from professors to PhD students.”*

When it comes to preparing work for supervisions, 67% know either exactly what to do or have a good idea of what to do when their work is set for them and only 5% have little or no idea what is expected. 95% find that their work relates very well or fairly well to the course content. For Archaeology and Anthropology students the largest problem with preparation for supervisions appears to be managing the work-load. 37% of students sometimes struggle or always struggle with the work that has been set, which tends to be because of organisational problems or simply amount of work.

*“There’s so much work and we’re covering such broad topics that I feel I’m not getting enough depth.”*

*“Sometimes supervisions are set too close together, e.g. three in a week with an essay for each.”*

Archaeology and Anthropology students tend to be very positive about the environment within the supervisions. 73% state that they contribute very often or fairly often in supervisions. A significant majority state that the supervisor and other students make contribution to supervision very easy or fairly easy. 82% find that their questions are answered very well or fairly well.

One area which students think needs some improvement is the provision of feedback on their work. 18% state that they receive poor feedback or no feedback.

*"If I have written an essay I would prefer to receive active criticism of it and how to improve personally rather than a repeated general discussion of the topic I have just written about."*

#### **Recommendations:**

- **The faculty should look at ways to improve organisation of supervisions so as to reduce work load pressure on students.**
- **All students should receive constructive feedback on their work.**
- **The faculty should monitor variable quality in teaching.**

## 4.2 Classics

20 students studying Classics responded to the questionnaire (8.3% of the total number of students studying Classics in the University). These students mostly have very positive experiences of the supervision system. 95% find that their supervision work relates very well or fairly well to their course. 84% know exactly what to do or have a good idea of what to do when work is set. Classics students also appear to find it easier than students in general to manage their work load; 80% manage well or quite well with the work that is set.

*"I very much enjoy the supervision system and feel that it has greatly benefited my understanding of my subject."*

*"I love the supervision system."*

Within supervisions, students appear quite confident to make contributions to supervisions. Only 5% report that they rarely or never have something to say. They also overwhelmingly state that they feel that their supervisor makes it very easy or fairly easy for them to make a contribution. Although respondents say that other students are more likely to make it very easy or fairly easy for them to make a contribution, they are more positive about their supervisors than other students (40% say other students make it 'very easy' compared to 75% saying the supervisor makes it 'very easy'). Students' comments do suggest that, at times, other students in the supervision can affect them.

*"I have been in a situation where there has been one person in a supervision who is vastly more intelligent than the rest and has dominated the whole thing."*

*"Being in a supervision with someone who is shy is often as bad as being in a supervision with someone who is louder than you. It's often hard to make the distinction clear and get your point across."*

100% of students find that their questions are answered either very well or fairly well and 70% receive either very good or good feedback. 90% feel that they would be comfortable or very comfortable approaching their supervisor with their concerns.

## 4.3 Computer Science

26 students from Computer Science responded to the survey (8.3% of the students who study Computer Science in the University). As with other subjects, Computer Science students comment that the quality of their supervisions varies.

*"It varies widely from supervisor to supervisor."*

*"There are some amazing supervisors and some really poor ones."*

When preparing for supervisions, 84% of students find that they know exactly what is expected of them or have a good idea. Although a significant majority find that the work relates well to the course, the percentage who find that it relates very well is slightly lower than the average (48% compared to 55%) and this reflects in some of the students' comments.

*"Sometimes the work isn't related well to what we have covered in lectures or what gets discussed in supervisions."*

*"Certain supervisors do not seem to know what is expected of us in the end of year exams."*

However, several students also comment that they find the supervisions very useful and that they are essential in helping them to prepare for exams.

26% of students find that they sometimes struggle or always struggle with the amount of work set. Only 15% find that they manage well. From students' comments this appears to be because of organisational problems.

*"Due to my timetable all supervisions tend to be within a couple of days each week which can mean I suddenly have huge amounts of work to do."*

*"Sometimes work tends to be set late so we only have a couple of days to do it."*

In supervisions, 82% find that they contribute very often or fairly often and as with other subjects the majority finds that the supervisor and the other students make it easy for them to contribute. 78% would feel comfortable or very comfortable approaching their supervisor with their concerns.

22% of students find their questions are answered very well, which is less than in the general trend and 23% receive little or no feedback, which is greater than the average trend. When making comments, students are most likely to comment on the individual skills of supervisors. Examples include supervisors not always being able to answer questions or sometimes being unwilling to provide written answers, resulting in the students not gaining the highest level of understanding.

*"Certain supervisors are bad at making constructive suggestions ... you attempt questions (answered poorly), receive some criticism and a brief glance at the answer and the supervision is over."*

*"Some supervisors seem to have no skill in explaining and run through the material so fast little can be gained."*

*"It seems that supervisors who have supervised the same course for many years know the material very well but expect us to as well."*

#### **Recommendations:**

- **Supervisors should attend supervisor training sessions to enhance communication and teaching skills.**
- **All supervisors should be aware of course content.**
- **As far as possible, supervisions should be spread out throughout the terms and work set a reasonable amount of time in advance.**
- **The issue of variability in teaching quality should be monitored.**

## 4.4 Economics

38 students from Economics responded to the survey (7.3% of the students studying Economics in the University). When preparing for supervisions, students seem to be particularly aware of what is expected of them. 91% know exactly what to do or have a good idea of what to do. However, many students appear to have problems with their work load, with 44% finding that they sometimes struggle or always struggle with the amount of work set. Students indicate this might be caused by a few factors. Several students comment on the difficulty of obtaining books on reading lists whilst others state that organisational difficulties result in supervisions being very close together. Additionally, significantly fewer Economics students find that their work relates closely to their course compared with students in general. 24% find that their supervision work relates very well to their course compared to 55% of students in general. This may be because lectures and supervisions do not coincide well with each other:

*“My lectures and supervisions are very often not timed well so if the lecture occurs after the supervision I have a wasted lecture and the supervision before is very difficult.”*

*“Some supervisions don’t coincide with what is being covered in lectures.”*

*“Sometimes the topics covered in supervisions are not yet covered in lectures; these are more difficult to prepare.”*

60% of respondents contribute very often or fairly often to supervisions; 89% state that their supervisor makes it easy or fairly easy to contribute and 97% state that other students make it easy or fairly easy to contribute. 18% of students find that their questions are answered very well (compared to 34% amongst students in general), with 21% finding they are answered not very well or not at all (compared to 10% amongst students in general). Students’ comments tend to highlight this issue:

*“One supervisor fails to read the readings on his reading list and cannot answer questions.”*

*“There’s a lack of specialist supervisors in some fields so the supervisors we do have are often inexperienced or lack training.”*

*“One of my supervisors gives the wrong answers.”*

As with other subjects, Economics students are concerned with the quality of the feedback that they receive. 32% receive very good or good feedback and 24% receive poor or no feedback. Several students comment on the need for good feedback on supervision work.

*“Rather than just saying this is 2.2 material say exactly why this is the case and how you can improve.”*

*“I’d like more feedback with suggestions and improvements.”*

Economics students seem to have a perception that the quality of their supervisions depends on what college they are at and are concerned about the implications.

*“I feel day to day that I do not get as good supervisors as my fellow students from other colleges and if this is just down to finance this is a real shame.”*

#### **Recommendations:**

- **As far as possible supervision work should relate to the current lecture course. Supervisors should be fully aware of course content.**
- **Supervisors should receive training in effective teaching and communication skills.**
- **All students should receive constructive feedback on their work.**
- **The means by which supervisors are assigned to students should be transparent to students.**

## 4.5 Engineering

62 Engineering students responded to the survey (6.3% of the students studying Engineering in the University). 91% of students know exactly or have a good idea of what is expected of them in their supervision work and 69% find that the work relates very well to their course (compared to 55% amongst students in general). Students suggest they are well prepared because the Department provides example papers and there is a very close relationship between work in supervisions and lecture courses. 32% struggle or always struggle (in line with the general trend) and this appears to be because students find they have a lot of work to do. Several students comment that they would appreciate some guidance of how long each piece of work should take to do, so they do not spend longer on work than the supervisors expect.

*"I often feel it takes longer than it is supposed to."*

*"It would be helpful to have an indication of how far through example papers we should be for each supervision."*

When it comes to willingness to contribute in supervisions, Engineering students differ from the general trend in terms of whether they are likely to contribute to supervisions. 23% are willing to contribute very often (compared to 24% of students in general) and 27% feel that they are unlikely to or do not contribute (compared to 24% of students in general). 95% believe that their supervisor makes it very easy or fairly easy to contribute and 92% believe that other students make it very easy or fairly easy to contribute. 81% feel comfortable about approaching their supervisor with their concerns.

Also in line with the general trend, Engineering students are concerned about the quality of feedback on their work (14% of Engineering students receive poor feedback or no feedback, compared to 13% of students in general). 17% of respondents say questions are not answered well or not answered, compared to 10% in the general findings. This heightened concern that supervisors do not always provide clear explanations or answer questions is reflected in comments:

*"Some supervisors don't really listen to or understand the questions I have."*

*"We should discuss what we're trying to achieve in supervisions – check I know the material, get a good interactive description of the fundamentals."*

Similar to students studying other subjects, students are most likely to comment on the variable quality of their supervisions. Several students express how they have both wonderful and poor teachers.

*"Some good, some bad, as it really depends on the particular supervisor, how easy it is to ask things and how they treat you as a student."*

*"Some supervisors deserve a medal, some are scraping through with a minimum of knowledge."*

However, several students make very positive comments about supervisions.

*"Supervisions have been excellent in all areas."*

*"They're great basically."*

### Recommendations:

- **More guidance about how long students should spend on their supervision work would be welcomed.**
- **Supervisors should ensure that students reach the required level of understanding in supervisions.**
- **The variability in quality of teaching should be monitored.**

## 4.6 English

64 students studying English took part in the survey (10% of students studying English in the University). Although 78% know exactly what to do or have a good idea of what to do for their supervision, students' comments suggest that they would like more guidance on what is expected. Comments indicate students are not sure how much reading is required, that essay titles are sometimes rather too broad and that clearer reading lists might be helpful. 34% state that they sometimes struggle or always struggle with their work load; this appears to be because of the amount of reading that is expected. 93% find work relates well to the course.

In supervisions, English students are more likely to feel comfortable making a contribution than the general trend (85% want to make a contribution often or fairly often). The vast majority report that their supervisor and other students make it very easy or fairly easy to make a contribution (100% and 94%). Amongst the smaller number of students who report that they do not feel comfortable contributing (15% do not contribute or rarely contribute) indications are given that this is because of other students. Several comments are made about "other students dominating all the time." However, it is also worth noting that comments were also made in reference to other students who do not contribute enough in supervisions:

*"I sometimes feel like I'm saying everything and not learning from my partner."*

*"It's a really good way of learning unless you're paired with a student who never does any work and refuses to talk in supervision."*

These comments could indicate that the relationship between students in the group is particularly important in English supervisions.

Similar to students in general, 39% of English students believe that their questions are answered very well but 13% find that they are not answered well or not answered at all. 50% find that they get good or quite good feedback with 10% finding they get poor feedback or no feedback. Students are likely to comment that they sometimes leave supervisions with a sense that they haven't really learnt anything and are not sure if their essay was going in the right direction. They do not find it useful when the supervision seems more like a lecture or when there are few clear explanations.

*"A supervisor might be knowledgeable but fail to convey the necessary information."*

*"I often feel I'm being talked at rather than to and then asked to make a comment about what has been said."*

*"Some lecturers stray from the subject and it is difficult to raise your queries."*

Several students make very positive comments about the supervision system, but once again the main view seems to be that standard is variable. Students comment that the faculty does not seem to have much control over the supervisions.

*"Standard of teaching University-wide remains very varied and pot luck."*

*"It's frustrating that there is no central organisation of the English BA teaching."*

*"There is no standardisation across the University as a whole as far as supervisions are concerned, not even within the same subject. This means that the content and quality of supervisions varies immensely."*

### Recommendations:

- **Supervisors should ensure that students get constructive feedback on their work.**
- **Students should have their queries addressed in the supervision.**
- **Variable quality in supervisions should be monitored.**

## 4.7 Geography

38 Geography students took part in the survey (12.7% of students studying Geography in the University). Compared to the general trend, fewer students are confident of what is expected of them in their supervision work; only 16% say that they know exactly what to do. However, a greater proportion of Geography students feel that they are able to manage their work load, although 29% still say that they sometimes struggle or always struggle. 97% of respondent believe their work relates closely to their course. Student comments on supervision preparation suggest problems arise because of organisational problems rather than because of the nature of the work. Problems with getting books from reading lists and problems with organising supervision times are mentioned by several students.

*“Availability of books on the reading list is sometimes an issue.”*

*“There is a serious problem with supervisions organised centrally by the department. Sign up sheets and essay titles are sometimes not available until 2 or 3 weeks into term.”*

*“Usually our supervisions are crowded into the last half of term which makes the planning very difficult.”*

Geography students are less likely than other students to contribute to supervisions (29% don't want to contribute or seldom want to contribute) although this does not appear to be because of other students or supervisors (91% feel their supervisor makes it easy to contribute and 97% feel other students make it easy to contribute). As in the general trend, Geography students would like feedback to be improved; 50% find have good or very good feedback but comments suggest that this could be improved further.

*“My supervisors don't give an indication of class on essays.”*

*“Supervised dissertations would be a big step forward.”*

However, there is a high level of satisfaction when it comes to supervisors answering questions. Only 3% believe that their questions aren't answered well or aren't answered at all.

### Recommendations:

- **Organisational problems with supervisions should be addressed.**
- **All students should receive constructive feedback on their work.**

## 4.8 History

59 History students responded to the survey (9.4% of students studying History in the University). In general, students are very positive about their supervisions. 92% state that they know exactly what is expected of them or have a good idea of what is expected of them in their supervision work and 94% find that this work relates well to their course. They also tend to manage better than other students with their work load with 34% stating that they manage well and 15% struggling (compared to 32% of students in general). Students' comments indicate that the main problem with preparation for supervisions is the time needed to complete the reading, but tend to find supervisors to be understanding about this.

History students are happy to make contributions to supervisions; 13% find they have little or nothing to contribute compared to 24% of students in general. The vast majority of History students find that other students or the supervisor make it easy to contribute. They are also more likely to report that they get constructive feedback from their work with 83% saying they receive very good or good feedback. Some students still comment that they would appreciate more feedback on their essay. Students are also more likely to state that their questions are well answered with 48% saying questions are answered very well compared with 34% of students in general.

Once again several students comment that they have variable experiences with supervisions.

*“The experience is very much dependent upon the supervisor – some are better, others worse.”*

*“Supervisors vary a lot!”*

*“It really depends from one supervisor to another – this term’s supervisor is amazing and I feel like I’m improving a lot but last year I had two appalling ones.”*

However, the main thing that stands out History students’ comments is the personal support they receive supervisors. 95% feel comfortable approaching their supervisor with concerns, and several give examples of supervisors being very understanding and supportive.

*“It’s good that I am able to email certain supervisors if I have a problem between when the work is set and the next supervision.”*

*“I have always found that if I have asked for more support / further guidance that supervisors have been very helpful and more than willing to do what they can.”*

#### **Recommendation:**

- **Variable quality in teaching should be monitored.**

## 4.9 Law

64 Law students participated in the survey (8.5% of the students who study Law in the University). 94% believe that their supervision work relates well to their course. 81% of Law students have at least a good idea of what is expected of them, although only 22% know exactly what is expected of them. They are significantly more likely to struggle with their work than other students; 44% state that they sometimes struggle or always struggle. In their comments, students highlight the need for clearer guidance on the work such as clearer reading lists with indications of which is the most important reading and better guidelines of how much work is expected. Students also describe the considerable time pressures on them:

*“The amount of supervision work assigned is often unrealistic.”*

*“The volume of work is too high with too little guidance given.”*

Students appear confident about making a contribution in supervisions; 86% want to make a contribution very often or fairly often and the majority find that their supervisor and other students makes this contribution easy. Law supervisors tend to be willing and able to answer their questions with 91% of respondents stating questions are answered very well or fairly well. From students’ comments, it appears that they feel the need to ask questions because explanations are not always clear in the first place.

*“Sometimes I feel that supervisors are not good at explaining an issue I have found difficult.”*

*“I think that some supervisors spend too long discussing the opinions of different experts as opposed to helping me with the understanding of the actual theory.”*

Following general trends, Law students feel feedback on their work could be improved. 47% state that they have very good or good feedback, but 11% state that they receive little or no feedback. From comments, it appears students do get some feedback but would prefer this to be clearer.

*“Sometimes I get no feedback except ‘excellent essay’, which is encouraging but I’m sure my work isn’t that good.”*

*“What exactly is the difference between quite good, fairly good, pretty good etc?”*

Law students are also concerned about variable quality in the supervision system and several students comment that quality is dependent on an individual supervisor. Several students do make very positive

comments about their supervisions commenting on how knowledgeable, organised and good at teaching supervisors are and how useful supervisions are to them.

*“The supervision system is what marks Cambridge graduates out particularly for law where being able to think on your feet is a skill that is fully developed.”*

#### **Recommendations:**

- **Students should be given more guidance in preparation of work for supervisions.**
- **All students should receive constructive feedback on their work.**
- **Variable quality in teaching should be monitored.**

## 4.10 Mathematics

73 Maths students participated in the survey (8.4% of the students studying Maths in the University). 96% find that their work relates very well or well to their course and they are more likely than students in general to know exactly what is expected of them or have a good idea of what is expected of them (88% compared to 81%). However, as with the general trend, 32% find that they do sometimes struggle or always struggle with work set. Students are most likely to say that this is because of time pressures.

*“We have too many questions on which we never have enough time.”*

*“There is too much work and not enough patience from supervisors sometimes.”*

Maths students are less likely than students in general to make a contribution to supervisions (36% contribute not that often or not at all compared to 24% of all students). As with other subjects this does not appear to be because of supervisors or other students actively preventing contribution. Students point out that they are not expected to make much of a contribution verbally and the work that they hand in is their contribution. Fewer Maths students find that their questions are answered well in supervisions compared to the general trend (29% compared to 35%) and 20% receive little or no feedback on their work. Students’ comments reflect both of these concerns; students feel that they do always not get the full explanations that they need to properly understand their work nor do they get adequate feedback.

*“There seems to be an attitude that it is more important to cover all the questions on an examples sheet by just going through them without allowing for queries about the subtleties of the question.”*

*“A few supervisors have seemed impatient or even resentful of being asked questions.”*

*“Very few supervisors hand out model solutions after supervisions, which I feel would be the most useful thing to do. They often do not mark work very thoroughly either.”*

Students also tend to remark that supervisions are rather one-sided with little participation from the students.

*“I get lectured in lectures and lectured in supervisions.”*

*“We sit and answer the questions. Then I leave.”*

However, there are some students make very positive comments about supervisions and say that their supervisions have been very helpful.

*“I think supervisions are generally very good and allow me to get a good understanding of my course.”*

#### **Recommendations:**

- **Supervisors should ensure that all students have reached the adequate level of understanding and that students have an opportunity to ask for further clarification.**
- **Students should receive constructive feedback on their work.**

## 4.11 Medical Science

59 Medical students participated in the survey (7% of the students studying Medical Science in the University). 96% find that their work relates well or very well to their course. Although 74% have a good idea of what is expected of them, only 10% know exactly what is expected of them in their supervision work. 75% however manage quite well with the amount of work set and comment that their supervisors help them by finding out how much work they have at the time and by planning work over a term.

In supervisions, Medical students are less likely to want to make a contribution to supervisions than students in general (34% contribute not often or not at all compared to 24% of students in general). Several students comment on group size being a factor that limits their contribution. Students' comments indicate some concern about time wasting or straying too far from the subject.

*"I'm not comfortable raising a lot of concerns at once. I feel that it monopolises the supervisors' time."*

Compared to the general trend, more Medical students find that their questions are either not answered well or not answered at all (18% compared to 10% of students in general). Students' comments tend to emphasise this:

*"One of my supervisors makes it very difficult for us to ask questions in supervisions and if we can ask questions he doesn't always answer them fully and sometimes he doesn't even answer the questions asked at all."*

*"If I don't understand something I don't feel able to pin my supervisors down about it."*

*"I ask questions and they get ignored."*

When asked about feedback on their work, 43% of Medical students find that they have good or very good feedback compared to 56% of students in general. 17% find they have little or no feedback.

There are several students who make very positive comments about their supervisions, but again more students comment that quality of supervisions varies with some supervisors being excellent and others not being able to answer questions and not being as helpful and supportive as others. Medical students, like Economics students, also appear particularly concerned about variation in provision across college. They feel that at some colleges students are more able to access teaching from the course organisers.

*"The vast variation in standard of supervisor and supervisions between colleges gives students at some (bigger / richer) colleges an unfair advantage over those at others as their supervisions are better. I'm aware that supervisions are supposed to be arranged on a college basis but there should be a university-wide database of supervisors who are of the same standard that the colleges can choose from to ensure standardisation across the University."*

### Recommendations:

- **Students should have their questions clearly answered in supervisions.**
- **All students should receive constructive feedback on their work.**
- **Variable teaching quality should be monitored.**
- **The means by which supervisors are assigned to students should be transparent to students.**

## 4.12 Modern and Medieval Languages (MML)

126 MML students responded to the survey (18.75% of the students studying MML in the University). 92% find that their supervision work relates very well or well to their course. 81% of MML students know exactly what to do or have a good idea, in line with general trends. There are also similar consistencies when it comes to managing work load; 33% of MML students always struggle or sometimes struggle with

their work compared to 32% generally. From students' comments, it appears they would appreciate more guidance with their supervision work:

*"More guidance as to how best tackle the subject of the essay would be very beneficial rather than having a completely new topic sprung upon you with no introduction."*

Students also commented that preparation is made more difficult by time pressures.

*"There are many books I would love to read but there is simply not enough time."*

*"Studying two languages I sometimes find that getting all supervision essays done for both every fortnight is quite difficult."*

MML students are less likely to make a contribution to supervisions than students in general, with 29% stating that they rarely or never want to make a contribution (compared to 24%). This does not appear to be the fault of the supervisor or other students (99% find both students and supervisors make contribution to supervisions either easy or very easy) but could possibly be related to group size.

*"Four is a bit much because it's much easier to hide."*

*"In groups of four it's impossible for everyone to feel like they've contributed."*

*"In larger groups I feel a bit lost in the discussion."*

98% of MML students find that their questions are answered either well or very well in supervisions, which is more than the general trend of 34%. MML students are also happier with their feedback (68% state that they receive very good or good feedback). Some students do still comment that feedback could be improved, and that quality of feedback can be variable. Students would appreciate clearer guidance on the current standard of their work and how it could be improved.

There are some students who do not enjoy their supervisions or find that their quality of supervisions varies. They are most likely to comment that they find their supervisor is intimidating and prone to 'lecturing' them.

*"The supervisor can be scornful if I ask a question about vocabulary he used that I don't understand."*

*"Some supervisors seem to feel it necessary to emphasise that they are a world authority on their subject (which they admittedly are) and are determined to dispute everything we say or write."*

However, MML students state that if they do have problems with their supervisors they find they are efficiently dealt with. Furthermore, MML students stand out from students in other subjects by being much more likely to make very positive comments about their supervisions, complimenting both the system as an excellent form of teaching and individual supervisors for being supportive.

*"The quality of supervisions is excellent ... they are on the whole informative, very useful and enjoyable."*

*"All my supervisors make sure that if we have problems with either content or quantity we can contact them to ask for help."*

*"I view supervisions as a chance to really improve and I regard myself as fortunate that we get them."*

#### **Recommendations:**

- **As far as possible, supervision groups should have fewer than four students.**
- **Variable quality in teaching should be monitored.**

## 4.13 Natural Sciences

245 Natural Sciences students responded to the survey (11.8% of the students who study Natural Sciences in the University). 96% find that their supervision work relates well to their course. The only problem that students highlight is that supervision work does not always fit in well with what is being covered at the time in lectures:

*“One of the main problems is when an essay is set on a topic that has not yet been covered in lectures.”*

*“You sometimes find that although the questions relate to the lecture material, the lecture notes are of little use when actually solving problems.”*

*“Work does not always seem to correspond with the topics being covered at that time in lectures.”*

82% of Natural Science students either know exactly what is expected of them or have a good idea. 33% state that they sometimes struggle or always struggle when preparing their supervision work. Both these responses follow general trends. Students appear to find there is a significant pressure on their time.

*“It is very difficult to balance subjects effectively, especially with the degree of extra reading required this year.”*

*“I’m often not given enough time, especially at the beginning of term. Work is often expected in too soon.”*

Students also appear to find that organisational problems can affect their preparation for supervisions. For example, supervisions are not spread out evenly throughout the term and supervisors don’t communicate with each other when setting work.

*“There needs to be better organisation of when the supervisions are. They seem to occur in clumps.”*

*“Supervisors don’t coordinate setting of work so we end up with three essays one week and none the next.”*

Compared to students in other subjects, Natural Science students are more likely to find that they do not contribute often or do not contribute at all to supervisions (29% compared to 24%). Yet as with students in general this does not appear to be because of supervisors or other students actively preventing contribution. There are a few students who report that they feel intimidated in supervisions.

*“Supervisors can be so scary that I don’t want to open my mouth.”*

*“The maths supervisor makes you feel stupid all the time.”*

*“Supervisions are scary – they are just like weekly interviews.”*

Students also tend to comment that contribution can be limited by the size of the supervision group. When students are in groups larger than four they tend to comment that it is difficult for all students to make a contribution and they feel that when making a contribution it is ‘wasting time’.

*“Being in large groups makes it difficult to make comments and ask personal questions – there isn’t time and there are always one or two students who dominate.”*

88% of Natural Science students find their questions are answered well or fairly well in supervisions.

*“Some supervisors are very open to questions and won’t be happy until I’ve really understood the answer.”*

For the 12% who believe that questions are not answered well, the main problem appears to be that supervisors are not adequately prepared to answer their questions.

Several students comment that supervisions feel more like lectures than discussions, and whilst some students state that this is not a problem, for others this can limit the usefulness of the supervision.

*"A lot of the time supervisions can seem more like interviews than anything to do with learning."*

*"Some supervisors seem to forget it is a teaching / learning exercise, not an interview."*

A similar number to students in general find that they receive very good or good feedback (56%), with slightly more than students in general receiving poor or no feedback (16%). Students generally comment that feedback on their work could be improved.

*"It would be nice at least to have some comment more than a tick at the end!"*

*"For one particular module I have found my supervisor very negative about my work yet does not offer any constructive points on how to improve."*

Several students made positive comments about their experience of supervisions, but far more commented on the variable quality of supervisions. Several students comment that they have experienced a wide range of quality of teaching.

*"I have three supervisors this year. One is very helpful, one is middlingly helpful and one is unhelpful."*

*"My supervisors have varied in ability hugely."*

*"Some supervisors are excellent whereas others can leave you confused."*

Several students comment that some form of mandatory training or standardisation could address this issue.

#### **Recommendations:**

- **As far as possible, supervisions should be spread out throughout the term and work set a reasonable amount of time in advance.**
- **As far as possible, supervision groups should have less than four students.**
- **Supervisors should be encouraged to attend training and training should include guidance about effective teaching and communication skills.**
- **Students should receive constructive feedback on their work.**
- **Variable teaching quality should be monitored.**

## 4.14 Philosophy

21 Philosophy students responded to the survey (13% of the students studying Philosophy in the University) and, of these students, 95% found that their supervision work relates closely to their course. In line with other subjects, 81% either know exactly what to do or have a good idea. Philosophy students are more likely to be able to manage their work load than students in general (76% find that they manage well or quite well compared to 68% of students in general). From students' comments, this appears to be because they find their supervisors supportive.

*"In the Philosophy department they're very well organised and make sure that everyone who needs it has guidance on what to do and how to do it."*

*"There is a lot support available from supervisors if I am unsure about anything."*

Philosophy students appear more confident in making contributions to supervisions than students from other subjects, with 90% contributing either very often or fairly often. All students find questions are answered well or very well. Philosophy students are more likely than students in general to receive good or very good feedback (67% compared to 56%).

Several students point out that although the majority of their supervisions are excellent, there are some exceptions.

*"Most of them are fine, but some are exceptionally bad!"*

*"The standard of supervisor does vary and not all are as well equipped as others."*

Those who have more negative experiences of supervisions say that this is because they, on occasions, feel intimidated or find their confidence is undermined by unconstructive comments. However, for every negative comment made, positive comments are also made.

*"The supervision system works very well in Philosophy."*

*"I think the system is really good, especially in a subject like Philosophy where the one on one supervisions really allow you to develop new ideas and expand the ones you already had."*

#### **Recommendation:**

- **Variable teaching quality should be monitored.**

## 4.15 Social and Political Sciences (SPS)

39 SPS students responded to the survey (10.3% of students studying SPS in the University). 95% find that their supervision work relates very well or fairly well to the course. Fewer SPS students find that it relates very well than students in other subjects (46% compared to 55%). Students' comments indicate that the main problem appears to be that supervision work does not coincide well with lecture courses. SPS students are also less likely to know what is expected of them with 18% knowing exactly what to do compared to 28% of students from all subjects. Students comment that preparation could be helped by more precise guidance.

*"Some supervisors set much more complicated questions than others with much less obviously relevant recommended reading."*

*"It is difficult to know what the supervisor is looking for."*

*"We need more guidance about key issues within the question before the essay is written."*

SPS students are less likely to struggle with their work load than students from all subjects, although 28% sometimes or always struggle.

SPS students are more likely to make a contribution to supervisions than students in general; 15% of SPS students would not contribute often or not contribute at all compared to 24% of students in general. However, students' comments suggest that they would appreciate supervisors more actively managing discussions to ensure that other students do not dominate. Some students comment that they do not like an argumentative, competitive environment in supervisions.

*"Supervisors should all receive training in coordinating discussion and learning and making sure no one feels stupid or unable to speak or that their opinions or questions aren't valuable."*

SPS students are less likely than students in other subjects to find that their questions are answered well in supervisions. 20% of students find questions are not answered well or not answered at all. From comments, several students find that they tend to be lectured or interviewed rather than engaged in a discussion in a supervision.

*"I never get taught anything or engaged in discussion, just asked questions and tested."*

*"Supervisions feel like tests."*

SPS students are also less likely to receive good or very good feedback than students from all subjects (49% compared to 56% of students from all subjects, with only 8% receiving very good feedback). Students comment on the need for constructive and sensitive feedback with clearer indications of what a good essay is.

Despite having more negative experiences of the supervision system in some areas than students in other subjects, several students comment that they appreciate their supervisions and find them very useful.

*"Supervisions are superb"*

*"Supervisions are very helpful – much better than the system at other universities."*

#### **Recommendations:**

- **Students should be given more guidance on what is expected from them.**
- **Supervisors should be trained in communication and teaching skills.**
- **Students should be given constructive feedback on their work.**

## 4.16 Theology

20 Theology students responded to the survey (11.4% of the students studying Theology in the University). 90% found their supervision work relates well or very well to their course. 85% know exactly what to do or have a good idea of what to do with the work that has been set however some acknowledge they have a difficulty with the work load (35% struggle or always struggle). Reasons given include the time pressures of work supervisors setting assignments at the same time and resources not being available in libraries.

Theology students appear confident in contributing to supervisions; 90% state that they contribute very often or often. Students comment that small supervision groups make it easy to contribute and they feel happy contributing in front of other students. However, several students also find that sometimes supervisions are more 'lecture' based than 'discussion' based.

*"Some supervisions are an excuse for supervisors to give another lecture."*

All students report that their questions are answered well or very well in supervisions. However, in line with general trends, Theology students would appreciate more feedback on their work with 10% reporting they have no or little feedback.

*"I often find it quite difficult to get advice on how to improve my essays. They seem quite happy with me to carry on getting average 2.1 marks and never seem to encourage me or expect anything more of me and seem surprised if I ask for advice on how to do better."*

Several of the students comment that they find the supervision system works very well, with one student professing it to be "*wonderful*". For others, the quality of supervisions varies, although as another student says "*the majority are very good.*"

#### **Recommendation:**

- **Students should be given constructive feedback on their work.**

## 4.17 Veterinary Medicine

25 students from Veterinary Medicine responded to the survey (13.1% of the students studying Veterinary Medicine in the University). 96% believe that their work relates closely to their course. Whilst 80% have a good idea of what is expected in supervision work, only 16% know exactly what to do. However, 84% find that they manage well with the work load; this is more than students in other subjects.

Students in Veterinary Medicine are less likely to contribute to supervisions with 28% stating that they contribute rarely or not at all. Although they overwhelmingly state that their supervisors make it easy for them to contribute, more Veterinary Medics than students from other subjects find that other students can make it difficult or impossible to contribute (12% compared to 6%). 92% believe that supervisors answer their questions very well or well, but 12% receive little or no feedback.

Comments from Veterinary Medics show a clear trend; they find that the quality of their supervisions varies. Whilst at some times they experience excellent teaching, get good feedback and are well prepared for supervisions, at other times they have more negative experiences.

*“They are extremely varied ... Some are excellent. Most have room for improvement (in different areas depending upon the supervisor). Some have been absolutely worthless.”*

*“One of my supervisors is excellent – during supervisions and constructive feedback on work set. Unfortunately the other two are nowhere near as good.”*

*“I have three main supervisors, two of whom are excellent and one who is not so good.”*

### Recommendation:

- **Variable quality in teaching should be monitored.**

## 4.18 Conclusion

Although the number of student responses for each subject is not high enough to lead to any firm conclusions, trends can be identified, suggesting different strengths and weaknesses in the supervision system in each subject.

### 4.18.1 Summary of strengths and good practice in the system

- Maths, History, Economics, Classics, Engineering, Philosophy, Theology and Medical students are likely to know exactly what is expected from them in supervision work.
- History, SPS, Geography, Classics, Veterinary Medicine, Philosophy and Medical students find their work load manageable.
- Medical students and Philosophy students believe that their supervisions are more efficiently organised than students from other subjects.
- Classics, Mathematics, History, Geography, Philosophy, Theology, Natural Science and Medical students believe that their supervision work relates particularly closely to their course.
- Archaeology and Anthropology, History, Classics, Philosophy, Computer Science and Theology students are generally positive about the supervision environment.
- Law, Classics, MML, SPS, History and Philosophy students find their supervisions are particularly useful to understanding course content.
- Classics, Philosophy and History students find their supervisors are especially supportive and understanding.
- English, Law, SPS and Veterinary Medicine students are particularly confident about contributing to supervisions.

- Geography, MML, Veterinary Medicine, History and Classics students' questions are answered particularly well in supervisions.
- Classics and MML students are particularly satisfied with levels of feedback.

#### 4.18.2 Summary of Recommendations

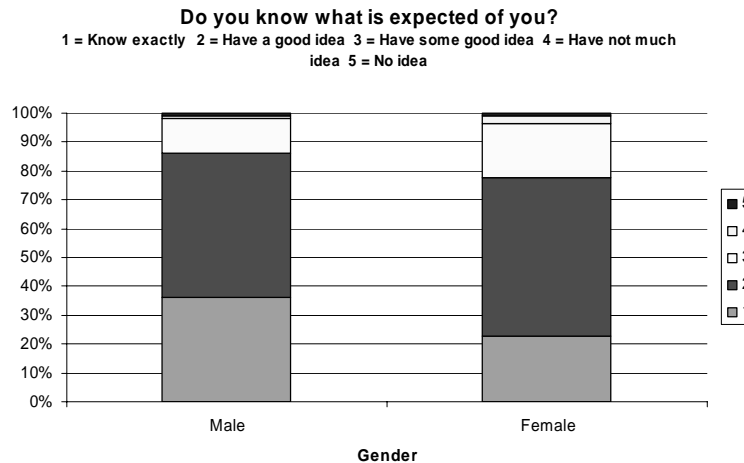
- In Archaeology and Anthropology, Geography, Natural Sciences and Computer Science, the organisation of supervisions should be improved.
- In Computer Science and Economics, all supervisors should be aware of course content.
- In Law and SPS, students should be given more guidance on what is expected of them in their supervision work.
- In Economics, Archaeology and Anthropology, English, Law, Mathematics, Geography, Natural Sciences, Medical Science, SPS and Theology, students should be provided with constructive feedback on their supervision work.
- In Mathematics, Medical Science and English, students' queries should be addressed in supervisions.
- In Natural Sciences, SPS, Computer Science, Economics, Mathematics, Medical Sciences, Engineering and English, supervisors should attend supervisor training sessions to enhance communication and teaching skills.
- In History, Computer Science, Archaeology and Anthropology, Economics, English, Law, Philosophy, MML, Natural Sciences, Veterinary Medicine and Medical Sciences, student feedback should be monitored to address the issue of variable quality.
- In MML, Medical Sciences and Natural Sciences, supervision groups should be kept as small as possible.

## 5 Gender

The survey elicited 421 responses from students who defined as male and 626 responses from students who defined as female. Whilst it is not expected that gender would affect whether students obtain a supervision report or the size of their supervision group, it might be a factor that could affect how the student experiences the supervision system. For example, this might be because of different learning styles or differences in how male and female students find interaction with supervisors and other students.

### 5.1 Preparation for supervisions

The following graph shows whether male and female students know what to do with the supervision work that is set for them.



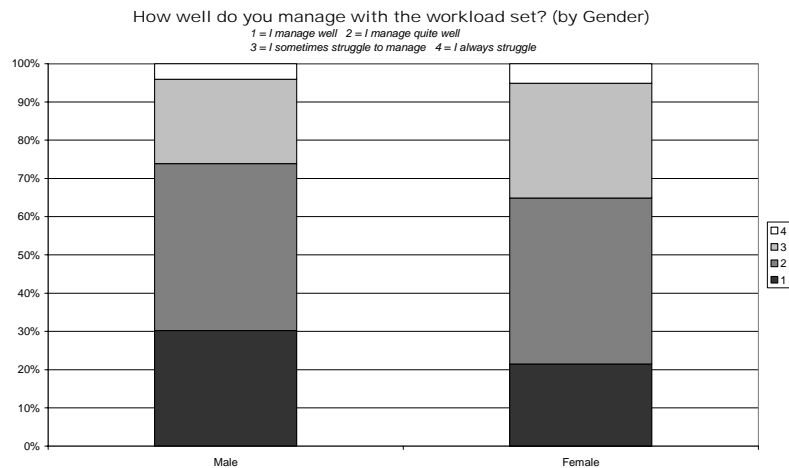
Whilst both male and female students are more likely to know what to do than have little idea of what to do, it appears that male students are more sure about what is expected of them. 86% of male students have a good idea of what to do compared to 78% of female students. 36% of male students know exactly what to do compared to 23% of female students. Both male and female students are likely to comment that they would appreciate more guidance on what is expected from them with their supervision work:

*“More assistance in figuring out what I have to do and how best to go about it would be appreciated.” (Male)*

*“We need better explanation of what the question is asking as it is not necessarily clear before you write it.” (Female).*

However, more female than male students are likely to comment that better guidance is important to them. Female students are more likely to seek for clarification of what is ‘expected’ of them in terms of amount of work or time spent on work rather than what the work means.

A similar pattern appears when students are asked how well they manage with their work. As the graph below shows, male students are more likely to assert that they can manage their work load than female students.



26% of male students admit to sometimes or always struggling with their work compared to 35% of female students. Whereas 31% of male students manage well, only 22% of female students manage well. Managing work load is related to whether students know what is expected of them, but as shown earlier, can also be related to issues of organisation and pressures on time.

Both female and male students comment that problems can be caused by poor organisation of supervisions, either with work being set too late or supervisions being 'bunched' together.

*"I can have up to four sets of supervision work for different supervisions all at once." (Male)*

*"Supervisions are set very close together and the supervisors all think their discipline is the most important and refuse to rearrange supervisions." (Female)*

Male and female students are both equally likely to make comments about the work load being too much for the time available and this creating a great deal of pressure on them.

*"There's not enough time to go into depth" (Male)*

*"Sometimes there's too little time to prepare everything." (Female).*

However, there does appear to be some difference between how male and female students react to work load. Male students are more likely to comment that the pressure does not necessarily make the experience of supervision negative.

*"There is a lot of work, but that is to be expected."*

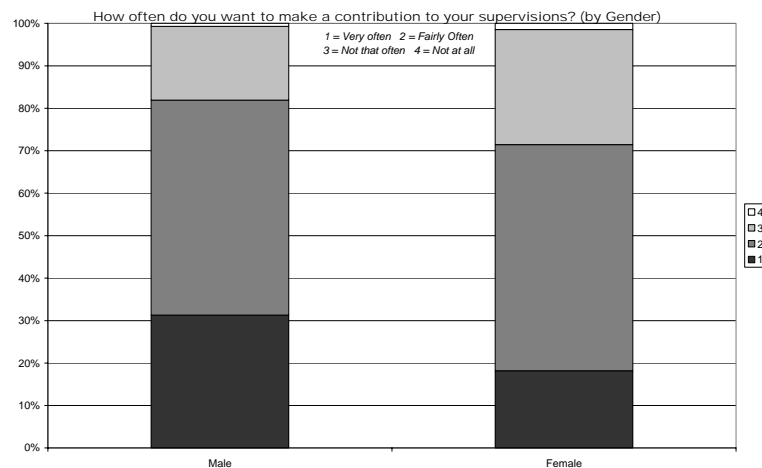
*"There is a lot of work but it is rewarding and I like the fact the supervision system forces you to work."*

By contrast, female students are more likely to talk about negative effects of the pressure caused by the work load.

*"I feel especially this year I'm regularly set too much work (bearing in mind the amount of reading needed) and that supervisors should set more realistic amounts of work ... At times I have to write three different essays just for one supervision each with different reading lists. I find that takes a lot of time to prepare and there isn't time in the supervision to discuss all the points in the depth."*

*"I think they sometimes they set us more work than is feasible to achieve knowing that we will not be able to finish it. This is fine as long as we students are aware of this and don't feel disheartened and stupid when we cannot achieve it all."*

## 5.2 Experience in supervisions



When asked about whether they make a contribution to supervisions, 27% of female students state that they do not contribute often compared to 18% of male students. More significantly, whereas 31% of male students often contribute to supervisions, only 18% of female students state this. Whereas both male and female students are more likely to state that other students and their supervisors make it easy or fairly easy for them to contribute, there is some difference. 68% of male students believe that their supervisor makes it easy to contribute to the supervision compared to 58% of female students. 65% of male students believe that other students make it easy to contribute compared to 55% of female students. This difference emerges in students' comments.

*"Sometimes I feel that other people in my supervisions would contribute more if I was not there. I think supervisions can become a bit biased if other people do not feel happy contribute for whatever reason. Although this is obviously to my benefit." (Male)*

*"I like to grill my supervisors rather than let them grill me." (Male)*

*"Some supervisors are not fair in giving equal attention and stopping some students dominating all the time" (Female)*

*"Arrogant public school men do still dominate and intimidate too often in supervisions. Too much competitive arguing, not enough constructive cooperative learning and balanced discussion." (Female)*

*"My one-on-one supervision is dominated by my supervisor. I always feel intimidated in my supervisions." (Female)*

There are several male students who report that they do not feel confident making a contribution in supervisions, just as there are several female students who are happy to contribute to supervisions. However, it is more likely that female students will report that they do not want to contribute for fear of sounding stupid and find that there are students who dominate supervisions. Male students are more likely to report that they would rather contribute than not say anything at all.

When identifying skills that they find positive in a supervisor, there is much that male and female students agree on. They appreciate a supervisor who can explain issues to them clearly. They do not like to be 'interviewed' in a supervision and they appreciate the opportunity to ask questions. They are also equally as likely to comment on their dislike of 'lecturing' in a supervision, and how they prefer a discussion based supervision.

*"I think that some supervisions are an excuse for supervisors to give another lecture." (Male)*

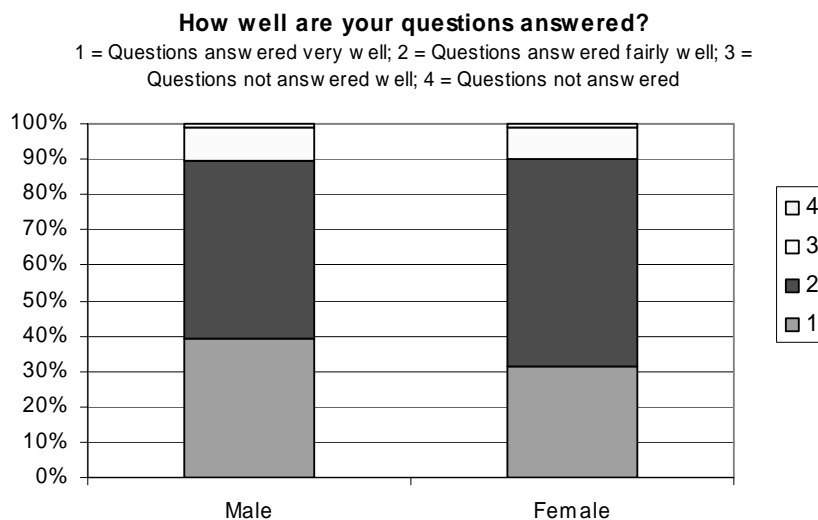
*"I dislike supervisions that are an exercise in the supervisor telling you everything he knows. That's what lectures are for." (Female).*

Male and female students also agree that they do not like a supervisor to impress their status on students.

*“The best supervisor seems to be the one who feels no need to impress his eminence on you.” (Male)*

*“I find many supervisors would rather show how intelligent they are compared to you.” (Female)*

The graph below shows how well female and male students find their questions are answered:



89% of male students and 90% of female students find that their questions are answered well or fairly well. Slightly more male students find that their questions are answered ‘very well’ (39% compared to 31%). From the comments made, male students are more likely to be concerned about their questions being answered than female students are.

*“Academics need to be able to answer questions more thoughtfully and directly.” (Male)*

Both male and female students are concerned that they receive constructive feedback on their supervision work. Similar numbers of male and female students report that they find feedback is poor. However, more male than female students report that they get very good feedback (24% compared to 18%). Male and female students agree on what good feedback is; constructive comments, advice on how to improve and an indication of what level they are performing at.

Several male and female students report positive supervision experiences and praise their supervisors and the system. In all areas, neither male nor female students have an overwhelmingly negative experience. However, male students are far more likely to make positive comments about the system.

*“The supervision system suits those who like working independently and for those so unaccustomed it teaches a valuable way of working”. (Male)*

*“The supervision system is generally excellent.” (Male)*

*“Supervisions are the best thing about the academic environment in Cambridge. They allow a free flow of information and discussion of ideas.” (Male)*

Whilst obviously many female students make similarly positive comments, they are also more likely to comment that the supervision style does not always suit them.

*“The supervision system benefits competitive bulshitters” (Female)*

*"I think the system of teaching and learning is quite male-biased. I like to read a lot and get a big overview of ideas but in supervisions it doesn't seem to make much difference and someone else may get as good a mark without having done so much work." (Female)*

Female students are also more likely to report instances where they have felt uncomfortable or have met directly with sexism in a supervision.

*"I do have one supervision with a male supervisor and I can tell the difference. It took me a while to adapt myself. I can really tell the men feel more comfortable in the supervision and that some other girls are still very uncomfortable."*

*"Some of the supervisors are biased against women and I found the sexism I faced from one of my supervisors last year difficult to deal with."*

*"A male supervisor is convinced that women cannot answer mathematical questions and explains each slowly unasked."*

This appears to be reflected in the fact that, although the vast majority of both male and female students feel comfortable or very comfortable approaching their supervisor, 40% of male students feel very comfortable compared to 27% of female students.

## 5.3 Conclusion

Whilst male and female students are more likely to have a positive experience of the supervision system than a negative one, it appears that male students tend to have a better experience of the supervision system than female students. Female students tend to find preparation for supervision more difficult and in the supervision find it more difficult to contribute. There is little difference in the teaching qualities that male and female students value; both think it is important that supervisions are discussion-based rather than 'lectures' or 'interviews', both appreciate supervisors who are supportive and offer clear explanations and both appreciate clear and constructive feedback on their work. The main difference is that female students are more likely to find that the style of supervision teaching does not suit them, and in a small number of cases they find that they have uncomfortable experiences in supervisions.

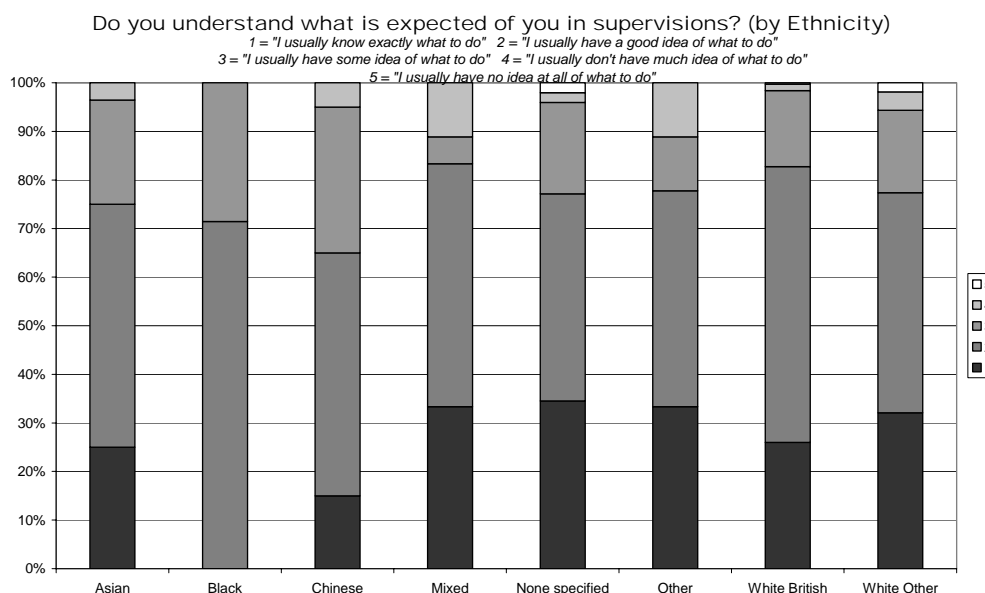
**Recommendation: That supervisor training should include gender awareness and there should be an emphasis on effective communication and teaching skills to ensure that all students feel comfortable in the supervision system. Anonymous feedback or an anonymous reporting system would help ensure that any student who experiences sexism or sexual harassment can report it.**

## 6 Ethnicity

As with gender, ethnicity might be another factor that could affect students' experience in supervisions. This might be because of cultural differences or differences in how different groups find interaction with supervisors and other students. The vast majority of respondents to the survey defined themselves as white British, however it is important to see if the smaller numbers who defined as either Asian, black, Chinese, mixed or white other have varying experiences in supervision. It should be noted that the numbers are small, yet mostly proportional to the number of students from that ethnic background in the University<sup>2</sup>. Trends can still be identified and tentative conclusions drawn.

### 6.1 Preparation for supervisions

The graph below indicates whether students know what is expected of them in supervisions.



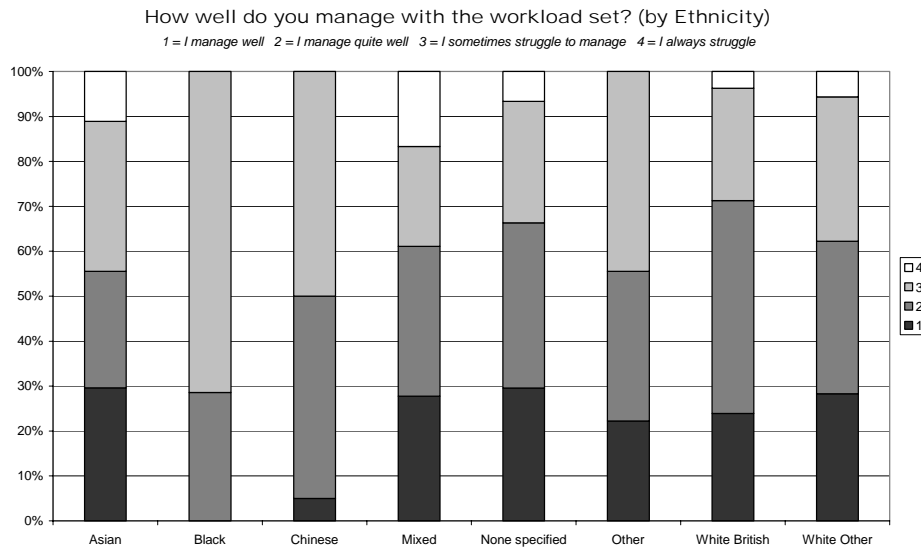
Whilst all students are much more likely to know what to do than have little or no idea, there does appear to be some difference in how confident different groups feel with their supervision work. White British and mixed background students are most likely to have a good idea of what is expected of them (83%). This compares to 75% of Asian students, 71% of black students and 76% of students who define as white other. Chinese students are least likely to know exactly what is expected of them with 65% having a good idea and only 15% knowing exactly what to do. Of the 71% of black students who state that they have a good idea of what is expected of them, none state that they know exactly what to do.

*“Sometimes a large amount of time has to be spent trying to see exactly what the issue is ... I feel that maybe just a bit of help from the supervisor will make life much easier” (Chinese student)*

*“It is sometimes difficult to know what is directly relevant and what is just set for background or accessory reading.” (Black student)*

<sup>2</sup> Asian students make up 4.5% of the undergraduate student population and made up 2.5% of respondents to the survey. Black students make up 0.8% of the undergraduate student population and 0.6% of respondents to the survey. Chinese students make up 4.3% of the undergraduate student population and 1.8% of respondents to the survey. Students from a mixed race background make up 2.6% of the undergraduate student population and 1.7% of respondents. Students from a white other background make up 5.3% of the undergraduate student population and 4.9% of respondents. Statistics are taken from Student Statistics 2003 – 2004.

The graph below indicates how manageable students find their work load.



Whilst 29% of Asian students manage their work well (higher than the percentage of students in general), a higher percentage than average also report that they sometimes or always struggle (43%). Student comments indicate that they find a lot of work is set, but some find ways in which to manage this:

*“Preparation is basically time management and making sure it gets done.” (Asian student)*

Students from a mixed background and a white other background show a similar trend with more reporting they can manage well than the average (28% and 27%) but more also reporting that they struggle (39% and 38%).

*“It can be a struggle but I usually manage it” (Mixed background student)*

*“I usually prepare work to demand” (Mixed background student)*

*“The work load is large and difficult but that is the nature of Cambridge.” (white other student)*

Black students are also more likely to report that they struggle with work load than students in general (71%). The small number of respondents might mean that this is as a result of the subject that they do rather than indicating a general trend, but student comments do indicate that pressures on time are considerable.

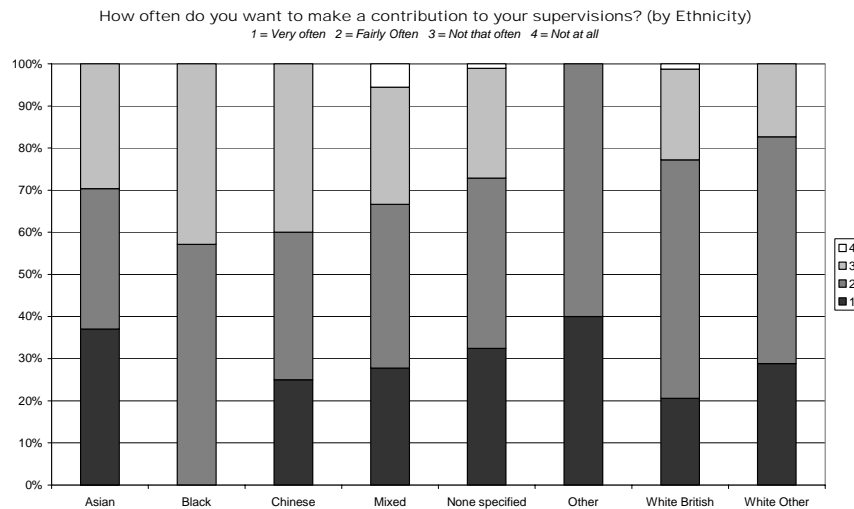
*“Some areas simply cannot be compressed without cutting out vital information so it’s mostly a matter of doing the best you can with the time available.” (Black student)*

50% of Chinese students who responded to the survey sometimes or always struggle and only 5% state that they manage well with the work load. Students’ comments indicate that this is because of poor organisation of supervision, lack of adequate guidance and the size of the task.

*“There are very tight schedules.” (Chinese student)*

*“Doing supervision work often takes up rather a large chunk of my week.” (Chinese student).*

## 6.2 Experience in supervisions



Asian students and students from a mixed or white other background are more likely to want to contribute to supervisions than students from all backgrounds. 36% of Asian students, 28% of students from a mixed background and 29% of students from a white other background contribute very often to supervisions. However, Asian students and students from a mixed background are also more likely than students in general to report that they would not contribute often or at all to supervisions (29% and 33%).

*“The first supervision I had with four people I felt quite intimidated cos the others seemed to know so much more and I hardly opened my mouth.” (Student from a mixed background)*

Chinese and black students are more likely to not contribute often or at all to supervisions. 43% of black students and 40% of Chinese students state that they would not contribute often or at all.

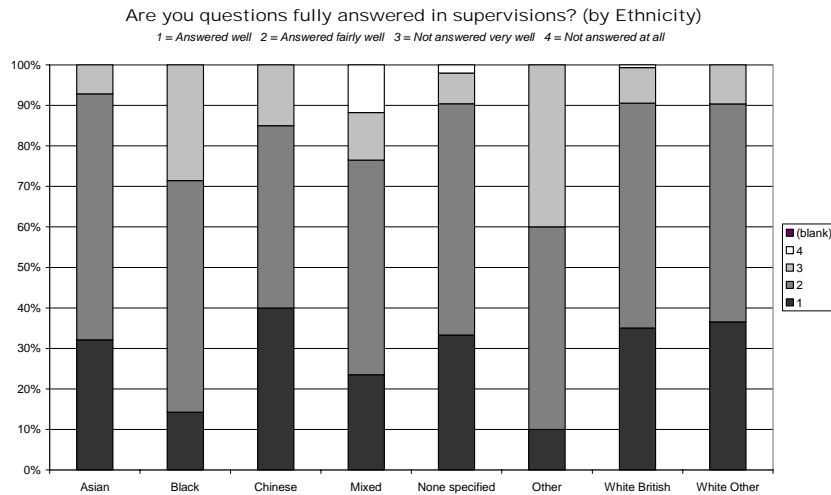
*“I’ve been interrupted so many times and I have no idea why when I’m in the middle of saying something.” (Chinese student)*

Neither Asian, Chinese, black students or students from a mixed race background feel that their supervisors actively prevent them from making a contribution. However, Chinese and black students are less likely to find their supervisor makes it easy for them to contribute (55% and 57% compared to 62% in the general trend). Asian and Chinese students are more likely than students in general to find that other students make contribution difficult. 14% of Asian students and 20% of Chinese students find that other students make contribution quite difficult or impossible compared to 7% of students from all backgrounds.

*“It is the nature of the supervision style that means those who know all the answers to the questions don’t shut up.” (Chinese student)*

Students tend to agree on the qualities that they value in a supervisor. Students from all ethnic backgrounds agree that the supervisor should be able to explain issues clearly and should avoid one-sided supervisions where they ‘lecture’ students or ask them a lot of questions.

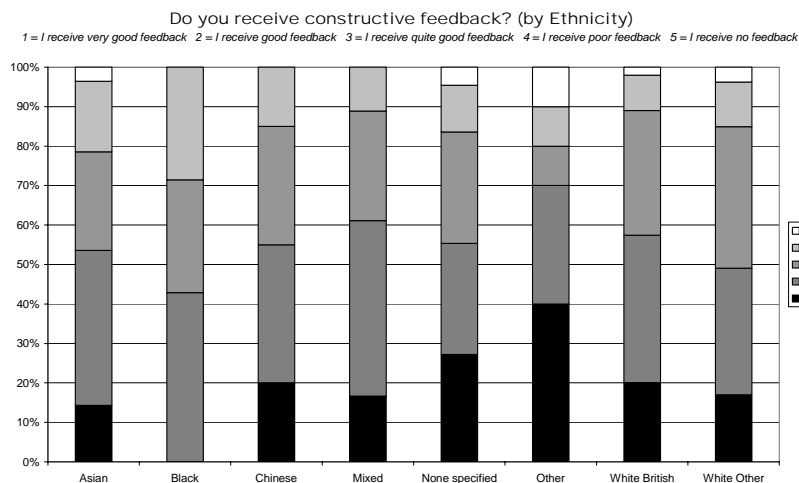
The graph below indicates how well students believe their questions are answered in supervisions.



Asian and White British students are more likely to find that their questions are answered very well in supervisions (39% and 35% compared to an average of 34%) yet Asian students are also more likely to find that their questions are answered poorly or not at all (29% compared to an average of 10%). Black and Chinese students and students from a mixed or white other background are also more likely to find that their questions are answered poorly or not at all (14% of black students, 15% of Chinese students, 17% of students from a mixed background and 11% of students from a white other background compared to 10% of students from all backgrounds).

*“There is often a seeming unwillingness to address my questions completely seriously” (Student from a mixed race background)*

When asked about whether they receive adequate feedback on their work, students respond as follows:



Students from a white British or mixed background are more likely than students in general to receive very good or good feedback (58% and 61% compared to an average of 56%). Asian and black students and students from a white other background are less likely to receive very good or good feedback (53%, 43% and 49%). 22% of Asian students, 29% of black students and 15% of students from a white other background find that they receive poor or no feedback compared to an average of 13%.

*“Some supervisors rarely write any comments on my work” (Student from white other background).*

*“Supervisions could be improved by making it mandatory for supervisions to give constructive criticisms.” (black student)*

*"I find that comments on essays are unhelpful and mainly refer to minor grammatical changes with little comment on style and content." (Asian student).*

When asked how comfortable they feel approaching supervisors with their concerns, Asian, white British and white other students and students from a mixed background are as likely as students in general to find that they would be very comfortable approaching their supervisor. However, Asian students are also more likely to find that they would not be comfortable (22% compared to 18% of students from all backgrounds). Black and Chinese students are also less likely to feel comfortable approaching their supervisor; 57% of black students and 20% of Chinese students stating they would feel not very comfortable or not comfortable at all, compared to an average of 18%.

When commenting on their experience as a whole, students from all backgrounds make positive comments about the supervision system. However, Asian students and students from a mixed or white other background are more likely to make positive comments than Chinese and black students.

*"I always get a lot out of them if I concentrate." (Asian student)*

*"The supervision system is very helpful" (Student from a mixed background)*

*"I have been very happy with my experience in supervisions." (Student from white other background).*

## 6.3 Conclusion

Regardless of ethnic background all students are more likely to have a positive experience of supervisions but some other trends can be identified.

Asian students who participated in the survey tend to find that they are less likely to know what is expected of them in their supervision work and in supervisions in general. Although more report that they manage very well with their work than students from all backgrounds, they are also more likely to report that they struggle. This tendency towards 'polarisation' in the system is also reflected in the fact that Asian students are more likely to contribute often and more likely to not contribute at all. They are both more likely to find that their questions are answered very well and answered very poorly. They are also more likely to experience both very good and very poor feedback. Again, when it comes to approaching their supervisor with their concerns, Asian students are more likely than students from all backgrounds to be very comfortable whilst also being more likely to be entirely uncomfortable. For Asian students who participated in the survey their experience of supervisions is truly variable.

Very few black students responded to the survey, although the number who did is proportional to their population in the University. Black students who participated in the survey are more likely to struggle with their work and not know what is expected of them compared to students in general. In supervisions, it appears that they contribute less than other students and are less likely to find that their supervisors make it very easy to contribute. They are also more likely to find that their questions are answered poorly and that feedback on work is poor. They are less likely to find that they are comfortable approaching supervisors with their concerns.

Chinese students who participated in the survey are less likely to know what is expected of them in supervision work and much more likely than students from other backgrounds to struggle with their work load. They feel less comfortable than students in general in contributing to supervisions, and are more likely to find that other students and their supervisors make contribution difficult. They would not feel as comfortable approaching their supervisor with their concerns. They are more likely than in the general trend to find that questions are answered poorly but they do not differ in how well they rate the feedback they receive.

Students from a mixed background who participated in the survey differ little from the general trend in knowing what is expected of them in supervision work. They are both more likely to struggle and more likely to feel they can manage very well. More than in the general trend find that they would make no contribution to supervisions but more also report that they would feel very comfortable making a

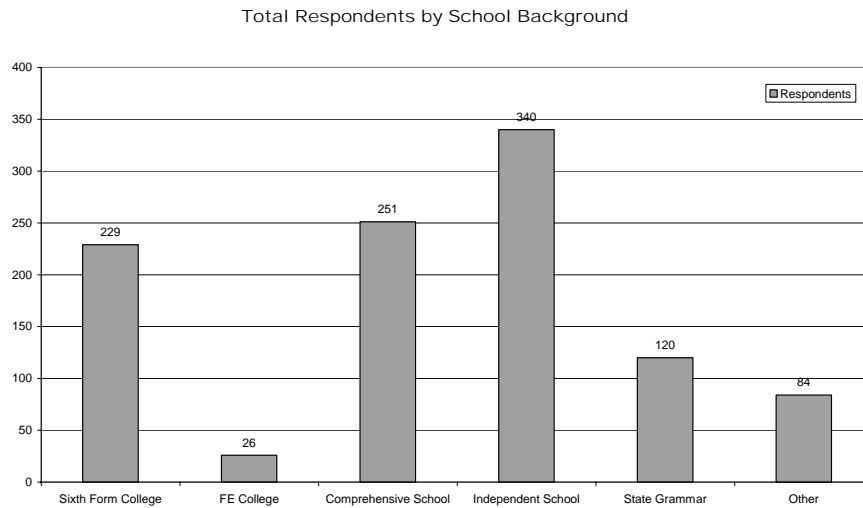
contribution and they are as comfortable as other students are with approaching their supervisor with concerns. More students from a mixed background than students from all backgrounds find that their questions are not answered well in supervisions but more receive very good or good feedback.

Students from a white other background who participated in the survey are both more likely to report that they manage well and more likely to report that they struggle with their work than students from all backgrounds. They are also less likely to know what is expected of them. They appear more likely to contribute to supervisions than students from all backgrounds but are less likely to find that their questions are answered well and receive good feedback. They are as comfortable as students in general with approaching a supervisor with their concerns.

**Recommendation: Supervisor training should include racial and cultural awareness training in recognition that there are some groups of students who do not appear to have as positive an experience of supervisions as others.**

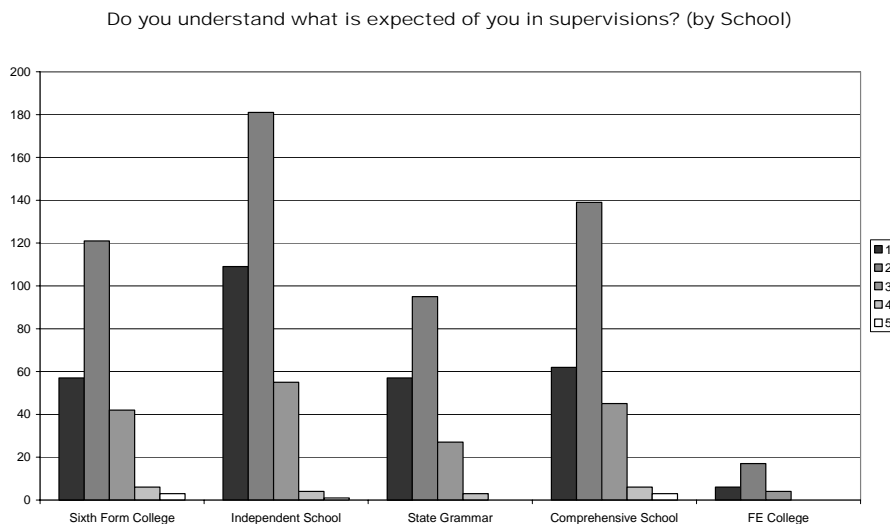
## 7 School background

It might be expected that school background could be another factor affecting experience in supervisions. This might be because different school backgrounds promote different approaches to learning that may or may not aid students in the supervision system. The graph below gives an indication of the range of school backgrounds amongst those who participated in the survey.



### 7.1 Preparation for supervisions

There is very little difference between students from different school backgrounds when asked whether they know what is expected from them.



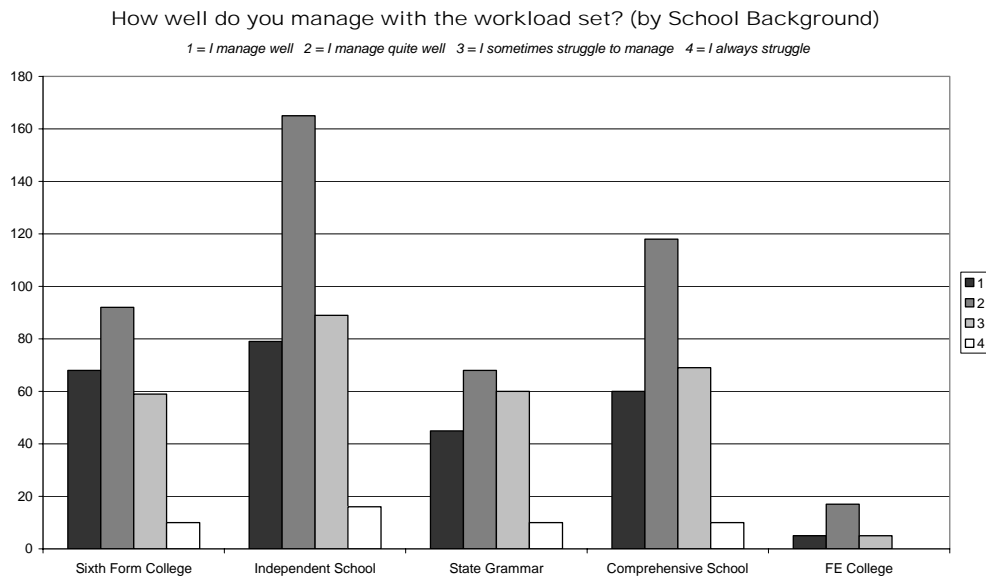
Students from FE Colleges and state grammar schools are slightly more likely than students in general to have a good idea of what is expected of them (84% compared to 81% of students on average). Regardless of school background, all students agree that guidance on how best to prepare for supervisions is useful. Students from FE Colleges, comprehensive schools and independent schools are most likely to mention that this is very important to them.

*“Supervisors should be trained in some way so that they know how to make a useful supervision handout for each student to use to prepare the next supervision.” (FE College student)*

*“Better knowledge prior to supervisions would give us a better idea of how to plan our time.” (Comprehensive school student)*

*“Comprehensive reading lists are usually the best way to go; it would have been helpful to have been given more advice about how to research topics in the first year.” (Independent school student)*

There are no significant differences in how well students from different school backgrounds manage their work load.



Students from FE Colleges manage best with the work load with 19% reporting that they sometimes struggle or always struggle compared to 32% of students on average. Students from independent schools and state grammar school are more likely to find that they struggle with 37% of students from both independent and state grammar acknowledging that they sometimes or always struggle. Students from sixth form colleges, comprehensive schools or other schools are similar to students in general. All students, regardless of background, are likely to comment on the pressures created by work but there are some slight differences in how the pressure created by work load is perceived.

Students from sixth form colleges and comprehensive schools are more likely to comment on the need for more time so that they can read as widely as possible, or do as much as possible of the work that has been set in order to gain a complete understanding. These students are also more likely to find it 'unreasonable' if too much work is set for them.

*“I would like to have time to read around the subject.” (Sixth form college student)*

*“I like to have attempted all the questions set so that I know what I do or don't understand.” (Comprehensive school student)*

Students from independent schools, despite admitting to struggling with work, are less likely to see this as a negative part of the supervision system and believe that this is what to be expected from Cambridge.

*“Cambridge is about stretching one – it would be inappropriate to be set work that was immediately obvious, and it would be boring!” (Independent school student)*

*"I am a busy person and would hope to be struggling to complete the work set on occasions. Otherwise I would either not be taking the work seriously enough, organising my time well or not being set enough." (Independent school student).*

Another feature of comments from students from state grammar schools and independent schools is that they would like more variety in the work that they are set and more opportunity to choose how to work.

*"Compulsory supervisions are an unnecessary waste of time with supervisors setting lots of work that interferes with your own studies. It is very useful to be able to work in your own way." (Independent school student)*

*"They should vary every week what they give us. An essay a week is boring." (Independent school student)*

*"It would be more beneficial for us in the long term to concentrate on consolidating lecture material rather than writing essays which are time-consuming and less relevant." (State grammar student)*

## 7.2 Experience in supervisions

School background does not appear to affect the likelihood of a student making a contribution to supervisions. School background does not appear to affect how easy students find supervisors make it for them to contribute. There is some difference in how easy students find other students make it for them to contribute to supervisions, with students from FE colleges being less likely to find students making it easy (50% compared to 62% of students on average).

*"I am not a particularly shy and quiet person but I sometimes don't bother contributing and just switch off when I am in supervisions with some people. I don't really have problems with the supervisor, just other students." (FE College student).*

When describing skills that they value in a supervisor, students from sixth form colleges and comprehensive schools are most likely to mention that they value supervisors who explain clear ideas and issues; they are frustrated when this does not happen.

*"Some supervisors seem to have no skill in explaining and run through the material so fast little can be gained. It would be nice if supervisors could have some training." (Sixth form college student)*

*"Some academics are just useless at communicating through the medium of speech." (Comprehensive school student).*

FE College students and state grammar students are most likely to comment on the need for supervisions to be less like lectures and more discussion-based.

*"I'd like to see it get to the point where there is more of a discussion as opposed to it being a private lecture." (FE College student)*

*"Some supervisions feel more like lectures in a way" (State grammar student)*

A large number of independent school students comment on how they value supervisors being able to answer any questions that they have; these students find supervisions are less useful if this is not the case.

*"Certain supervisors are frequently unable to answer any other questions regarding the course." (Independent school student)*

*"Supervisors are often ill prepared for all but the easiest questions." (Independent school student).*

There is very little difference between students from different school backgrounds when asked how well students' questions are answered in supervisions.

Students from sixth form colleges and FE colleges are more likely to be satisfied with the feedback they receive (61% and 73% compared to 56% of students on average) whilst students from state grammar schools and independent schools are less likely to find feedback useful (47% find they get good feedback). However, students from all school backgrounds are similar in the comments they make about the need for constructive feedback.

## 7.3 Conclusion

School background appears to have little effect on how a student experiences their supervisions. Some minor trends can be identified. Students from a comprehensive school or sixth form college background are more likely to value the supervision system as a means to explore issues in more depth and believe it is important that a supervisor is able to communicate issues and ideas and give guidance on work. Students from FE Colleges are most likely to find supervision work manageable and appreciate the system when it promotes discussion of issues. Students from an independent school or state grammar background are more likely to comment on the need for more variety in the supervision system and more opportunities for independent learning. Independent school students are more likely to comment on the importance of supervisors being able to answer their questions satisfactorily and to have a wide knowledge of the subject that they teach. However, these trends are very general and there are few significant differences in the experiences of students according to their school background.

## 8 Disability

It is also important to establish whether students with disabilities have a positive experience in supervisions. A student's disability should not disadvantage them in any way and it is important to establish if the environment within supervisions suits all students. 25 students who defined themselves as having a disability responded to the survey. Students were asked to give brief details of disability and of those who did, 1 defined their disability as Irlen's Syndrome, 2 as Aspergers' Syndrome, 1 as deaf, 1 as visual problems, 1 as long term wrist and back conditions, 1 as ME and 5 as dyslexia. The other students chose not to give details of their disability.

### 8.1 Preparing for supervision

When preparing for supervisions, 27% sometimes struggle or always struggle with their work compared to 32% of students in general. 8% have little or no idea what is expected from them in their supervision compared to 3% of students on average. When commenting on preparation for supervisions, some students comment that more assistance could be given to help them.

*"More reading time would make my work more productive." (Student with dyslexia)*

*"I could do with more flexibility at times about being dyslexic and need library books for longer than I get them." (Student with dyslexia)*

### 8.2 Experience in supervision

In supervisions, students with disabilities are more likely to want to make a contribution with 80% stating that they contribute very often or fairly often compared to 76% of students on average. Students also believe that supervisors and other students make it very easy or fairly easy for them to contribute (92% find both supervisors and students make it easy compared to 96% of students on average). Students do feel slightly less comfortable approaching supervisors with concerns. 28% state that they do not feel very comfortable approaching their supervisor.

Students with a disability are less likely to find that their questions are answered fully; 28% believe that they are not answered well or not answered at all compared to 10% of students on average. Students with a disability are less likely to receive constructive feedback, although there is not a large difference with students on average (52% receive good feedback compared to 56% of all students).

*"We get criticism which is basically useless and not enough general points about essays in general." (Student with dyslexia)*

*"I don't feel I'm given enough feedback in general." (Student with dyslexia)*

Some students comment about specific problems they have had with their supervisors.

*"Supervisors can be quite intolerant about occasions when you find it hard to complete the whole reading list." (Student with dyslexia)*

*"In one of my supervisions the supervisor always wrong foots me by taking the question in a different sense to the one which I took it and going on about the superiority of her own interpretation, which makes me feel thick." (Student with Asperger's Syndrome)*

However, other students are extremely positive about the support they have received from their supervisors.

*“My supervisors have all been very helpful with respect to my needs as a student with a disability.” (Deaf student)*

### 8.3 Conclusion

Students with disabilities who participated in the survey do not have a significantly different experience of supervisions than students in general. For some students, it appears from their comments that they have positive experiences in supervisions and they have very supportive and understanding supervisors. Other students' comments indicate that their experiences are not as positive and they would appreciate more help and understanding to allow them to get the most out of the supervision experience.

**Recommendation: The good practice that already exists in the University to ensure that students with disabilities have a fair and positive experience of the learning environment should be disseminated. All supervisors should attend relevant training sessions.**

## 9 Conclusions

The CUSU Quality of Supervisions Survey demonstrates how students experience the supervision system in different areas; preparing work for supervisions, experience in supervisions and feedback on the supervision system. It also demonstrated how different factors, such as subject studied, gender, ethnicity and disability can have an effect on the students' experience of supervisions. Strengths and weaknesses in the supervision system were highlighted and trends identified.

### 9.1 Preparation for supervisions

An overwhelming number of students report that their work relates closely to course content. It is unlikely that students will have problems in this area, but when problems do arise students tend to state that it is because lecture courses and supervision work do not coincide very well. The subject that a student studies can have an influence on how well they find their work relates to course content, with some subjects seeming to relate closer to course content than others.

The majority of students know what is expected from them in their supervision work, although several students comment that they would like more guidance. The subject that a student studies appears to have an effect on whether they know what is expected. Some faculties and departments provide particularly useful guidance for students whereas in other faculties and departments, students are more likely than students in general to find that they have little or no idea what is expected from them. Other factors also appear to influence the likelihood of a student feeling confident that they know exactly what to do when work is set. Female students tend to be less likely than male students to know what is expected from them whilst the Asian, Black and Chinese students who participated in the survey and students from a white other background who participated in the survey are more likely to have little or no idea of what is expected from them.

Whilst a majority of students state that they are more likely to be able to manage well or fairly well, 32% find that they sometimes or always struggle with the work that is set. Managing the work load appears to be problematic for some students for a variety of reasons; their supervisions are not well organised, resources are not available, clear guidance is not given or there is too little time. Students are more likely to find work load to be manageable when they have a clear idea of what they need to do and adequate time in which to do it and have their work load spread throughout the term. Students' experiences can vary according to which subject they study; in some subjects students are more likely to find that they struggle with their work and the reasons for this also depend on subject studied. In some subjects supervisions are not as well organised as in others whilst in other subjects students are more likely to find that they have too much work to do. Again, other factors can also affect whether students are more likely to report that they struggle with their work load. Female students are more likely to report that they struggle and point to the negative effects of an excessive work load. Black and Chinese students who participated in the survey are also more likely to report that they struggle with their work and point to the pressures of completing everything that is expected of them. For some students with disabilities, preparation for supervision can sometimes be difficult if they do not have adequate time to go through a reading list or if adequate guidance is not provided.

### 9.2 Experience in supervisions

More students are likely to report having a positive experience in supervisions than a negative one, yet they find that this can depend on a number of factors such as the individual supervisor, other students and their own levels of confidence. Again, it appears that subject studied, gender, ethnicity and disability can also affect whether a student has a largely positive or negative experience of the supervision system.

Students tend to rate supervisors highly when they are able to: explain complex ideas and theories clearly and ensure that students understand; are able and willing to answer questions and are able to facilitate a discussion between students and between the student and supervisor rather than 'lecturing' or 'interviewing'. Students tend to agree on the importance of these qualities regardless of what subject they study, their gender, school background or ethnicity and whether they have a disability. Different groups of students do place more importance on different qualities than others, but broad agreement remains. Students although agreeing on what qualities they value do vary in how likely they are to find that supervisors possess these qualities, with factors such as subject, gender, ethnicity and disability having an influence, as well as other issues such as individual personalities and different capabilities of supervisors. The majority of students find that their questions are answered well in supervisions, although this again depends on subject and possibly also ethnicity, with black and Chinese students who participated in the survey and students from a white other and mixed background who participated in the survey being less likely than students in general to find their questions are answered well.

The majority of students feel comfortable making a contribution to supervisions and do not feel that supervisors or other students would actively prevent them from making a contribution. However, this varies according to subject, gender and ethnicity. In some subjects students are less comfortable making a contribution and tend to give reasons including a lack of confidence, not being given an opportunity by other students to contribute, supervisions being more like lectures than discussions and group sizes being larger than normal. Female students are less likely to contribute than male students are and are more likely to find that other students and supervisors make it difficult to contribute. Black students who participated in the survey are less likely to contribute than other students and are more likely to state that supervisors make it difficult to contribute. Chinese students who participated in the survey are also less likely to contribute and point to both supervisors and other students making contribution more difficult. It appears that some students do not find the supervision environment as comfortable as others do.

The majority of students also find that they are more likely to receive good feedback on their work than none at all, but this is an area where students would like to see improvement. Several comment that they would appreciate an indication of the standard at which they are performing and also some ideas about how their work could be improved. Students from several different subjects feel that feedback on their work could be improved although there are some subjects in which students rate the feedback that they receive very highly.

### 9.3 Supervision reports and student feedback to colleges

The majority of students find that the CAMCORS system works very effectively with a large number of students receiving reports from all supervisors. In general, students are very positive about the system of termly supervision reports and a majority report that they discuss these reports with someone in their college, either their Personal Tutor or their Director of Studies or both. For 74% the reports are used as a basis of constructive discussion. If students do have criticisms with the supervision report system it is that they feel all students should be able to access their own reports online and also that reports could be more detailed. Students also comment that they would appreciate feedback to occur more regularly than once a term.

Fewer students are satisfied with the system of providing feedback about the quality of their supervisions to their college. Although a majority of students are invited to provide feedback to their colleges, a large number of students feel that feedback that they provide has little or no effect. There are some students who report that their college deals with problems efficiently, yet there are other students who find that they are not confident reporting problems in their college, find action is not taken when problems are reported and feel that no action is taken on the basis of feedback. Students mention the need for an anonymous feedback system in colleges and to be given some indication of what happens to the feedback they provide. Considering that there are some groups of students who do not have as positive experience of supervisions as others, and considering that many students report that experiences of the supervision system can vary widely, it is important that there is a student feedback system in place that can monitor these trends. It is, furthermore, extremely important that in the eventuality that a student has a serious problem with a supervisor, they will be feel confident that they can report the problem without suffering any repercussions and that their complaint will be investigated and acted upon if necessary.

## 9.4 General conclusions

It is clear that many students at Cambridge University value the supervision system highly. All students are more likely to find that they have had a positive experience of the supervision system and have found supervisions extremely useful. Many report that their supervisors are excellent teachers and they value the close and individual attention from a subject expert that small group teaching offers. Many students find that supervisions give them a deeper understanding of the course, allow any difficulties they have in understanding to be addressed and provide them with ideas and guidance on how best to realise their academic potential. It is, for many students, the most important part of the undergraduate teaching the University provides and what makes the quality of teaching so high in the University.

Yet although in general quality of teaching is high, it appears difficult to monitor and control quality of teaching. In many instances, students report isolated cases of very poor teaching or state that their experience of supervisions has varied widely. Students have a perception that the quality of their supervision teaching is crucial in deciding how successful they will be academically and are concerned when they feel that some of their teaching does not meet the required standards or that other students appear to access better teaching than they do. Students are likely to comment that the supervision system is an excellent one, but that more effort needs to be taken to ensure that all individuals within the system are as capable at teaching as others are and that there is 'standardisation' across the system on areas such as providing guidance on supervision work, providing feedback on supervision work and equipping supervisors with the necessary skills to be good teachers. Students are likely to comment on the need for supervisor training, and such training could highlight the many areas of good practice that students describe and are summarised in this report in order to ensure that more students experience a consistently positive experience of supervisions.

Despite all students being more likely to report positive than negative experiences of the supervision system, it appears there are groups of students who have a consistently more negative experience than other students. Female students have more negative experiences of preparing work for supervisions and also report that they are less likely to have a positive experience in supervisions. They are more likely to report that other students and their supervisors limit them in contributing to supervisions and there are also some references to sexism in supervisions. Female students are also more likely to comment that they do not feel that supervision work always suits their preferred learning style. Black and Chinese students who participated in the survey also consistently report a more negative experience of aspects of the supervision system than other students. They find preparation for supervisions more difficult and are more likely to feel that they do not want to contribute to supervisions. Asian students who participated in the survey are also more likely to report negative experiences of supervisions (although are also more likely to report very positive experiences). There are also some cases where students with disabilities feel that more effort could be made to allow them to get the most out of the supervision system. In order to ensure that all students have an equally positive experience in supervisions it might be useful to ensure that supervisors are trained in effective communication and teaching skills as well as receiving gender awareness training, cultural awareness training, racial awareness training and disability awareness training. Effective student feedback mechanisms and anonymous reporting mechanisms could also ensure that faculties, departments and colleges are aware if there are students who have very negative experiences in supervisions and the problems can then be addressed.

Although each faculty and department and each college has different strengths and weaknesses, there are some general recommendations that apply to all:

## 9.5 Recommendations

### 9.5.1 Good practice

- The good practice identified by students in the report should be disseminated in order to ensure that as many students as possible have a consistently positive experience of the supervision system.

### 9.5.2 Group size

- As far as possible, supervision groups should have fewer than four students.

### 9.5.3 Organisation of supervisions

- The means by which supervisors are assigned should be made more transparent to students.
- Parity of provision across colleges should be assured as far as possible.
- As far as possible students should be able to have supervisions spread throughout the term and not 'bunched' together.

### 9.5.4 Preparation for supervisions

- All supervisors should be provided with an outline of course content.
- There should be a reasonable amount of time between work being set and the supervision.
- Faculties and departments should give an indication of what is a reasonable amount of work to set.
- As far as possible, supervisors should give clear guidance to students of what is expected from them.
- Students should be able to contact their supervisor prior to their supervision if they are struggling to understand their work.

### 9.5.5 Experience in supervisions

- Students should find that their questions are fully answered in the supervision.
- Students should be given clear feedback on their supervision work with constructive comments and ideas for improvements.

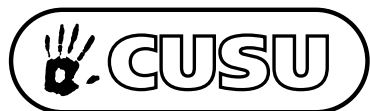
### 9.5.6 Training

- The colleges and the University should ensure that all teaching officers receive some form of training in effective teaching and communication skills.
- Training for supervisors should include some guidance on how best to prepare students for supervisions.
- When designing training courses, the skills that students value in individual supervisors (ability to explain complex ideas and theories clearly and ensure that students understand, ability and willingness to answer questions and ability to facilitate a discussion between students and between the student and supervisor) should be taken into account.
- Training should include some guidance on creating a learning environment where all students feel at ease in recognition that a small number find supervisions are intimidating.
- Training should include sessions on gender awareness, cultural awareness, racial awareness and disability awareness.

### 9.5.7 Feedback

- Colleges should use student feedback to address problems caused by variable quality in the supervision system.
- Colleges should use student feedback to monitor whether there are groups of students who have more negative experiences of the supervision system than others.
- Students should be aware of what happens to the feedback that they provide.
- Colleges should put anonymous feedback or reporting systems in place.

# 10 Appendix I: The Questionnaire



## Quality of Supervisions Survey

Thank you for participating in this survey. The data collected from this survey will be used to compile a report into the quality of supervisions across the University. It will give an overview of the supervision system as a whole as well as investigating whether there are factors affecting students' experience of supervisions. It will attempt to identify problem areas as well as areas where there is good practice. There will also be a short report compiled for each college, so that the JCR has information to raise questions related to their college supervisions.

All information will be dealt with confidentially and you do not have to provide information in all areas if you do not wish to.

Where different options are given for an answer, please indicate the answer most applicable to you with a cross.

College: \_\_\_\_\_ Sexuality: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Subject: \_\_\_\_\_ Ethnic background: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Year: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you have a disability? Yes / No (please underline)  
 If so, please could you give brief details of your disability?

What is your school background?

Sixth form college\_\_  
 FE College\_\_  
 Comprehensive school\_\_  
 Independent school\_\_  
 Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

### Supervision group

1 Typically, how many people are in your supervision group?

2 Do you find this to be:

Too small?	
Just right?	
Too large?	

### Preparation for supervisions

3 Which of the following statements best describes how you feel when supervision work is set for you?

I usually know exactly what to do and what is expected from me	
--	--

I usually have a good idea of what to do and what is expected from me	
I usually have some idea of what to do and what is expected from me	
I usually don't have much idea what to do and what is expected from me.	
I usually have no idea at all what to do or what is expected from me.	

4 Do you feel that you able to manage with the amount of work that you are set?

I manage well with the amount of work set	
I manage quite well with the amount of work set	
I sometimes struggle to manage the amount of work set	
I always struggle with the amount of work set	

5 How well does your supervision work relate to your course in general?

Very well	
Fairly well	
Not very well	
Not at all	

6 Please give any further comments you might have about preparation for supervisions

### Experience in supervisions

7 How often do you want to make a contribution to supervisions?

Very often - I feel I have a lot of useful things to say.	
Fairly often - I feel I often have something useful to say	
Not that often - I feel I occasionally have something useful to say	
Not at all - I never have anything useful to say.	

8 In general, how easy do your supervisors make it for you to make a contribution, if you wish to, in supervisions?

Very easy - they always allow me to make a contribution	
Fairly easy - they usually allow me to make a contribution	
Quite difficult - they sometimes won't let me make a contribution	
Impossible - they never let me make a contribution	

9 In general, how easy do the other students in your supervisions make it for you to make a contribution, if you wish to, in supervisions?

Very easy - they always allow me to make a contribution	
Fairly easy - they usually allow me to make a contribution	
Quite difficult - they sometimes won't let me make a contribution	
Impossible - they never let me make a contribution	

10 Do you feel that your questions are fully answered in supervisions?

Yes, they are usually answered very well	
Yes, they are answered fairly well	
No, they are not answered very well	
No, they are not answered at all	

11 Do you receive constructive feedback with suggestions for improvements?

I receive very good feedback with plenty of suggestions for improvements.	
I receive good feedback with some suggestions for improvements.	
I receive quite good feedback with occasional suggestions for improvements.	
I receive poor feedback with few suggestions for improvements.	
I receive no feedback with no suggestions for improvements.	

12 How comfortable do you feel approaching your supervisors with concerns?

Very comfortable.	
Comfortable	
Not very comfortable	
Not comfortable at all	

13 Please give any further comments you might have about your experience in supervisions.

**Supervision reports**

14 Do you receive supervision reports from all your supervisors?

Yes, from all my supervisors	
Yes, from most of my supervisors	
Yes, but only from a few of my supervisors	
No, from none of my supervisors	

15 Does your college provide you with a password to enable you to access your supervision reports on Camcors (the online database of supervision reports)?]

Yes	
No	

16 Do you discuss these supervision reports with your DoS or personal tutor?

Yes	
No	

17 Are your supervision reports used as a basis for constructive discussion with your DoS or personal tutor about how you are doing and what improvements can be made?

Yes, definitely	
Yes, mostly	
No, not really	
No, not at all	

**Feedback on supervisions**

18 Does your college ask you to provide feedback on supervisions?

Yes	
No	

19 If yes, how well does your college respond to the feedback you provide?

Very well - student feedback makes a real difference	
Quite well - student feedback has an effect	
Not that well - student feedback does not have much of an effect	
Not at all - student feedback makes no difference	

**Please give any further comments you might wish to make about your supervisions and the supervision system.**

# 11 Appendix II: The Data

## Supervision group

1 Typically, how many people are in your supervision group?

- 1: 13%
- 2: 42%
- 3: 30%
- 4: 11%
- 5: 3%
- More than 5: 1%

2 Do you find this to be:

Too small?	3%
Just right?	86%
Too large?	11%

### Comparison between Question 1 and Question 2

<b>Number in supervision</b>	<b>Find it too small</b>	<b>Find it just right</b>	<b>Find it too large</b>
1	8%	92%	
2	2%	94%	4%
3	1%	84%	15%
4		75%	25%
5		42%	58%
More than 5		43	57%

## Preparation for supervisions

3 Which of the following statements best describes how you feel when supervision work is set for you?

I usually know exactly what to do and what is expected from me	28%
I usually have a good idea of what to do and what is expected from me	53%
I usually have some idea of what to do and what is expected from me	16%
I usually don't have much idea what to do and what is expected from me.	2%
I usually have no idea at all what to do or what is expected from me.	1%

4 Do you feel that you able to manage with the amount of work that you are set?

I manage well with the amount of work set	25%
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I manage quite well with the amount of work set	43%
I sometimes struggle to manage the amount of work set	27%
I always struggle with the amount of work set	5%

#### Comparison between Question 3 and Question 4

	<i>Manage well with work set</i>	<i>Manage quite well</i>	<i>Sometimes struggle</i>	<i>Always struggle</i>
<i>Know exactly what to do</i>	45%	34%	18%	3%
<i>Have a good idea of what to do</i>	20%	51%	26%	3%
<i>Usually have some idea of what is expected</i>	8%	38%	42%	12%
<i>Usually don't have much idea of what to do</i>	5%	20%	60%	15%
<i>Usually have no idea what to do</i>		50%		50%

5 How well does your supervision work relate to your course in general?

Very well	55%
Fairly well	40%
Not very well	5%
Not at all	0%

6 Please give any further comments you might have about preparation for supervisions

#### Experience in supervisions

7 How often do you want to make a contribution to supervisions?

Very often - I feel I have a lot of useful things to say.	24%
Fairly often - I feel I often have something useful to say	52%
Not that often - I feel I occasionally have something useful to say	23%
Not at all - I never have anything useful to say.	1%

8 In general, how easy do your supervisors make it for you to make a contribution, if you wish to, in supervisions?

Very easy - they always allow me to make a contribution	62%
Fairly easy - they usually allow me to make a contribution	34%
Quite difficult - they sometimes won't let me make a	4%

contribution	
Impossible - they never let me make a contribution	0%

- 9 In general, how easy do the other students in your supervisions make it for you to make a contribution, if you wish to, in supervisions?

Very easy - they always allow me to make a contribution	64%
Fairly easy - they usually allow me to make a contribution	30%
Quite difficult - they sometimes won't let me make a contribution	6%
Impossible - they never let me make a contribution	<1%

**Comparison between Question 7 and Question 8**

	<b>Very easy to contribute</b>	<b>Fairly easy to contribute</b>	<b>Quite difficult to contribute</b>	<b>Impossible to contribute</b>
<b>Contribute very often</b>	80%	18%	2%	0%
<b>Contribute fairly often</b>	66%	31%	3%	0%
<b>Don't contribute often</b>	38%	55%	7%	0%
<b>Don't contribute</b>	42%	42%	16%	0%

**Comparison between Question 7 and Question 9**

	<b>Very easy to contribute</b>	<b>Fairly easy to contribute</b>	<b>Quite difficult to contribute</b>	<b>Impossible to contribute</b>
<b>Contribute very often</b>	84%	15%	1%	0%
<b>Contribute fairly often</b>	64%	30%	6%	0%
<b>Don't contribute often</b>	45%	44%	9%	2%
<b>Don't contribute</b>	18%	55%	27%	0%

- 10 Do you feel that your questions are fully answered in supervisions?

Yes, they are usually answered very well	34%
Yes, they are answered fairly well	56%
No, they are not answered very well	9%
No, they are not answered at all	1%

- 11 Do you receive constructive feedback with suggestions for improvements?

I receive very good feedback with plenty of suggestions for improvements.	21%
I receive good feedback with some suggestions for improvements.	35%

I receive quite good feedback with occasional suggestions for improvements.	31%
I receive poor feedback with few suggestions for improvements.	10%
I receive no feedback with no suggestions for improvements.	3%

12 How comfortable do you feel approaching your supervisors with concerns?

Very comfortable.	33%
Comfortable	49%
Not very comfortable	15%
Not comfortable at all	3%

13 Please give any further comments you might have about your experience in supervisions.

### Supervision reports

14 Do you receive supervision reports from all your supervisors?

Yes, from all my supervisors	54%
Yes, from most of my supervisors	31%
Yes, but only from a few of my supervisors	12%
No, from none of my supervisors	3%

15 Does your college provide you with a password to enable you to access your supervision reports on Camcors (the online database of supervision reports)?]

Yes	86%
No	14%

16 Do you discuss these supervision reports with your DoS or personal tutor?

Yes	89%
No	11%

17 Are your supervision reports used as a basis for constructive discussion with your DoS or personal tutor about how you are doing and what improvements can be made?

Yes, definitely	38%
Yes, mostly	35%
No, not really	21%
No, not at all	6%

### Feedback on supervisions

18 Does your college ask you to provide feedback on supervisions?

Yes	70%
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No	30%
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19 If yes, how well does your college respond to the feedback you provide?

Very well - student feedback makes a real difference	25%
Quite well - student feedback has an effect	37%
Not that well - student feedback does not have much of an effect	27%
Not at all - student feedback makes no difference	11%