

Findings from the Survey about Members' Time Commitments

Independent Remuneration Panel

Date: 19th December 2018

Author: Committee and Member Services Manager

Wards: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 The report contains the findings from a quantitative survey of Swindon Borough Councillors to ascertain an understanding of how much time they were spending on Council business. In addition, the survey also sought to provide evidence on the specific tasks Councillors are undertaking and the amount of time they assign to them.
- 1.2 The survey was requested by the Panel at its meeting on 4th October 2018. The quantitative survey is part of the Panel's continued commitment to making evidence-based recommendations to Council in line about the level of councillors' allowances.

2. Recommendations

The Panel is recommended to:

- 2.1 Note the contents of the report along with the findings attached at Appendix One and to ask questions of the officer who conducted the survey.
- 2.2 To consider how the findings will shape the Panel's approach to the qualitative phase of the evidence-gathering process when it interviews councillors, the Leader, and the Chief Executive.

3. Detail

Background

- 3.1 The Panel agreed at its meeting on 4th October 2018 that it wished to conduct a thorough review of Members' allowances as three years had elapsed since the previous exercise. The Panel agreed that it would use both a quantitative approach through a survey as well as seek qualitative data through a range of interviews.
- 3.2 Members were invited to complete an online survey with paper copies being provided to the political party groups. The survey ran from 29th October 2018 to 23rd November 2018.
- 3.3 The main organisational change affecting Members that has occurred since 2015 is that since 2017 every part of the Borough has a Civil Parish, all but one of

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which have elected parish councils. (The parish of Inglesham has such a small population that it still relies on an annual parish meeting.)

Overview

- 3.4 At the time of writing (December 2018), the Council had 57 elected Members of which 36 (63%) were men and 21 (37%) were women. This is better than the UK average of just 33% women reported by the IPPR in August 2017 <https://www.ippr.org/news-and-media/press-releases/more-than-3000-female-councillors-needed-to-reach-50-50-gender-balance-in-local-government>; however, it is still short of ensuring that councillors resemble the population. The balance is only slightly better for office holders as 58% the Cabinet Members or main committee chairs are men while 42% are women.
- 3.5 Only 22 members provided completed survey returns (7 women, 15 men) responded, which is a smaller proportion than in 2015/16. Although the responses are biased towards male respondents, no weightings have been applied given the overall lower level of engagement with the survey.

Key findings

- 3.6 The most significant difference is shown in the responses to Question 4 about the typical number of hours spent each week on council business (NB a "jitter" function was used to show the responses individually rather than having the symbols overlap). Fewer members reported spending more than 35 hours a week on Council tasks (down from 5 to 2) and more councillors were reporting spending 10 hours or less a week on all Council business (7 instead of 4). The summary statistics are set out in Table 1 below:

Table 1 Summary Statistics Members' surveys

Survey year/summary	Typical hours per week		Percentage change 2015/6 to 2017
	2015/16	2018	
Mean	23.4	19.5s	-16.7%
Median	20	15	-25%

- 3.7 Examining the breakdown questions about how members spend their time, there have been slight declines in the time spent on informal cabinet/shadow cabinet meetings (Question 6), at partner organisations (Question 7) reading reports (Question 8), and contact with the public (Question 13a).

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- 3.8 While the data show the number of hours, the Panel may wish to examine further the nature of the work that is still undertaken. In particular, the Panel may wish to consider the pressures and responsibilities that come with serving on a unitary authority responsible for the personalised social care services for the Borough's most vulnerable.
- 3.9 The survey shows an interesting divergence in attitudes towards the basic allowance (Question 15). Fewer Cabinet Members and Chairs in this survey, all of whom receive a special responsibility allowance, thought the allowance was too high but slightly more non-office holders thought it was too low. However, the number of responses was low.
- 3.10 There was an increase in the number of non-office holders who were also parish councillors, which may reflect the number of public-facing services that parishes have taken over from the Borough.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 There are no alternative options as this survey was explicitly requested by the Panel.

5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 There are no financial or procurement implications at this stage as the survey is intended to inform the Panel's deliberations.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 There are no legal or human rights implications. All the data were processed without recording any personal identifiers.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.3 There are no other implications at this time.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.4 No Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) was undertaken since this is not a decision-making report.

Risk Management

- 5.5 There are no risk management implications as this is not a decision-making report.

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6. Consultees

- 6.1 As this report is to inform rather than to secure a decision, officers chose not to consult either the Monitoring Officer (Interim Director of Law) or the Section 151 Officer (Director of Finance).

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None

8. Appendices

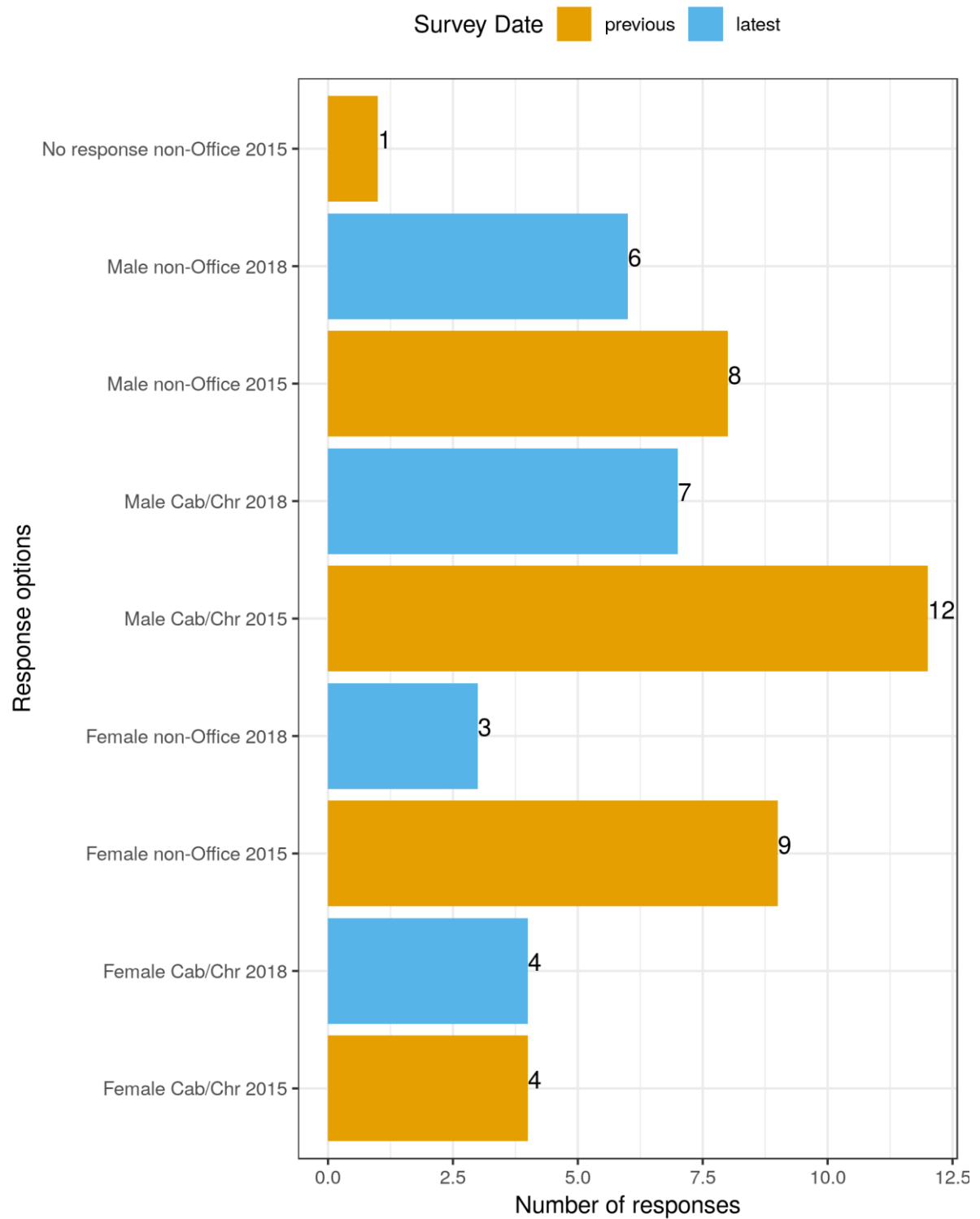
- 8.1 Appendix One: 2018 Councillors' Survey

Councillors' Survey 2018

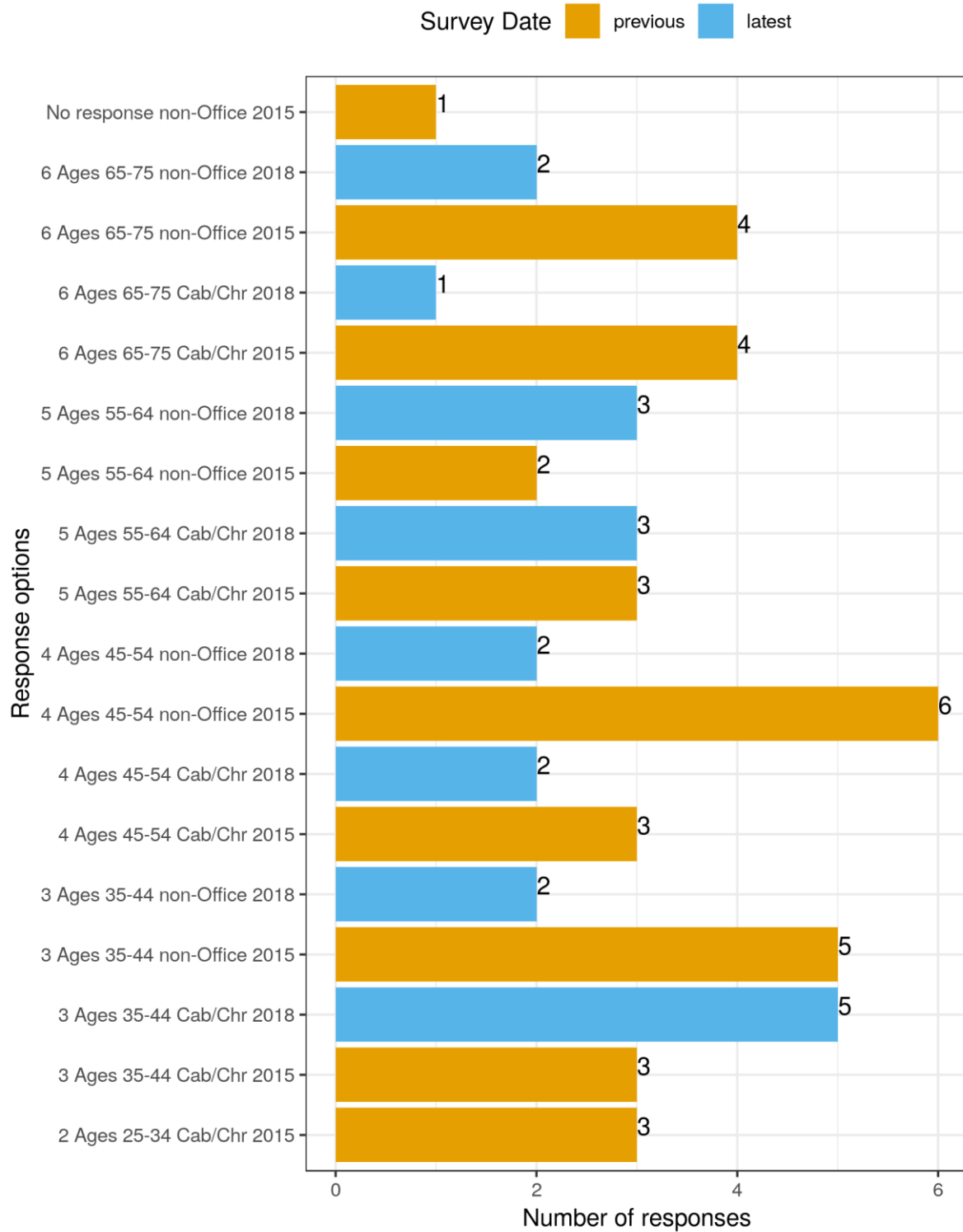
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8. Question 7. What is the average number of hours that you spend per week meeting with partner organisations e.g. CCG, Fire Authority, Police and Crime Panel etc	9
9. Question 8. What is the average number of hours that you spend per week reading reports?	10
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20. Question 18. Swindon limits the number of Special Responsibility Allowances to one per councillor, which is common but no means universal for all councils. Should councillors with more than one Special Responsibility receive 21

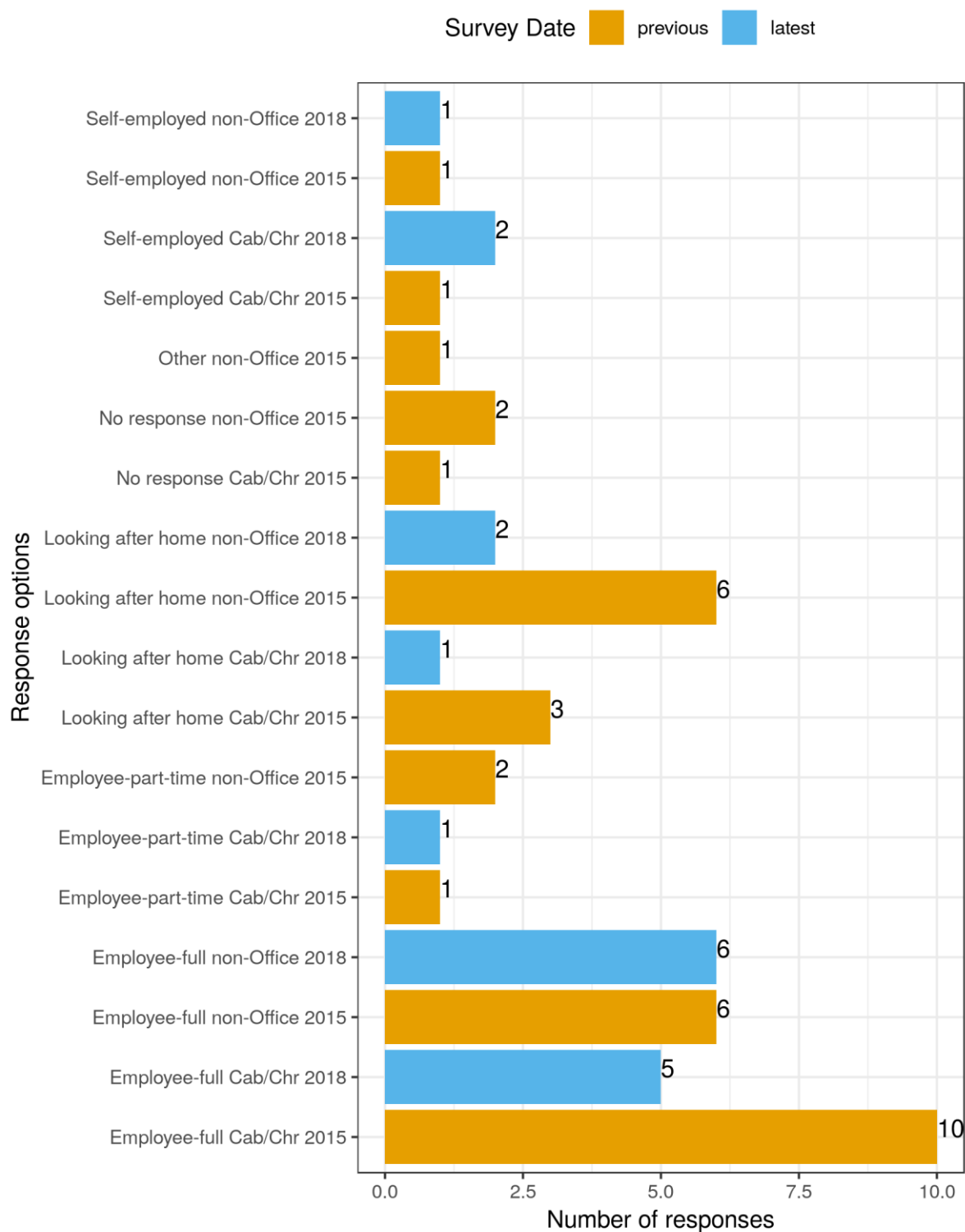
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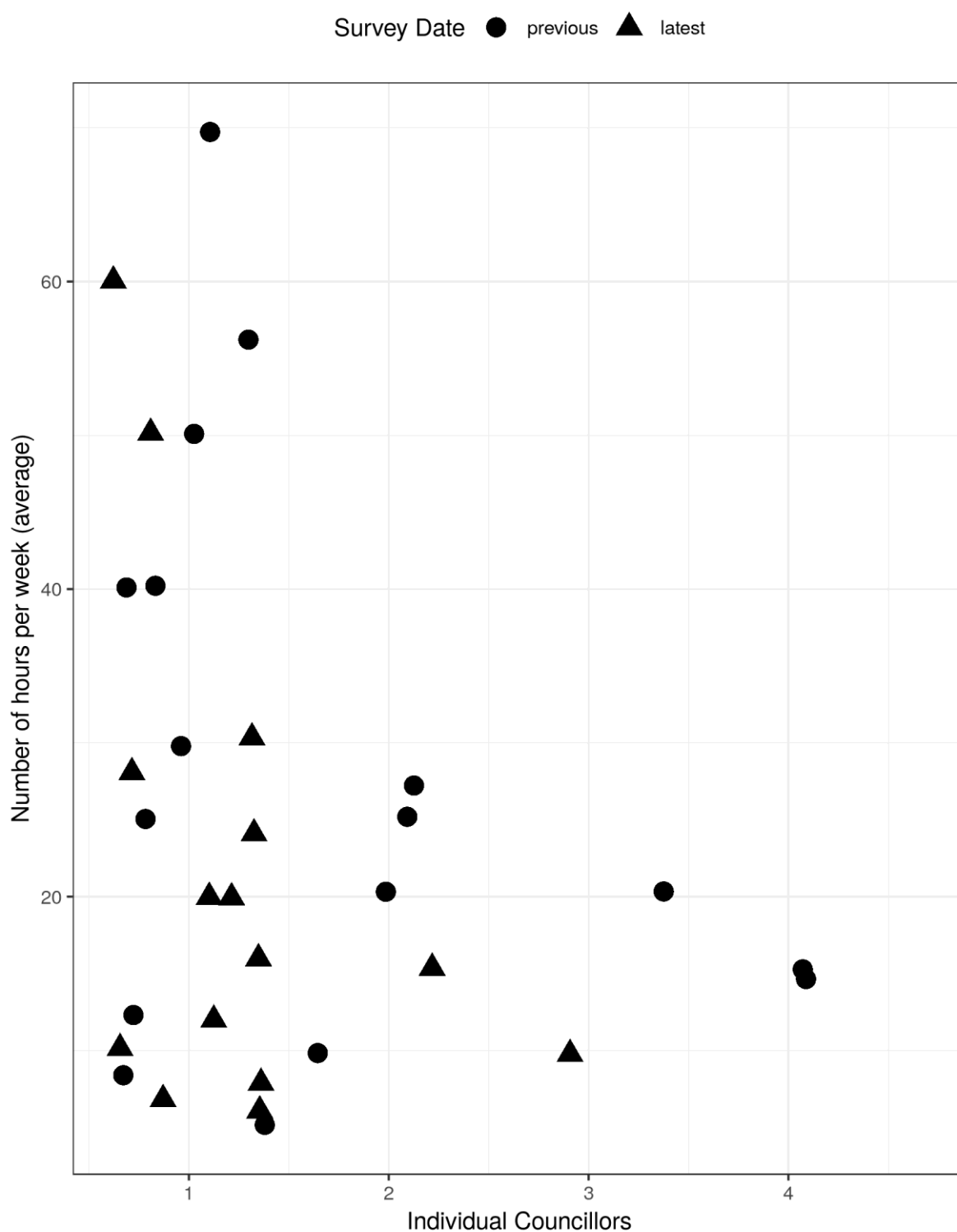
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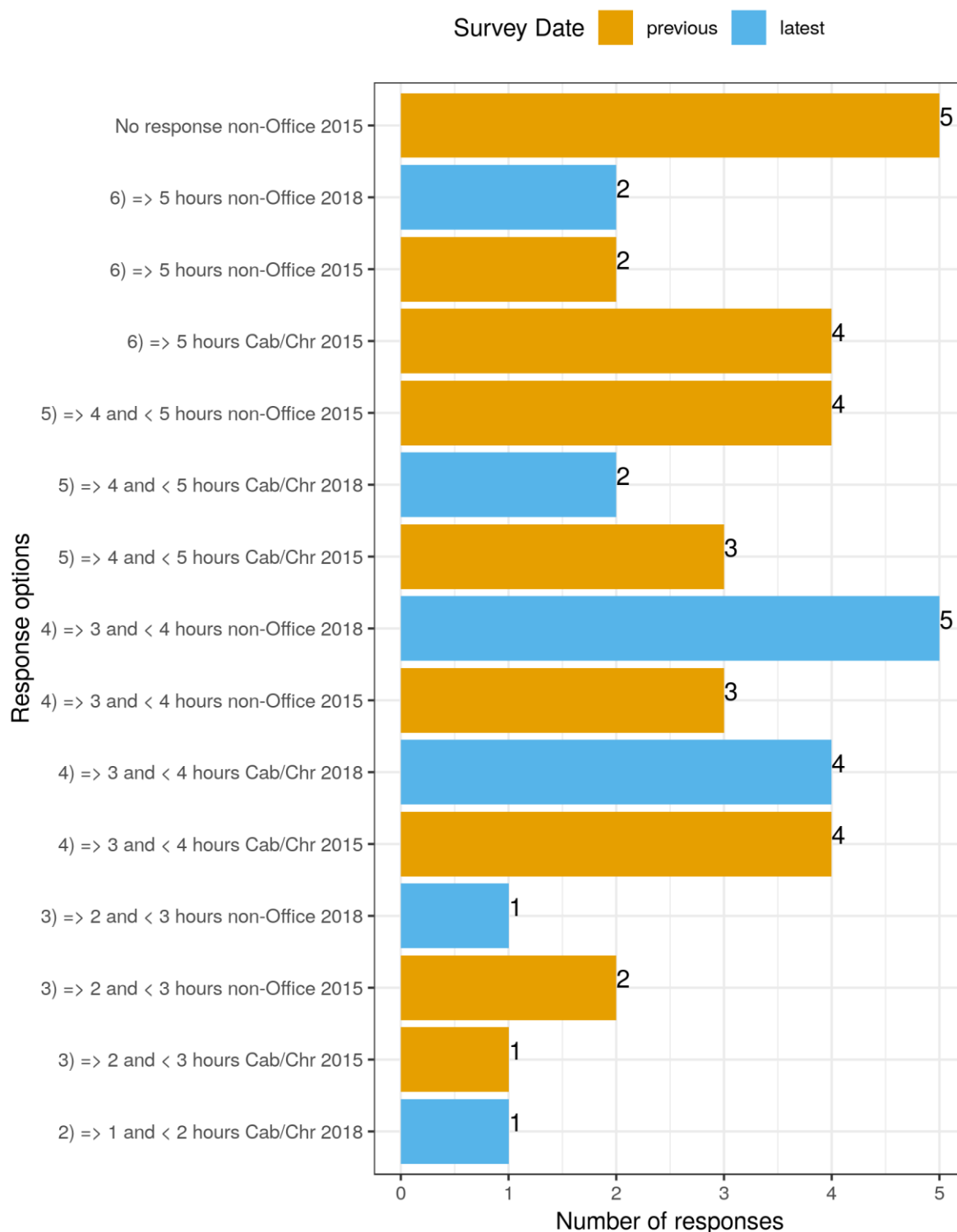
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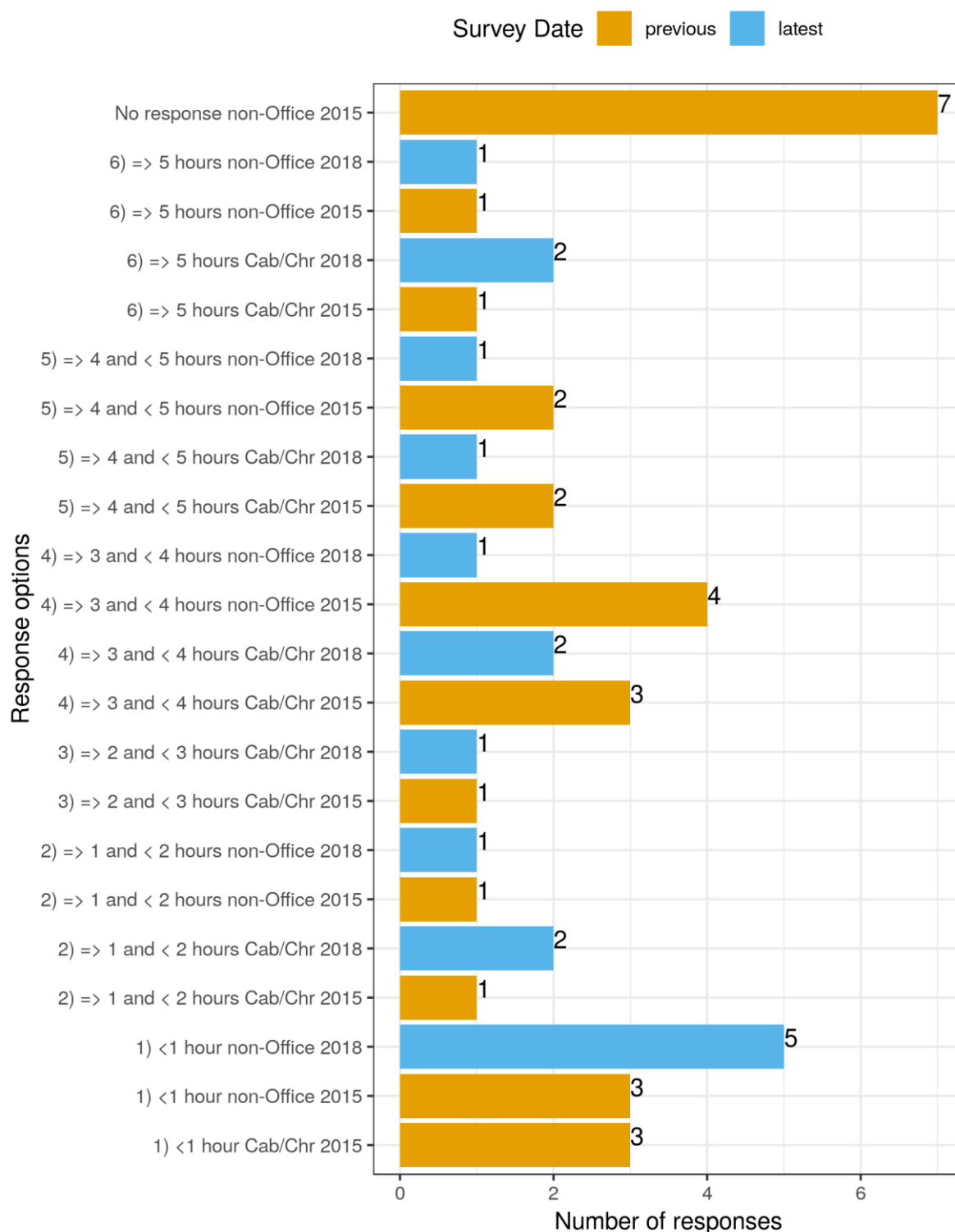
Question 4. What is the average number of hours per week that you spend overall on all Council activities



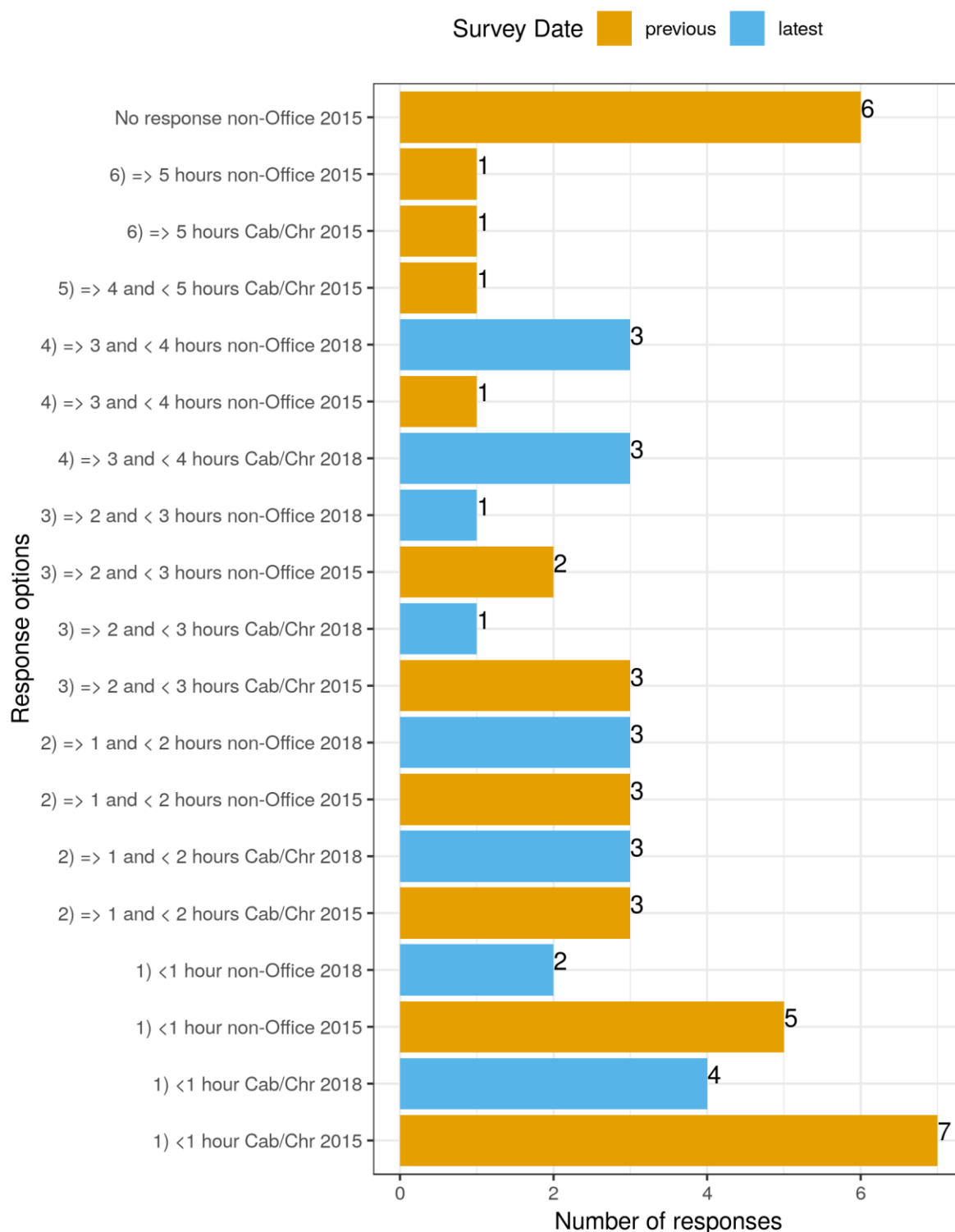
Question 5. What is the average number of hours that you spend per week attending formal meetings



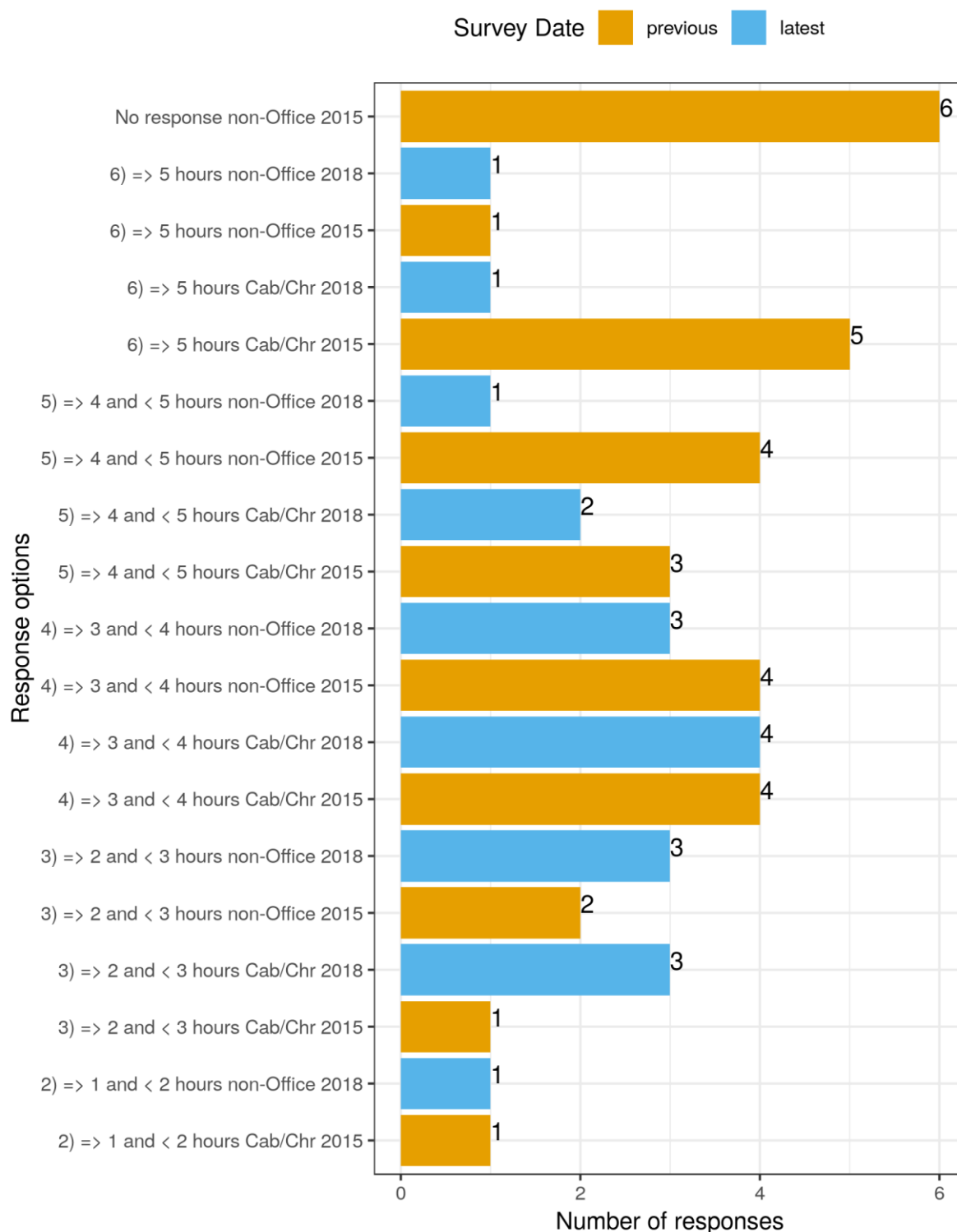
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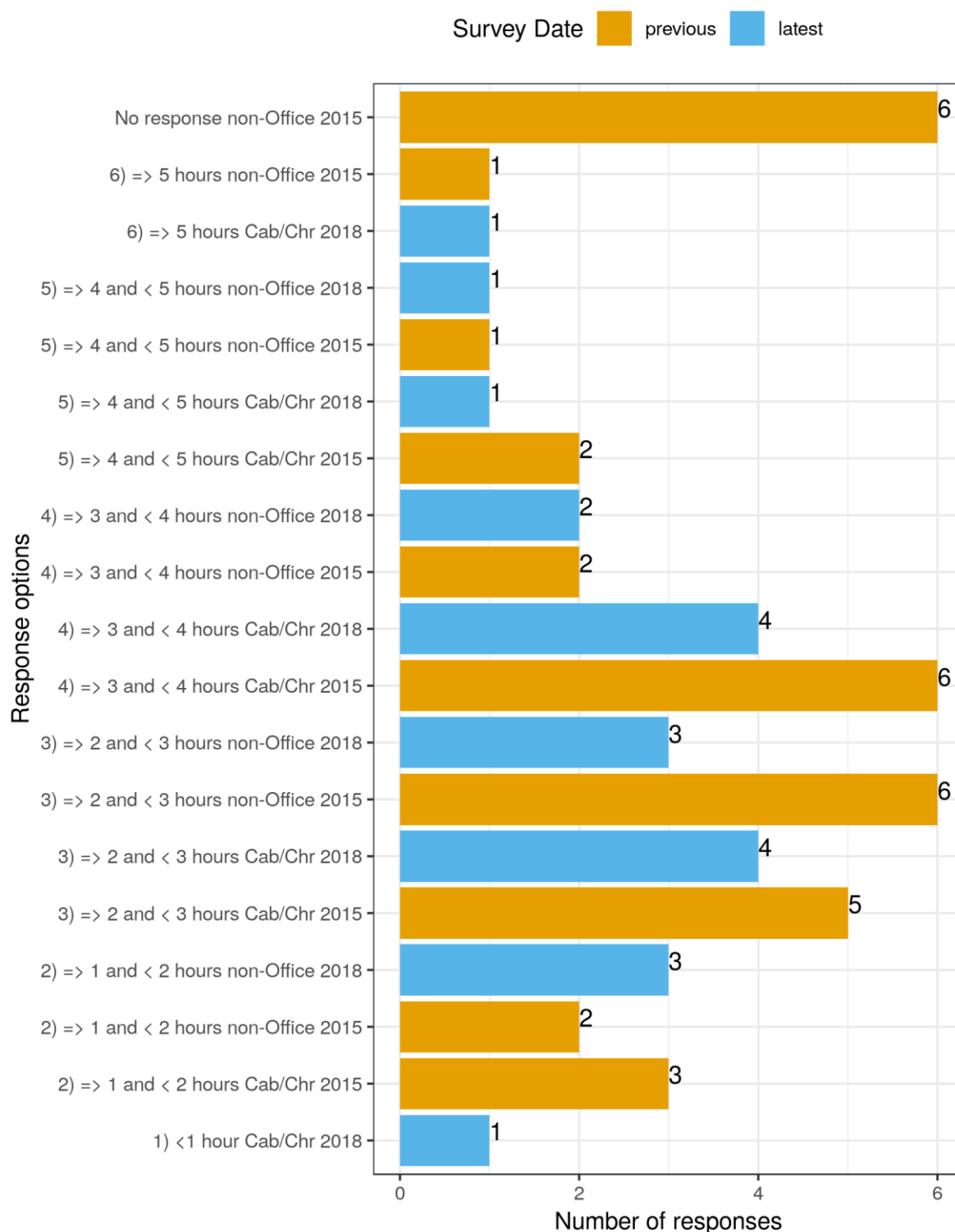
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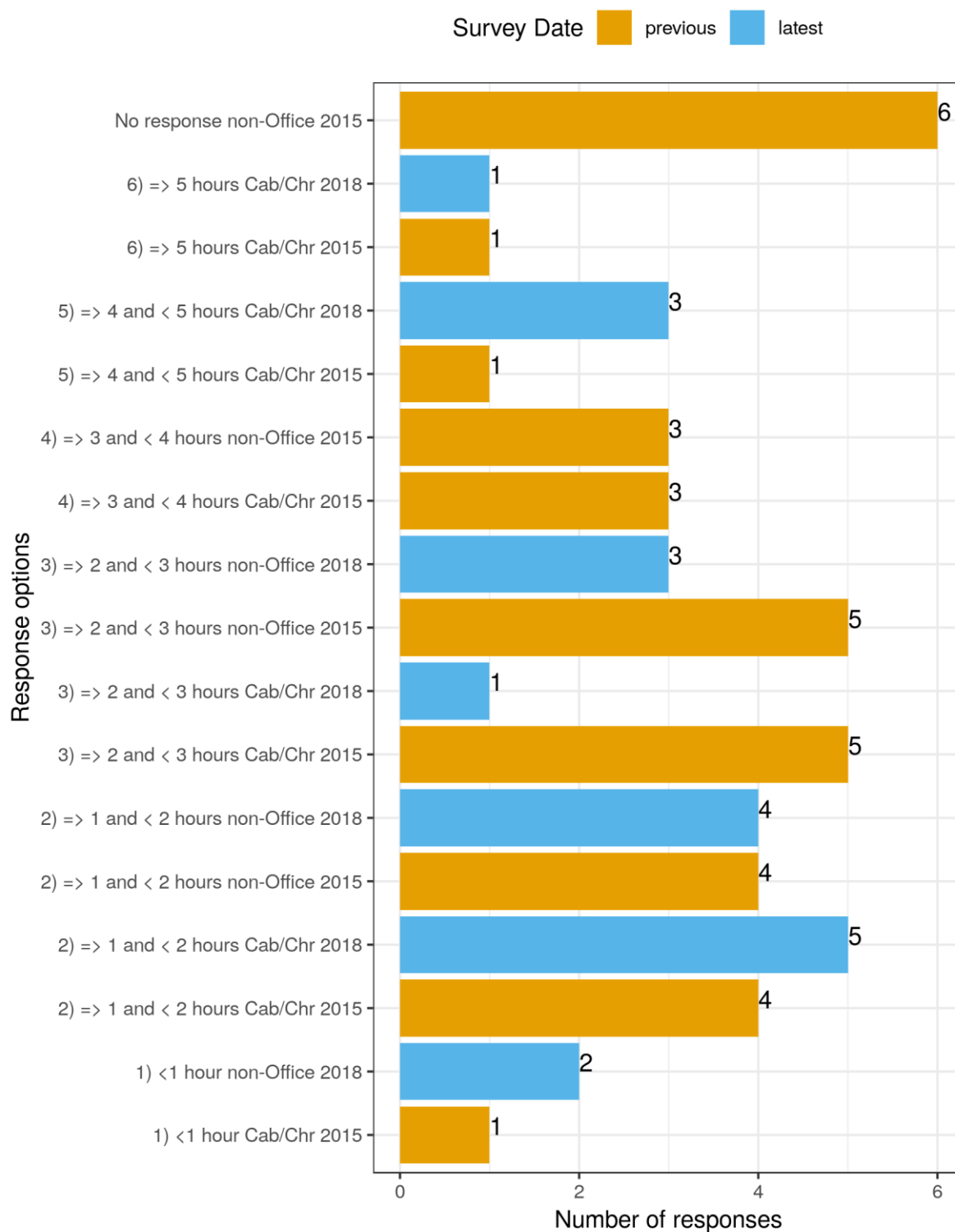
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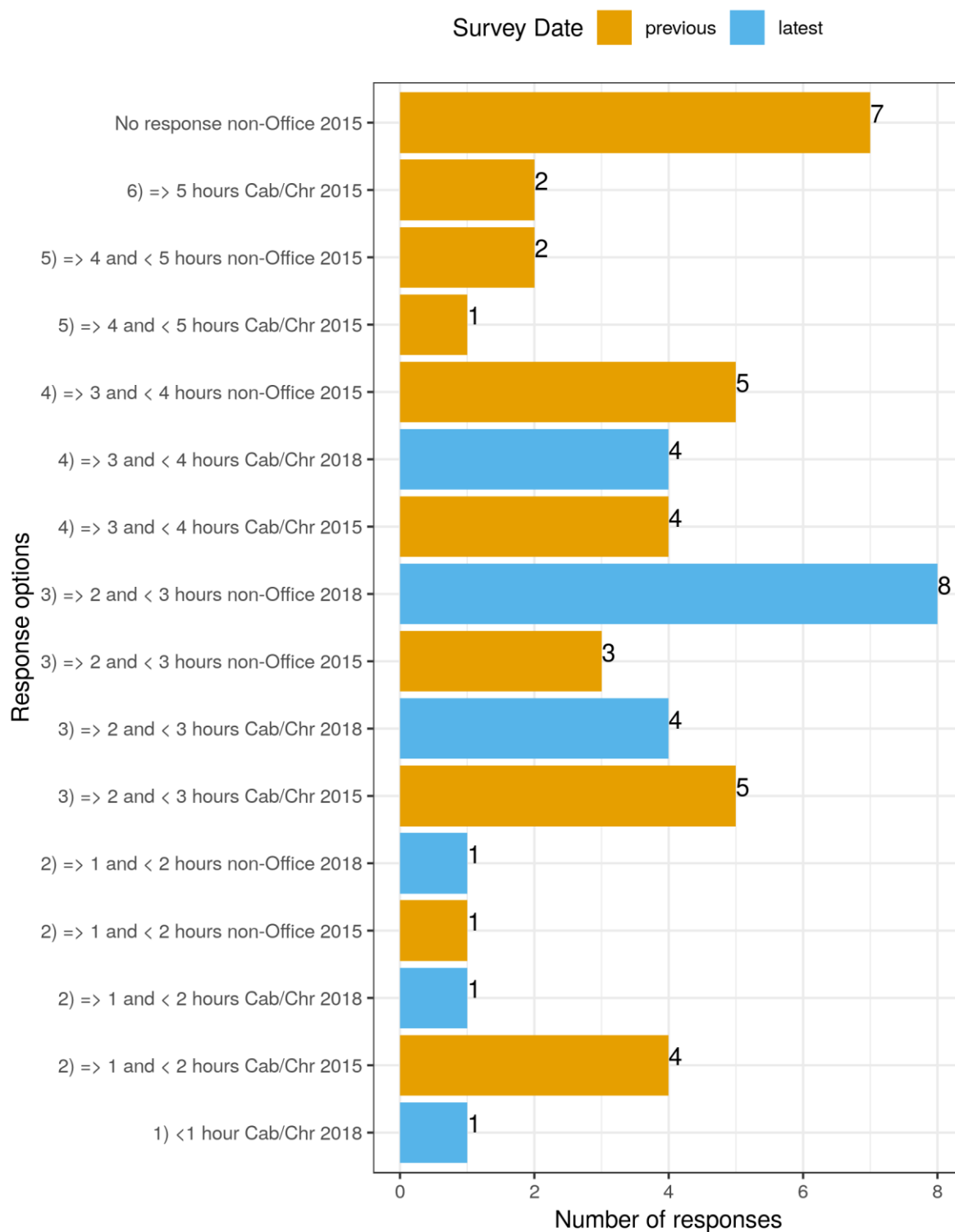
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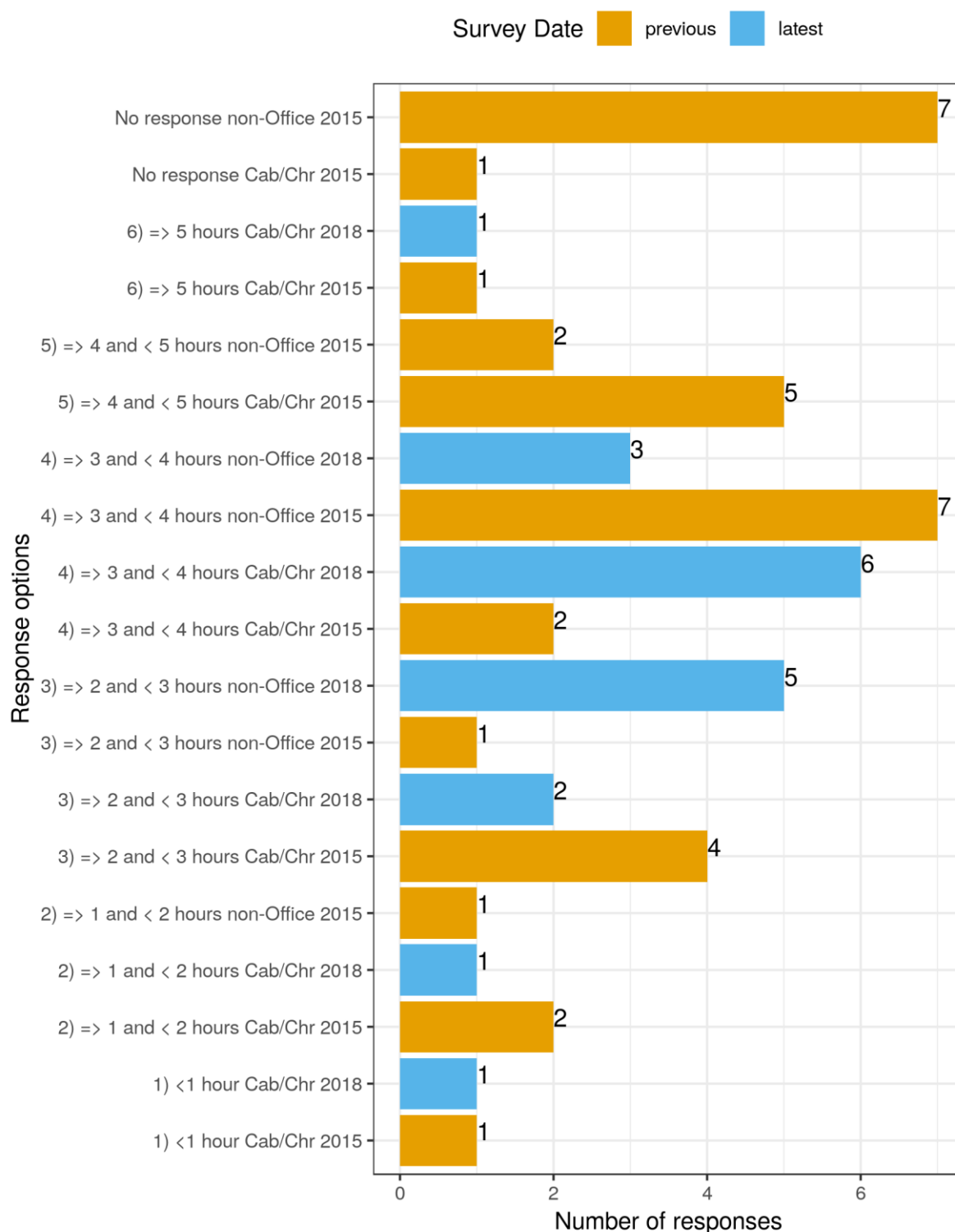
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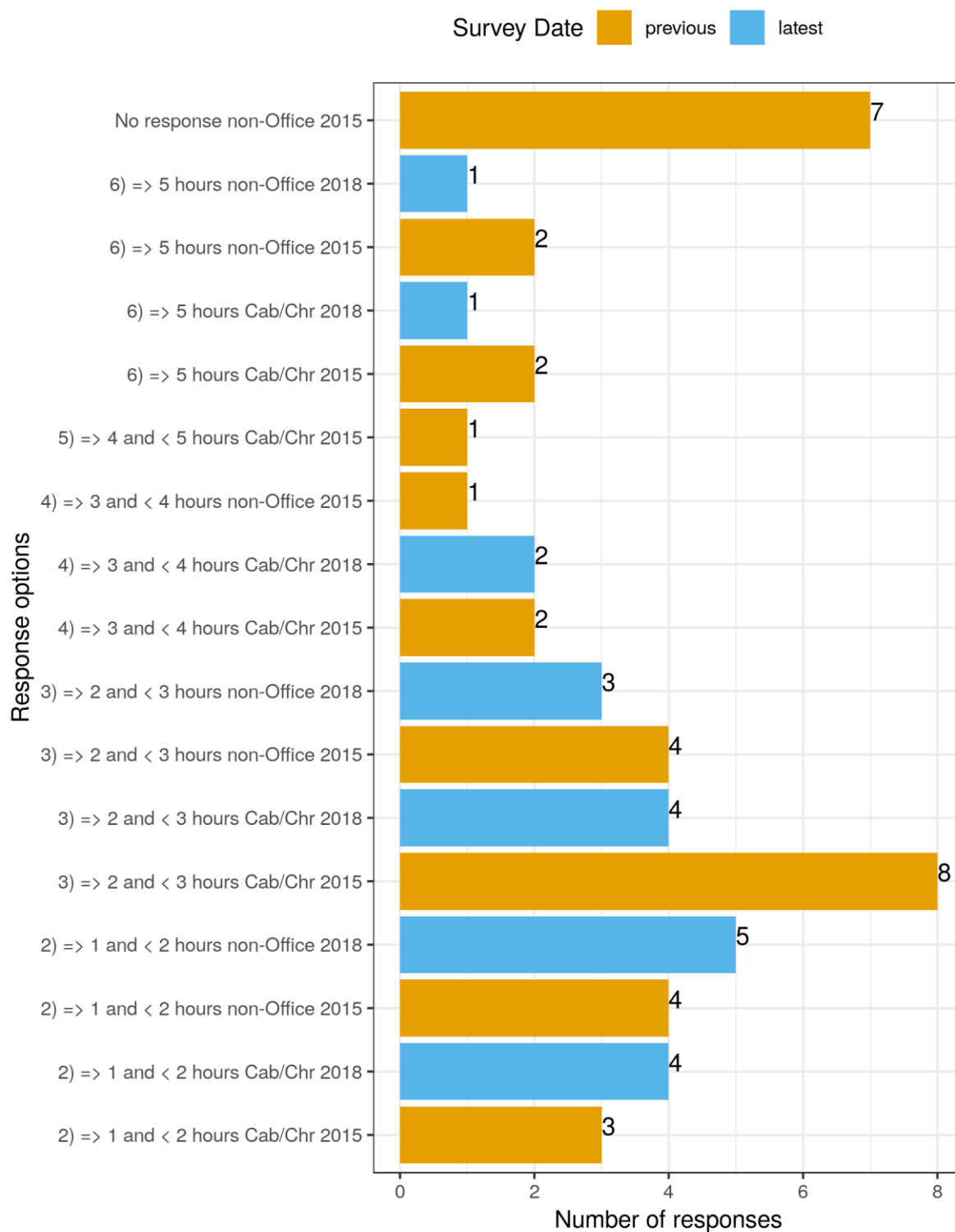
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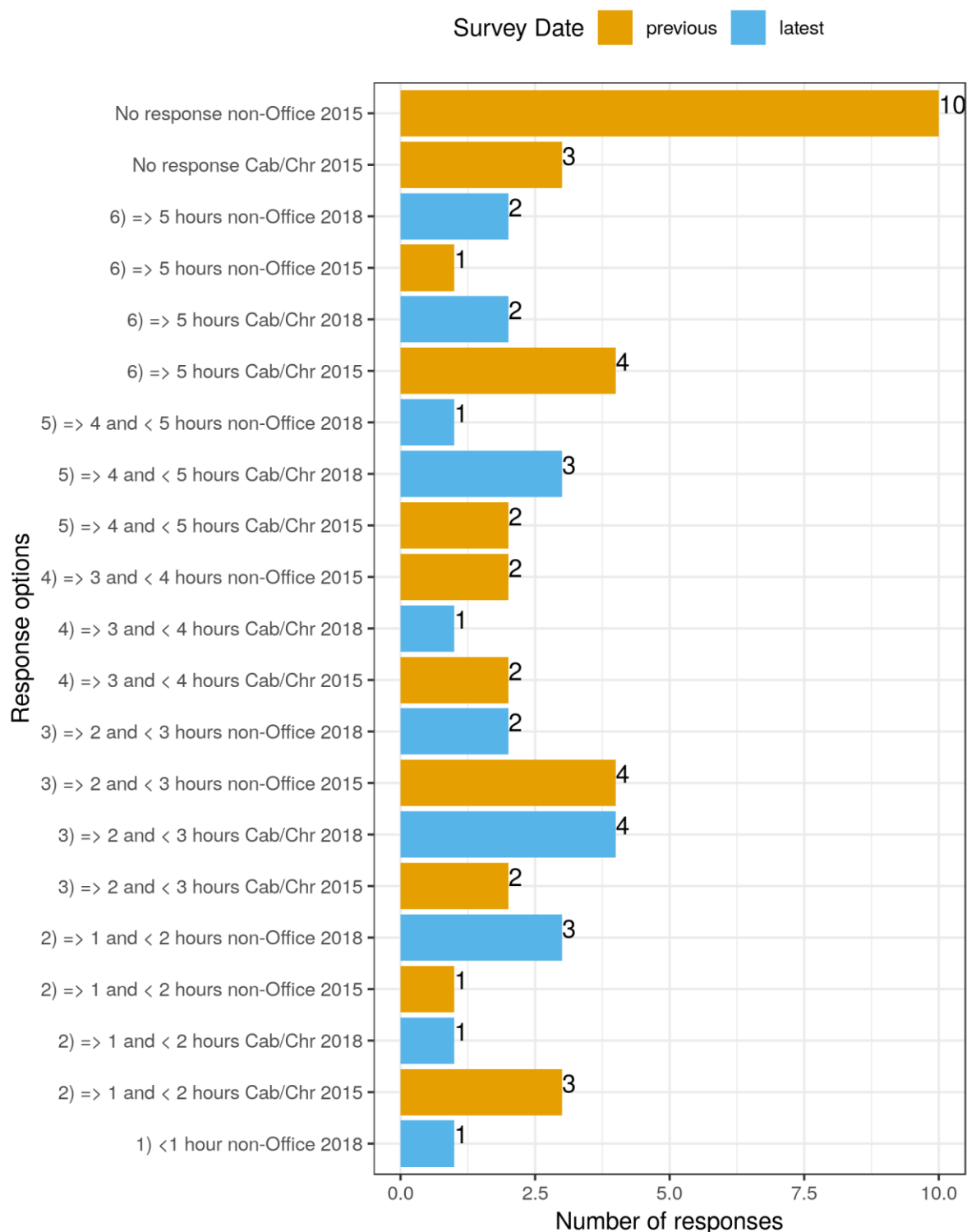
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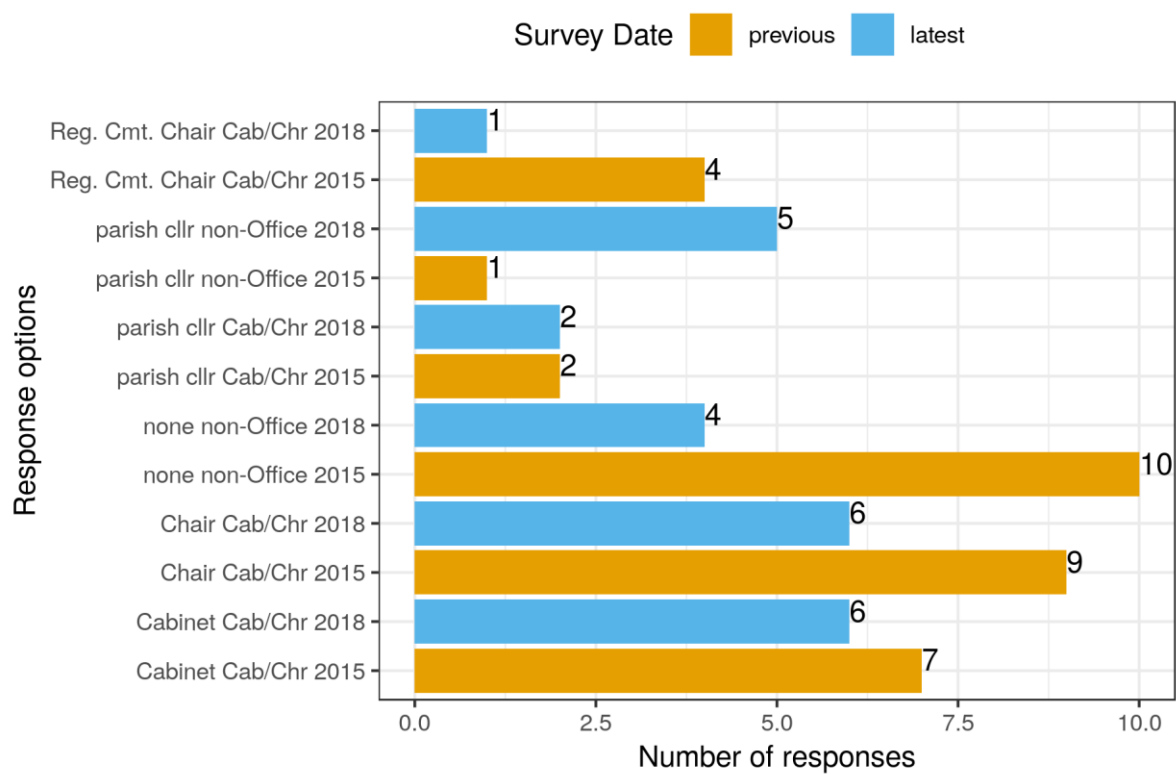
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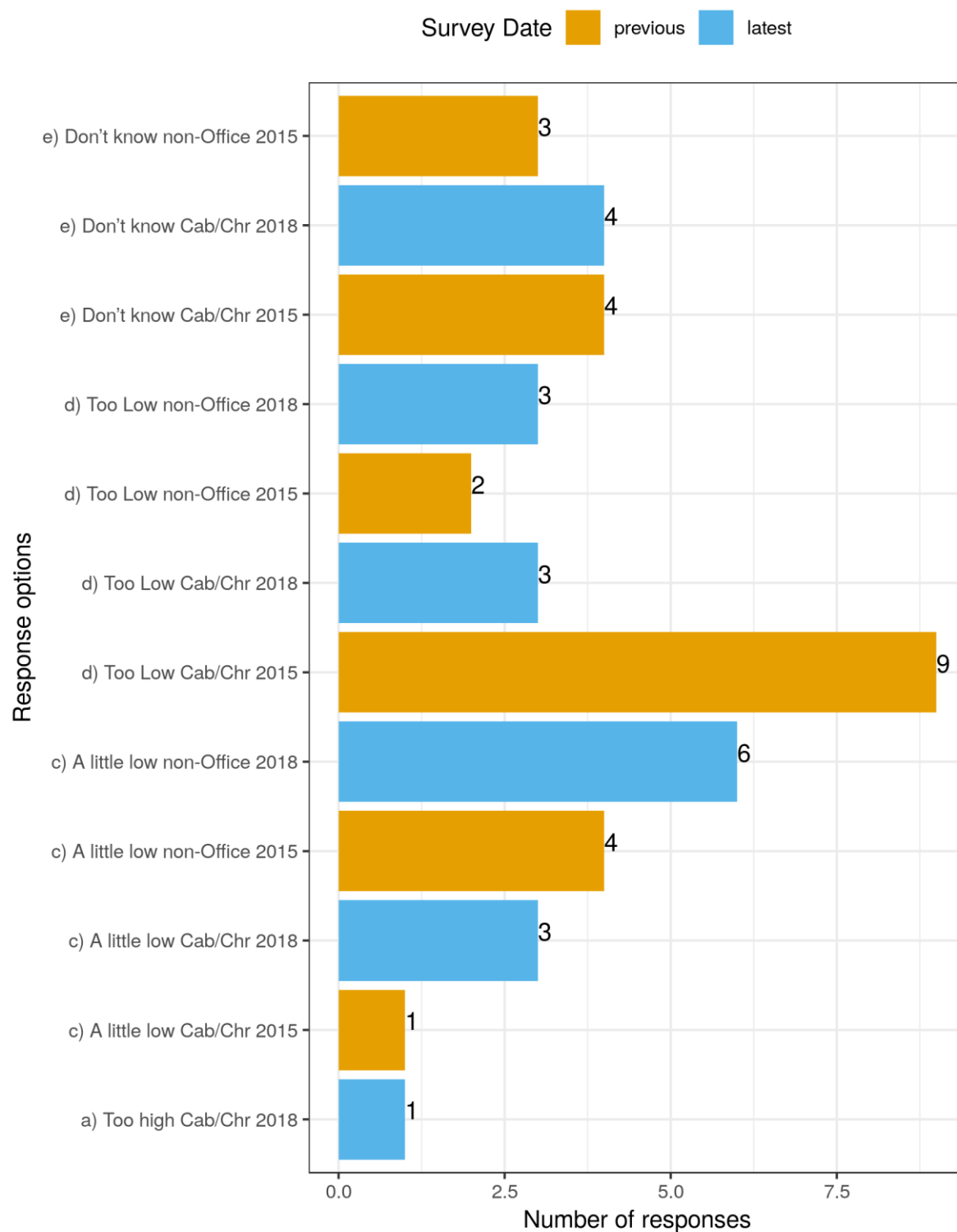
Question 13b. What is the average number of hours that you spend on indirect dealings with the public



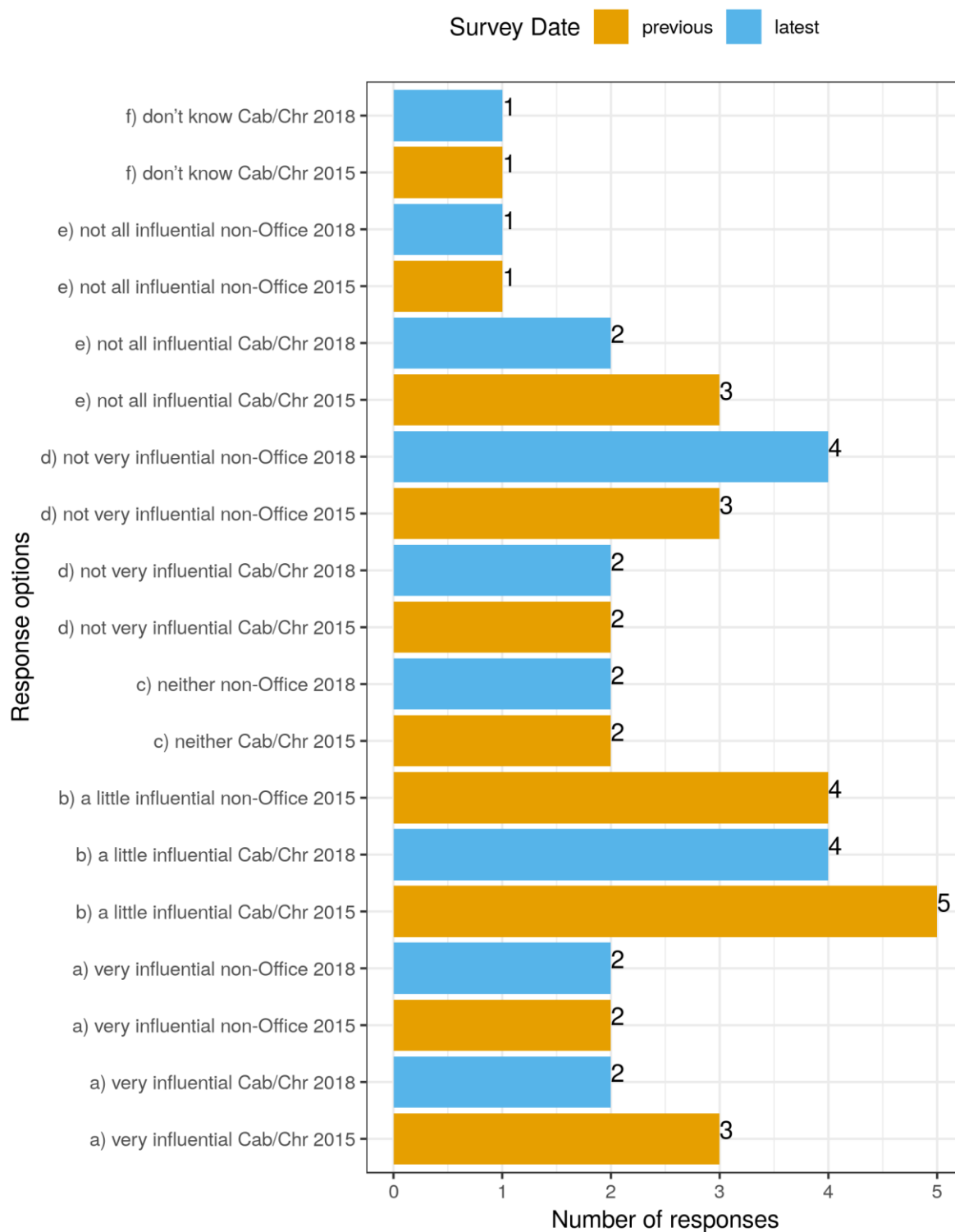
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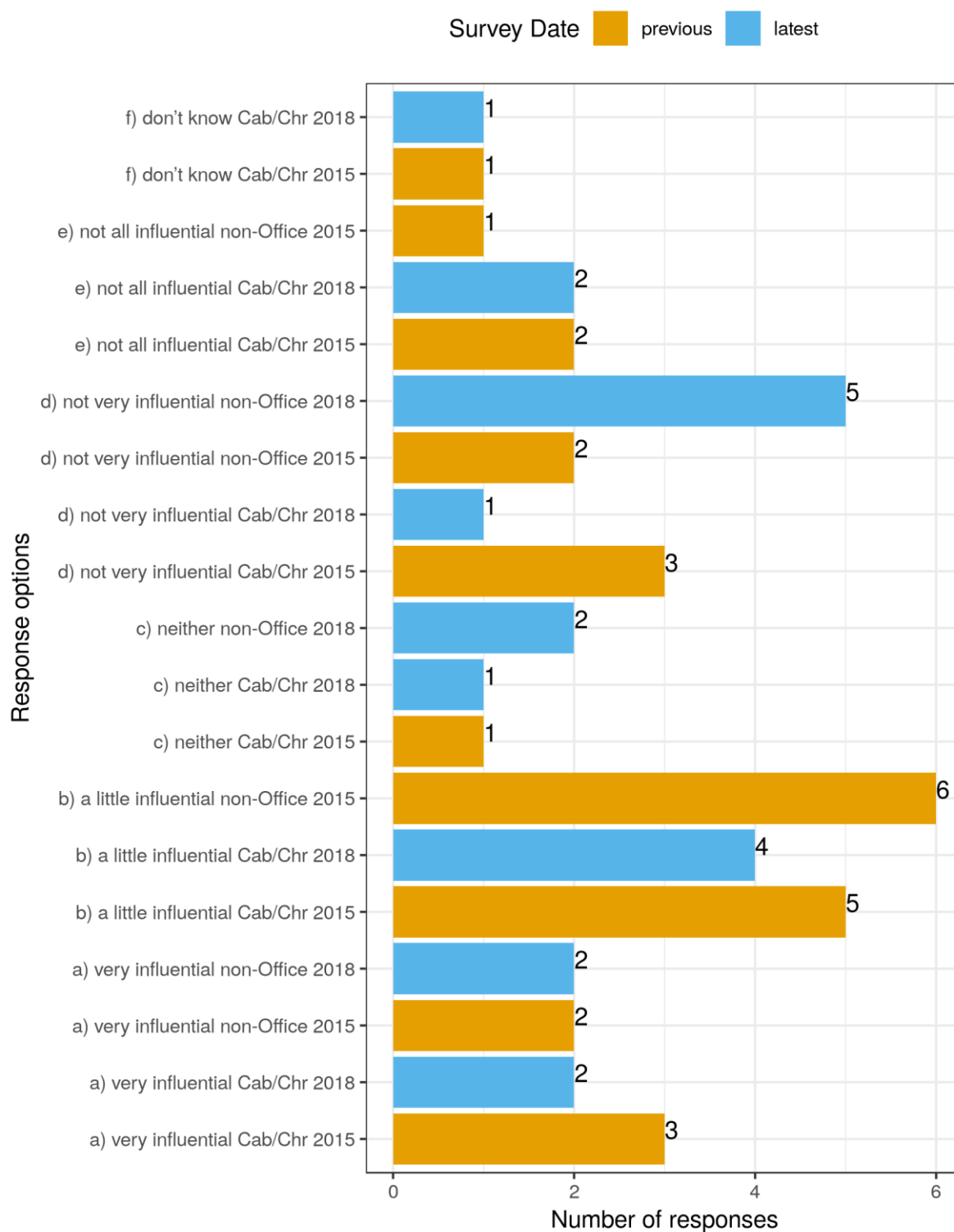
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