Survey of Final Year Projectwork in UK University Bioscience Departments

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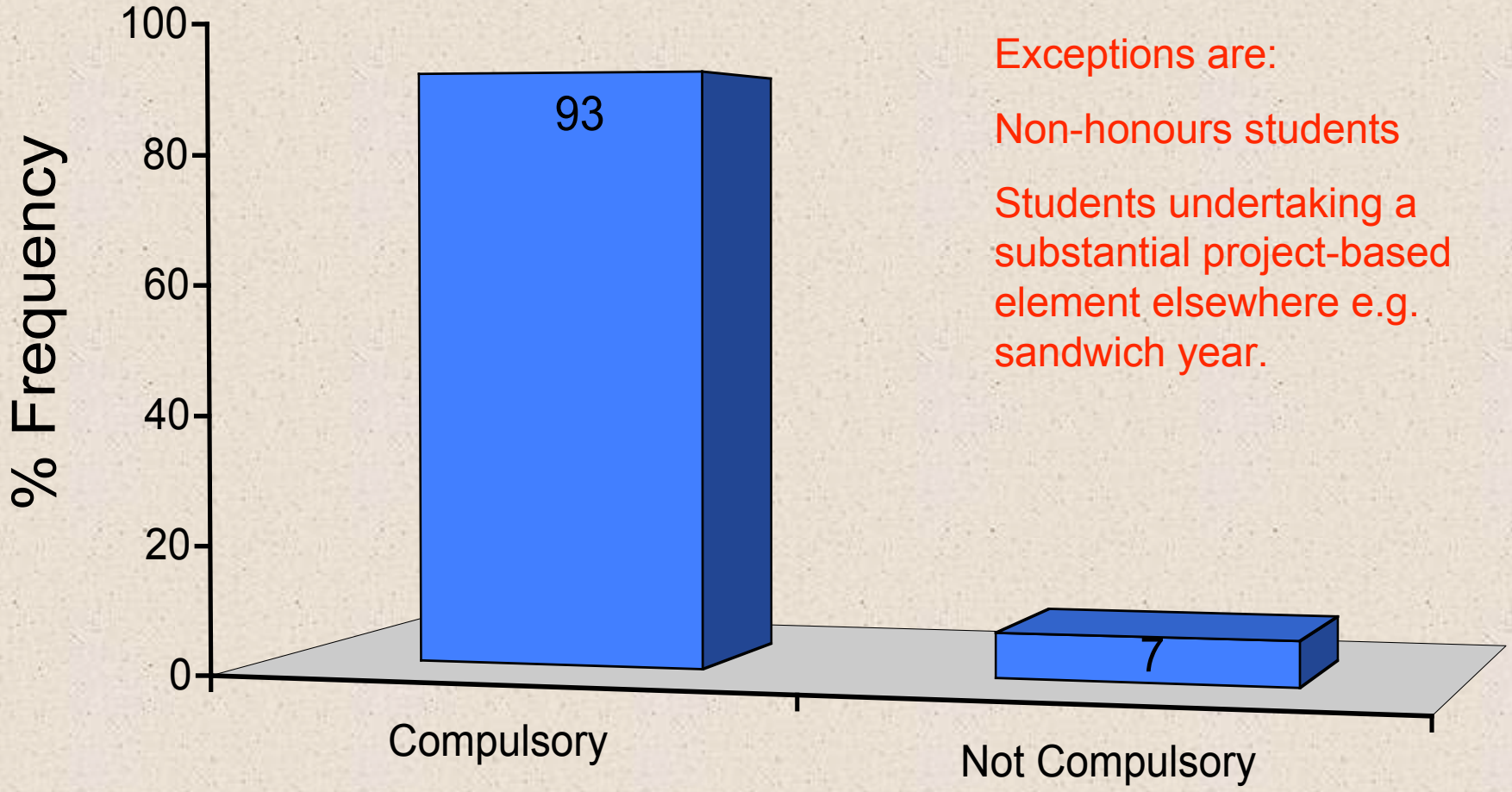
LTSN Bioscience Final Year Projects SIG

Returns were made by 58 separate departments (36 from pre-1992 and 22 from post-1992 universities)

- Aston University, School of Life and Health Sciences
- Cambridge University, Department of Plant Sciences
- Cardiff University, Cardiff School of Biosciences
- Coventry University, School of Science and the Environment
- Imperial College London, Department of Biological Sciences
- Loughborough University, Department of Human Sciences
- Manchester University, School of Biological Sciences
- Napier University, School of Life Sciences
- Northumbria University, School of Applied Sciences
- Nottingham Trent University, School of Science
- Nottingham University, School of Biosciences
- Oxford University, Department of Biochemistry
- Sheffield University, Biomedical Sciences
- Staffordshire University, Department of Biological Sciences
- University of Abertay, School of Contemporary Sciences

The vast majority of departments require all final year students to undertake a project.

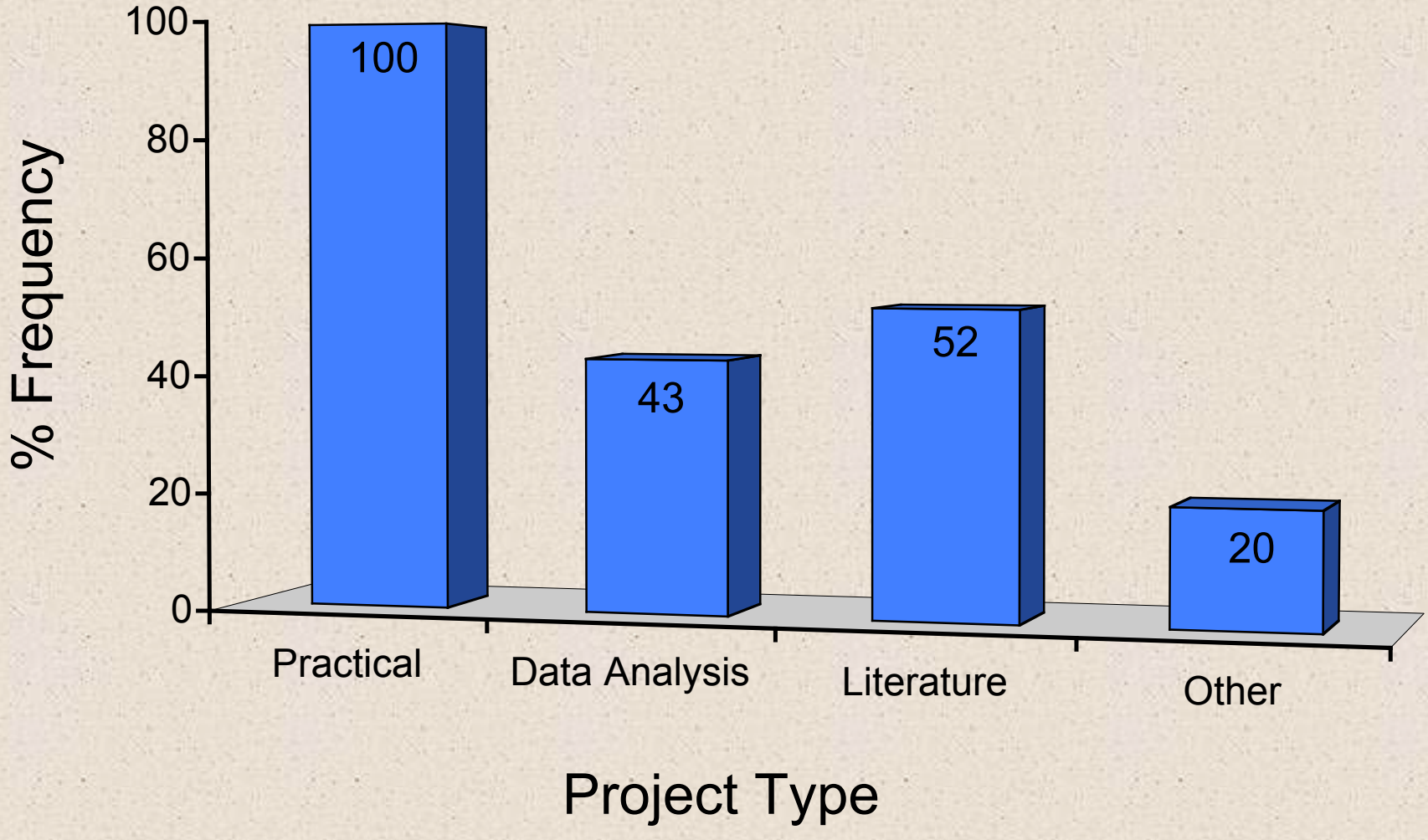


Exceptions are:

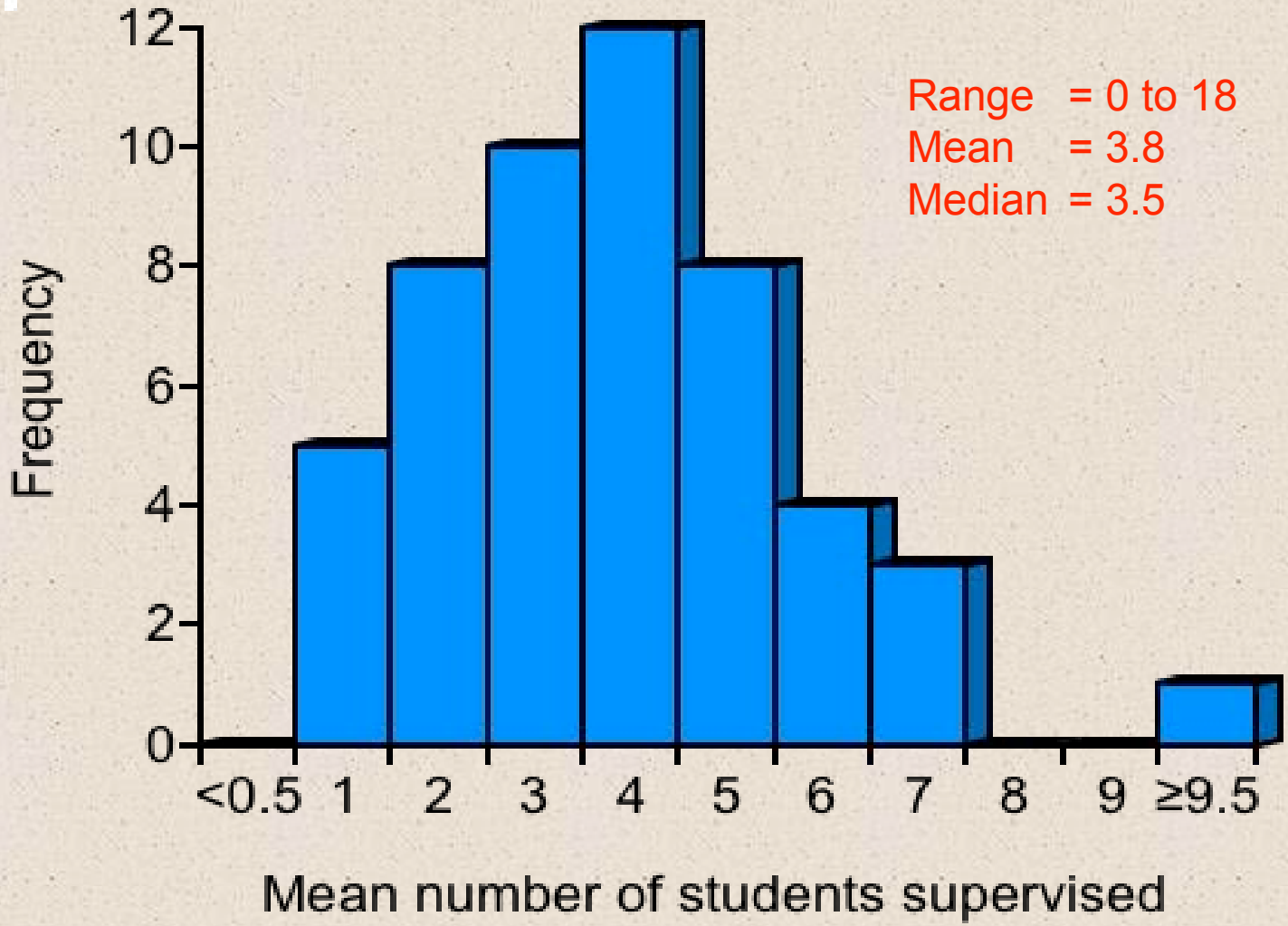
Non-honours students

Students undertaking a substantial project-based element elsewhere e.g. sandwich year.

Relative frequency of different types of final year project.



Frequency distribution of the mean number of students supervised per member of staff



22% of departments have students working in groups on final year practical projects

- One department has all students in groups
- Three have 50% in groups
- The rest all have less than 20% in groups

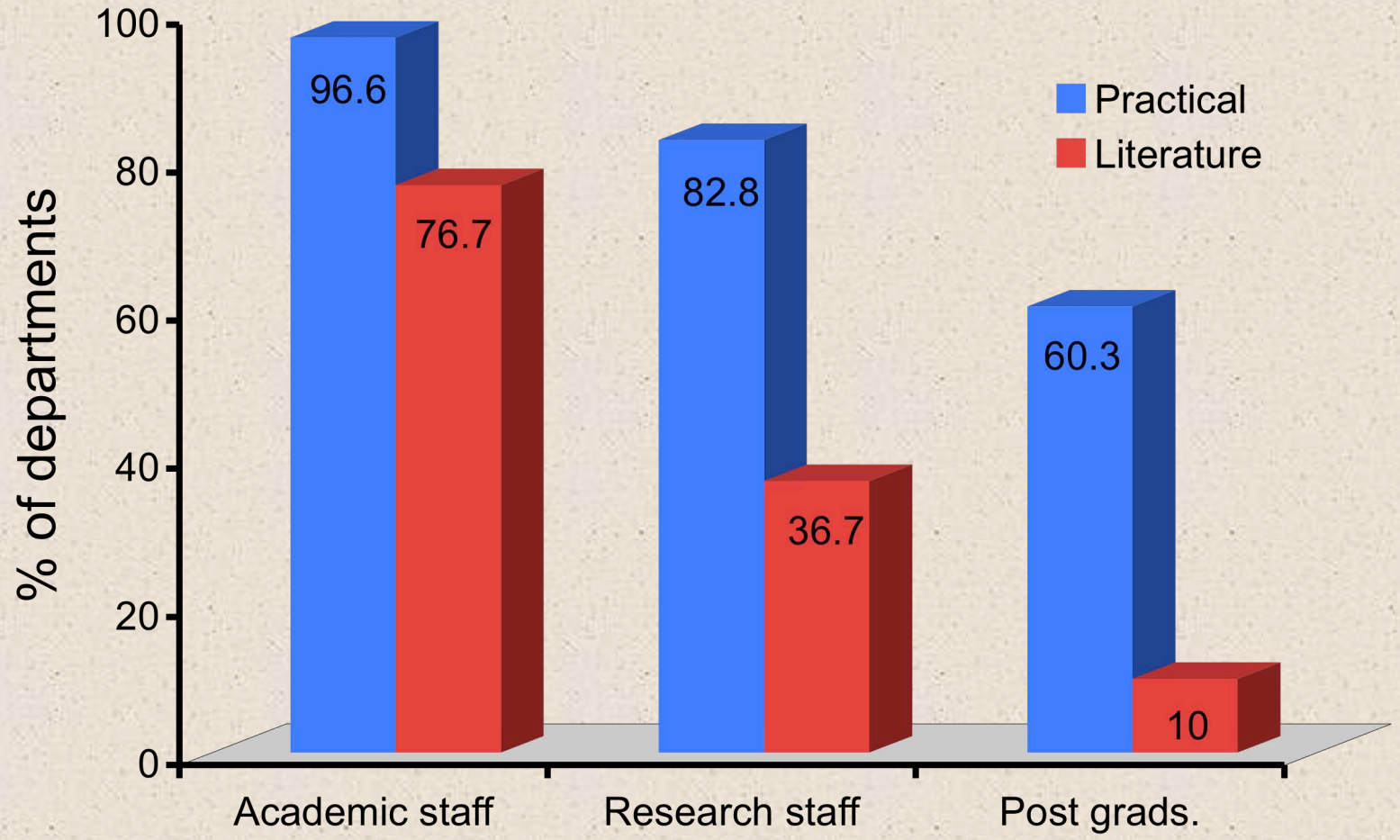
- Group size is usually 2
- Of the three departments with larger groups these are: 2 - 3; 3 - 5; 4 - 6.

- In all cases students are assessed individually

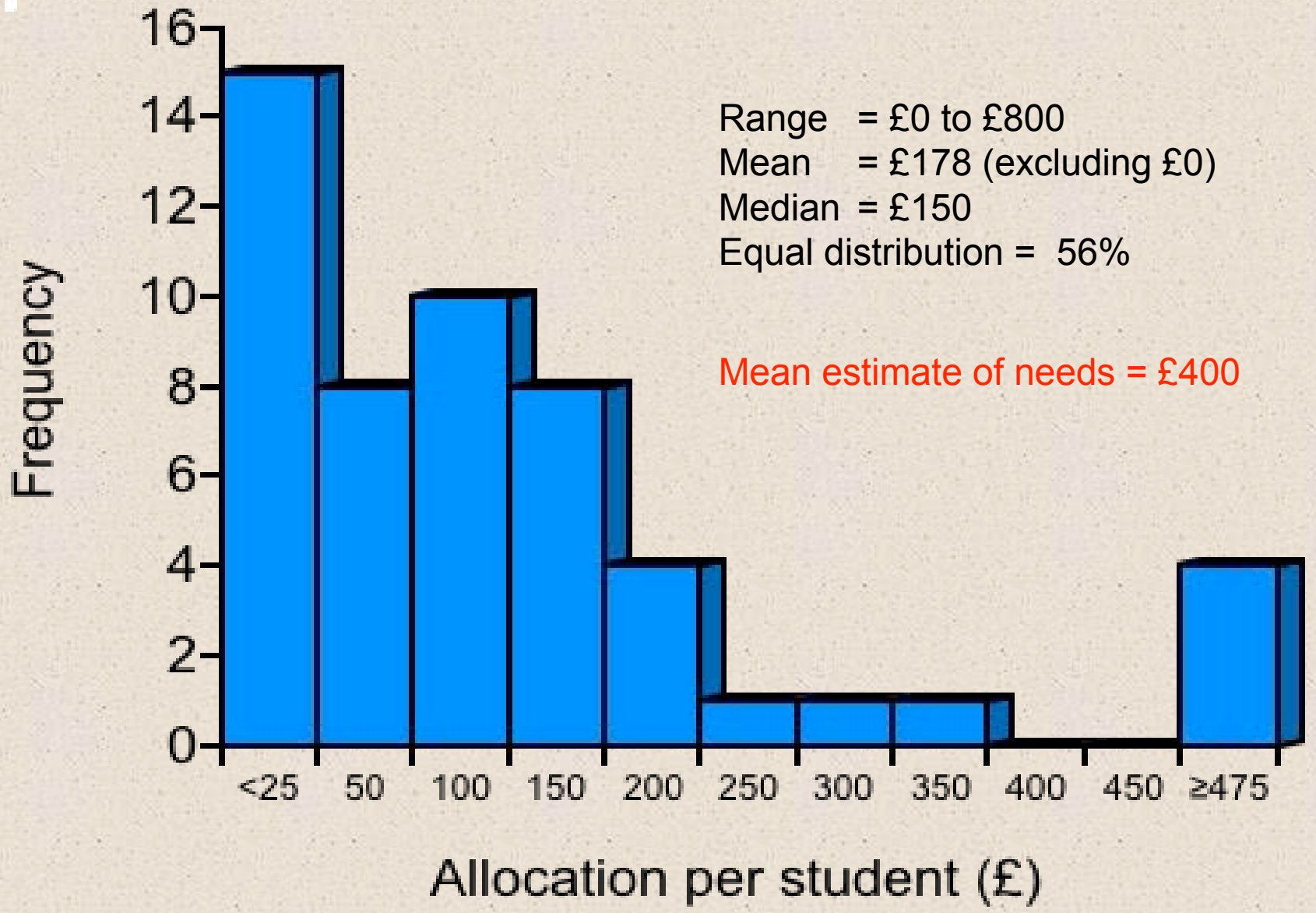
Supervision of project students:

- In 62% of departments supervisors meet their project students at variable intervals.
- In the 38% where they meet regularly, most meet at weekly intervals.
- In 25% of departments, supervisors keep a formal record of their meetings with project students.
  (in theory!)

Who supervises project students on a day-to-day basis?



Practical project funding allocations



Range = £0 to £800
Mean = £178 (excluding £0)
Median = £150
Equal distribution = 56%

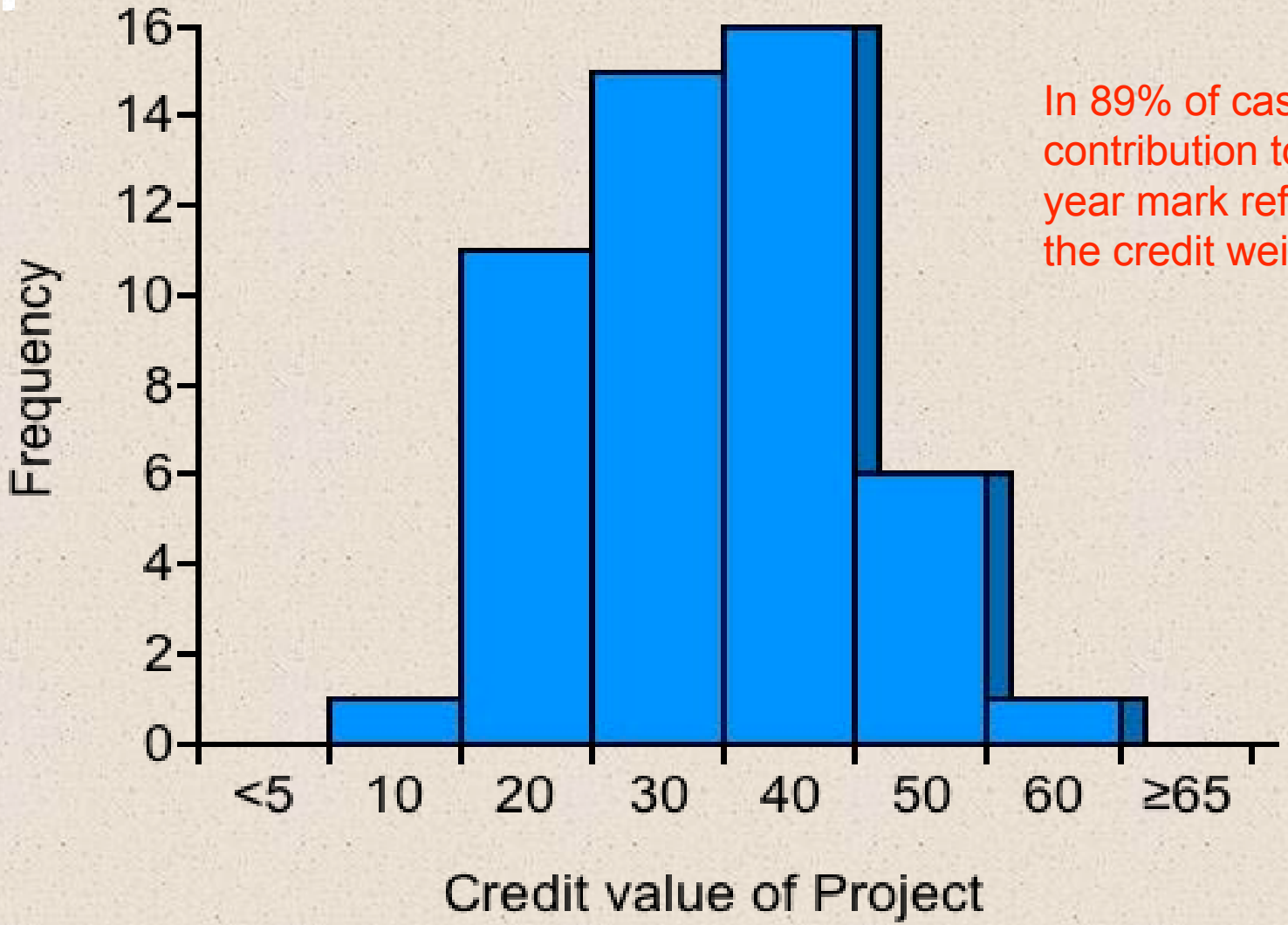
Mean estimate of needs = £400

Where do we accommodate practical projects?

- In a dedicated project lab. 16%
- In research space 90%
- Is space a problem? 46% ‘Yes’

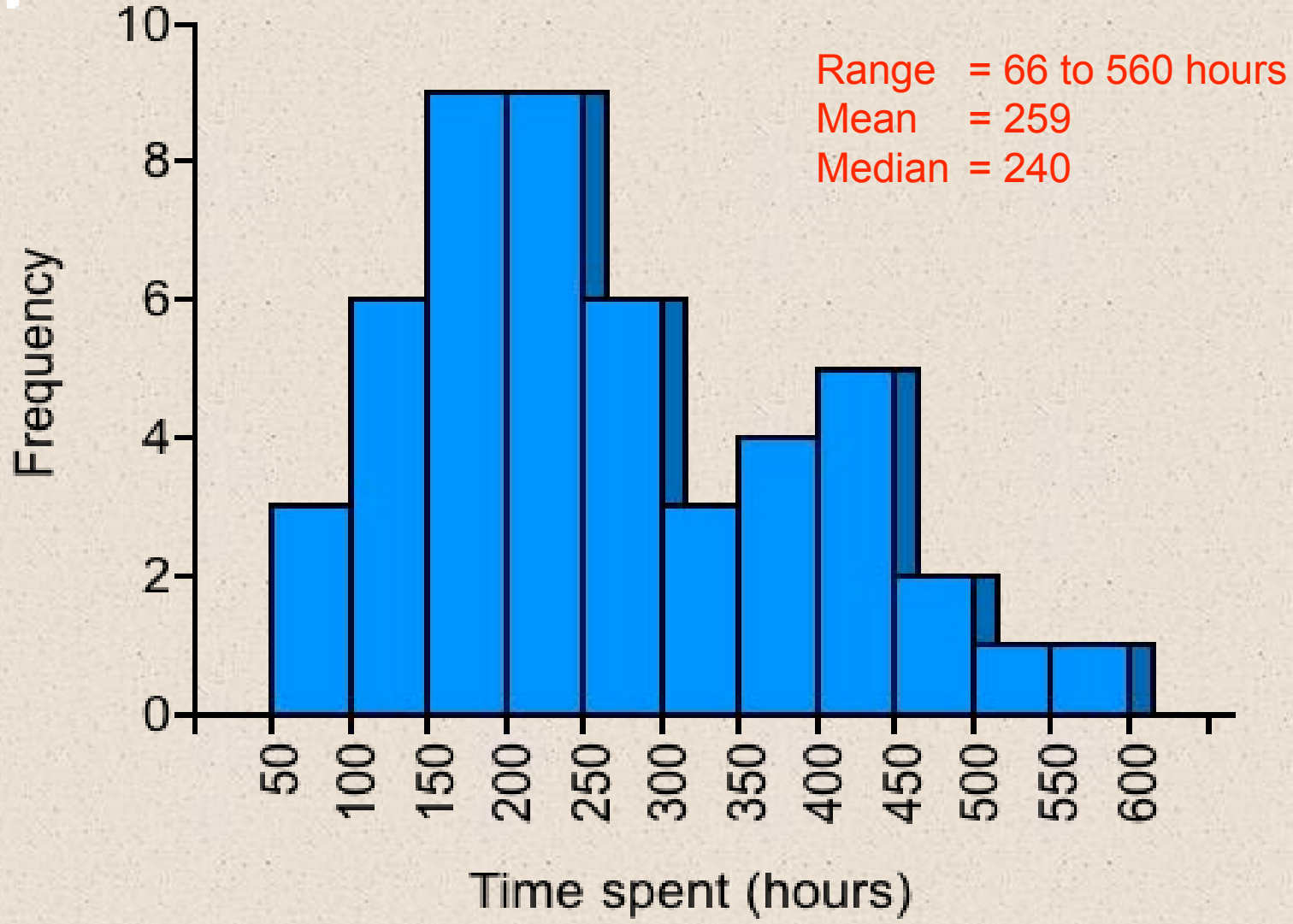
Credit value of project

(adjusted to total of 120 credits in final year).

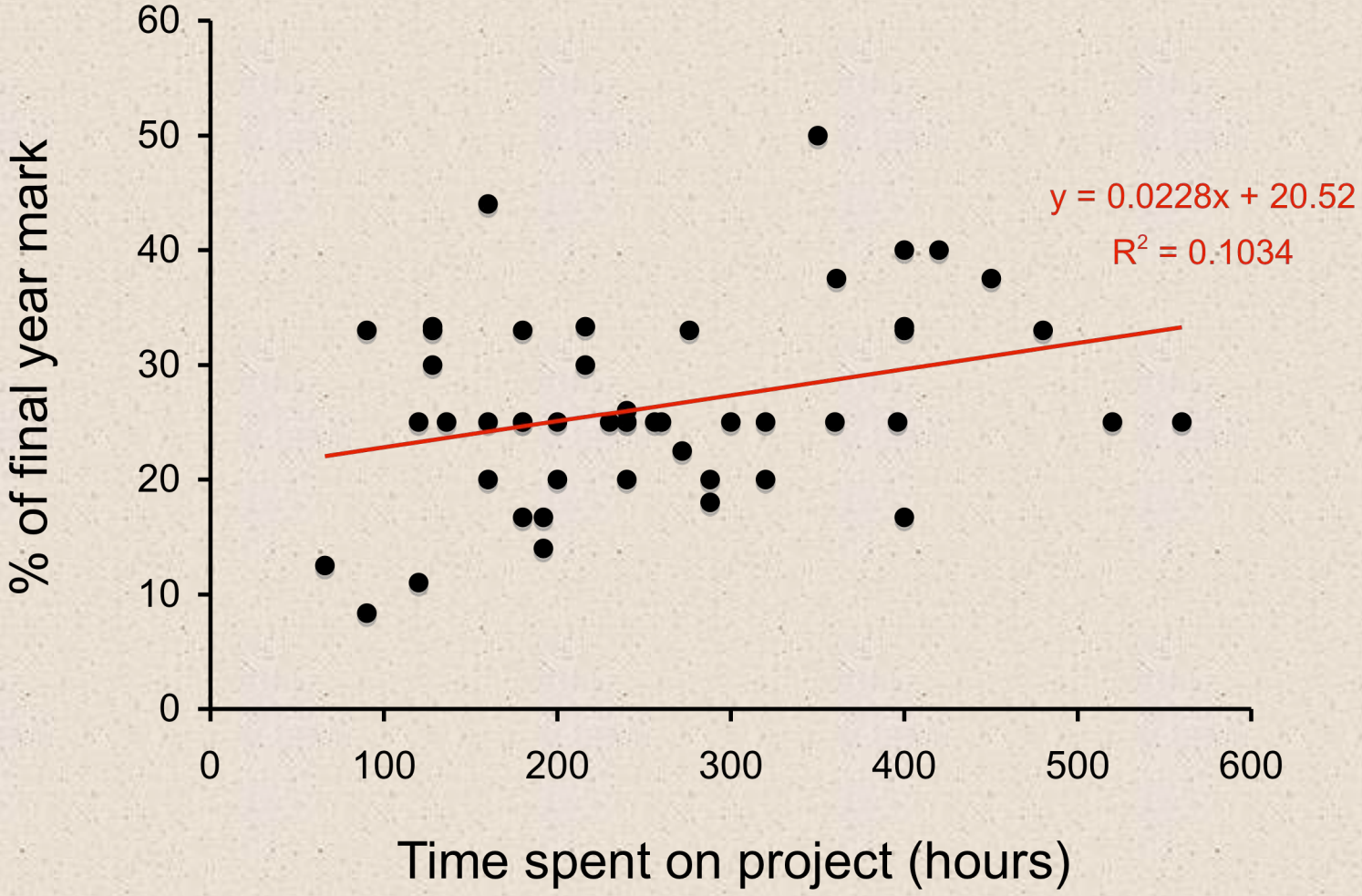


In 89% of cases the contribution to the final year mark reflected the credit weighting.

Estimated time students spend on practical projects.

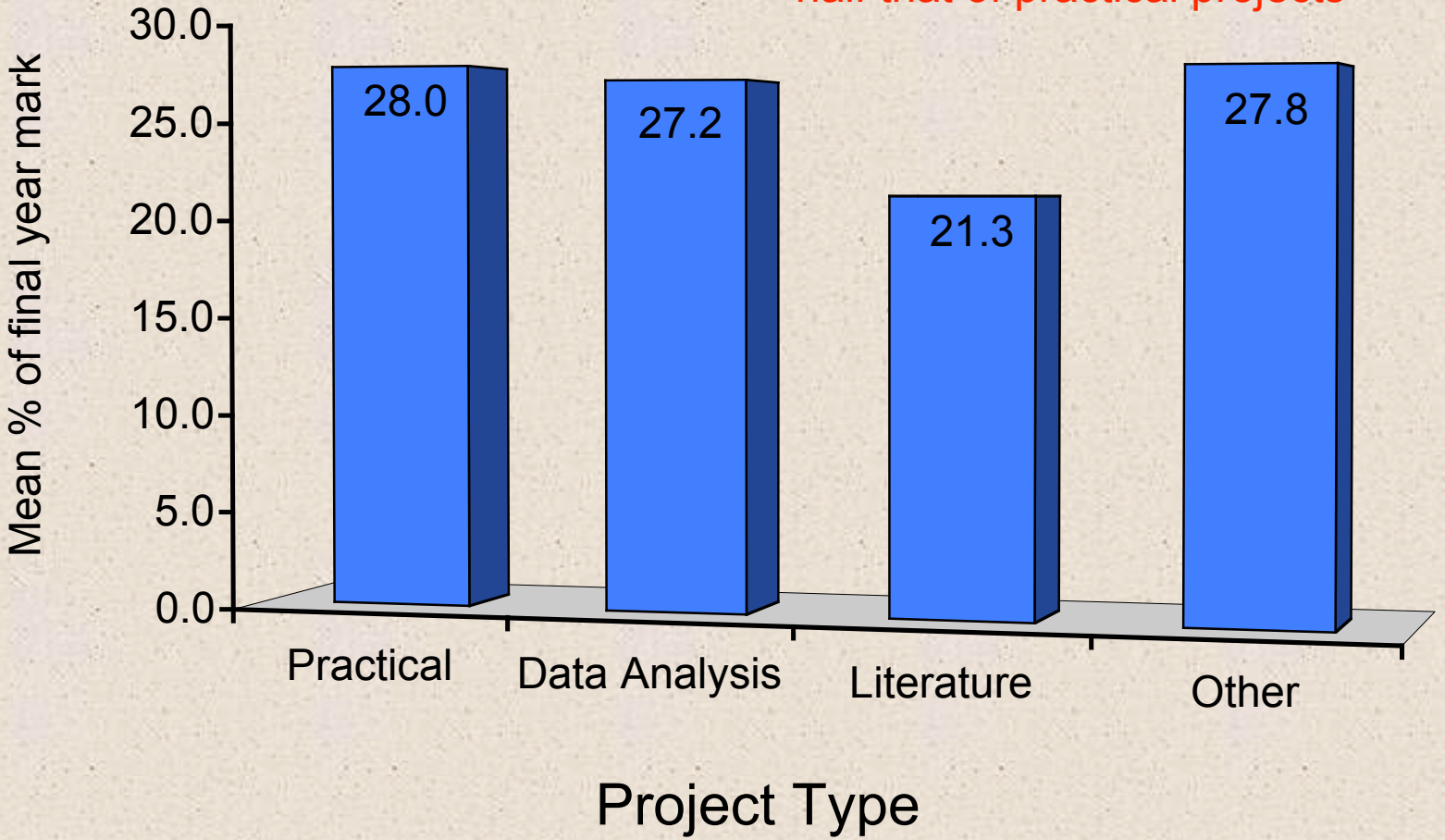


There is little relationship between the estimated time spent on a project and its weighting towards the final year mark.

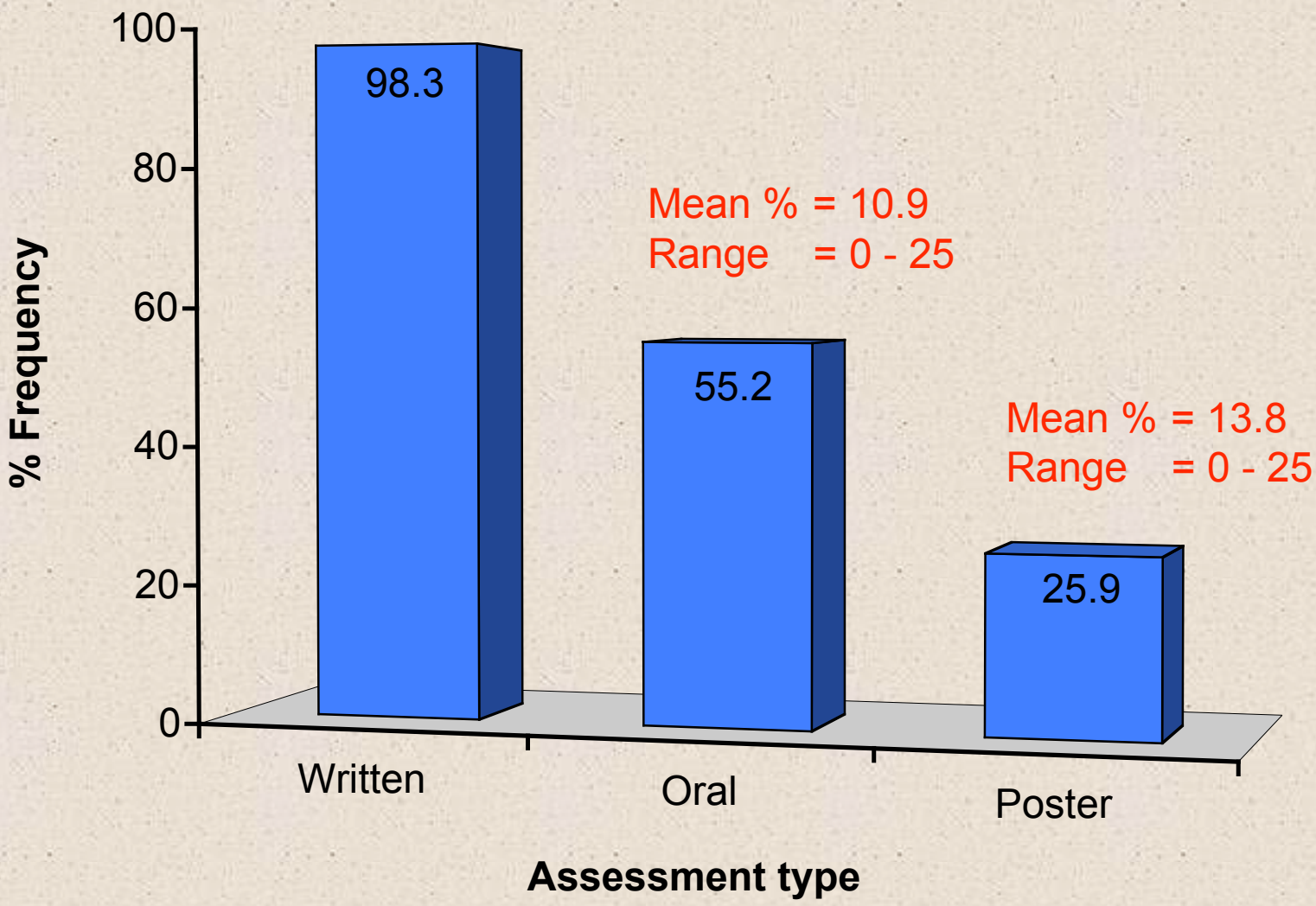


How much do different types of project count towards the final year mark?

38% of departments give a lower weighting to literature projects - usually half that of practical projects



How projects are assessed.



‘Other’ projects used a range of approaches:

- Computer modelling
- Bio-informatic type analysis
- Computer aided learning
- Education-based (involving local schools)
- Website construction
- Market-based research (linked with Bioscience company)
- Generating Power-point slides for u/g lectures!
- Writing a grant application
- Communication and science writing

Questions:

- Is it important that all students undertake some kind of final year project? What about students going into non-research careers?
- In most courses projects count for between 25% and 33% of the final mark. Is this too great a focus on a subset of skills?
- Are literature projects as demanding as practical projects? Should they be weighted differently?
- How big an issue is the resourcing of projects: in terms of finance, laboratory space and staff time?
- Are there advantages to having students working in small groups on projects? Is this a better model for the 'real world'?
- Should we try and be more imaginative in looking at alternative types of projects?