

Freshers Fortnight 20J and 21B Evaluation Report

1. Introduction and Key Findings

1.1 The Open University Students Association Freshers Fortnight is held twice a year, in September – October and in January – February. Freshers Fortnight is an opportunity for both new and continuing Open University (OU) students to engage with fellow students, take part in events and activities, and learn about the Association.

1.2 This report will evaluate the 28 September – 10 October 2020 (hereafter 20J) and 25 January – 7 February 2021 (hereafter 21B) Freshers Fortnights, organised by the Association's Student Community Team. This report presents an evaluation of these two Freshers Fortnights against the key objectives set for the events:

- Provide a welcoming and friendly atmosphere for both new and continuing students; with a focus on social opportunities to connect with fellow students, informative sessions from student representatives, Association and OU staff, and wellbeing
- Provide an opportunity for students to learn more about the Association, their student representatives and opportunities available to them
- Encourage further involvement from students with the Association beyond Freshers Fortnight

1.3 Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, Freshers Fortnight, which is usually a mixture of online and face-to-face events, was held entirely online.

1.4 As Freshers Fortnights 20J and 21B did not involve pre-registering for events, it is difficult to determine the exact number of students who engaged with the events and activities. However, from both Freshers Fortnights there was a total of 1765 students who signed up to the Freshers mailing list and there were 310 responses to the Feedback Survey for Freshers Fortnight 21B. This evaluation is based on two Feedback Surveys completed by students who engaged with Freshers Fortnight 21B and hosts of the events (the surveys were developed as a pilot after Freshers Fortnight 20J), as well as other engagement metrics over both Freshers Fortnights.

Overall, attendees found Freshers Fortnight 21B enjoyable, with some key feedback as below:

- 80.9% of the survey respondents agreed with the statement 'I found the hosts and facilitators friendly and welcoming' (53.5% selected 'strongly agree' and 27.4% selected 'agree').
- The feedback on whether Freshers Fortnight 2021 met attendees' expectations gives an overall satisfaction figure of 80% (39% selected 'very well, it met all my expectations' and 41% selected 'moderately well, it met most of my expectations').
- 77.1% of the survey respondents agreed with the statement 'I felt that the Freshers Fortnight reflected the Association's commitment to inclusivity and diversity' (41.9% selected 'strongly agree' and 35.2% selected 'agree').
- 68.7% of the survey respondents agreed with the statement 'I feel that attending Freshers has made a positive contribution to my student experience' (37.7% selected 'strongly agree' and 31% selected 'agree')
- In response to the question, 'Based on your experience of attending Freshers Fortnight 2021, would you recommend Freshers to a fellow student?', 68% selected 'definitely'.

Hosts also found Freshers Fortnight 21B enjoyable, with some key feedback below:

- In response to the question 'How did you find Freshers Fortnight 2021?', 95.6% of survey respondents found delivering an online session enjoyable (73.9% selected 5, the equivalent of 'very enjoyable', and 21.7% of respondents selected 4, the equivalent of 'enjoyable').
- 91.3% of survey respondents found the overall atmosphere and student engagement enjoyable (69.6% selected 5, the equivalent of 'very enjoyable', and 21.7% selected 4, the equivalent of 'enjoyable').
- In response to the statement 'There was clear information on how to join in with Freshers', 100% of survey respondents agreed (73.9% selected 'strongly agree' and 26.1% selected 'agree').
- In response to the statement 'I found it straight-forward to set up my session(s)', 95.6% of respondents agreed (73.9% selected 'strongly agree' and 21.7% selected 'agree').

1.5 Attendees' positive experience of attending Freshers Fortnight 21B is also reflected in the comments received throughout the survey. Attendees gave positive feedback on feeling welcomed, the variety of sessions, and the opportunity to meet fellow OU students. Several comments mention the sense of community that students felt as a result of having attended Freshers. Getting to know fellow OU students, feeling better informed about their OU journey, and learning about the different activities/services offered by the Association were highlighted; one attendee also commented on online sessions enabling students with accessibility needs to participate in events.

“I loved the feeling of being involved, the students and staff are great and welcoming and engaging”

“I found the sessions I went to very informative. The range of things available to access was varied and diverse which I think attracted a wide range of people.”

“This was my third Freshers Fortnight and I think it gets better every time. More sessions, more opportunities and more fun! I can't wait for the next one!”

“I found it very interesting and informative and it boosted my confidence in meeting new people.”

“It was lovely to chat and be involved and experience the sense of being part of a university full of other new students, returning students and helpful guidance from the student association and seeing tutors from the faculties.”

“Freshers fortnight was brilliant! It gave me the opportunity to get to know more about the OU, Clubs, events, The Student Association etc. It was also really beneficial to get involved and meet other new students - it felt a very positive and supportive environment. I now feel more at ease about starting my course, after engaging with as many Freshers' sessions as I possibly could, knowing that there is a huge amount of support available. Most importantly, I didn't realise how social the OU could be!”

“Cannot attend physically and felt a bit cut off from association as physically disabled remote student. This event brought me more into the student experience.”

2. Freshers Fortnight attendees & mailing list subscribers profile

2.1 The demographic analysis of attendees is key to the understanding of our membership engagement.

2.2 Freshers Fortnight 21B engaged many students who had not engaged with the Students Association before, with 45% of respondents selecting the statement ‘I was not engaged with the Students Association until this Freshers’ [Figure 1]. 73% of respondents said they keep up to date with news and events from the Association.

2.3 Notably, returning students showed considerably higher awareness of what the Students Association offers, as can be seen in Figure 2.

2.4 Figures 3 - 6 present profiles of those students who subscribed to the Freshers mailing list. There were 1765 students who subscribed to the Freshers mailing list as of 28 February 2021, including 1121 from 3 September 2020 – 30 November 2020 and 644 from 1 December 2020 – 28 February 2021. The data consists of those subscribers who provided their PI number, which was 1033 subscribers during the Freshers Fortnight 20J period, and 635 subscribers during the Freshers Fortnight 21B period. As Freshers Fortnight events did not require pre-registration, demographic analysis could not be made from attendees of events.

2.5 The proportion of Freshers mailing list subscribers under the age of 25 was higher for both 20J and 21B when compared with the OU student population [Figure 3].

2.6 For both 20J and 21B, the proportion of Freshers mailing list subscribers is skewed in favour of female attendees when compared with the OU student population. While for 21B the proportion of subscribers who had declared a disability corresponds to that within the wider student population, it is a decrease from 20J [Figure 4].

2.7 For both 20J and 21B, the ethnicity breakdown is similar to the demographic profile of the OU student population [Figure 5].

2.8 The only region showing a difference of more than 2% between the 20J and 21B subscribers and the OU student population is Scotland [Figure 6].

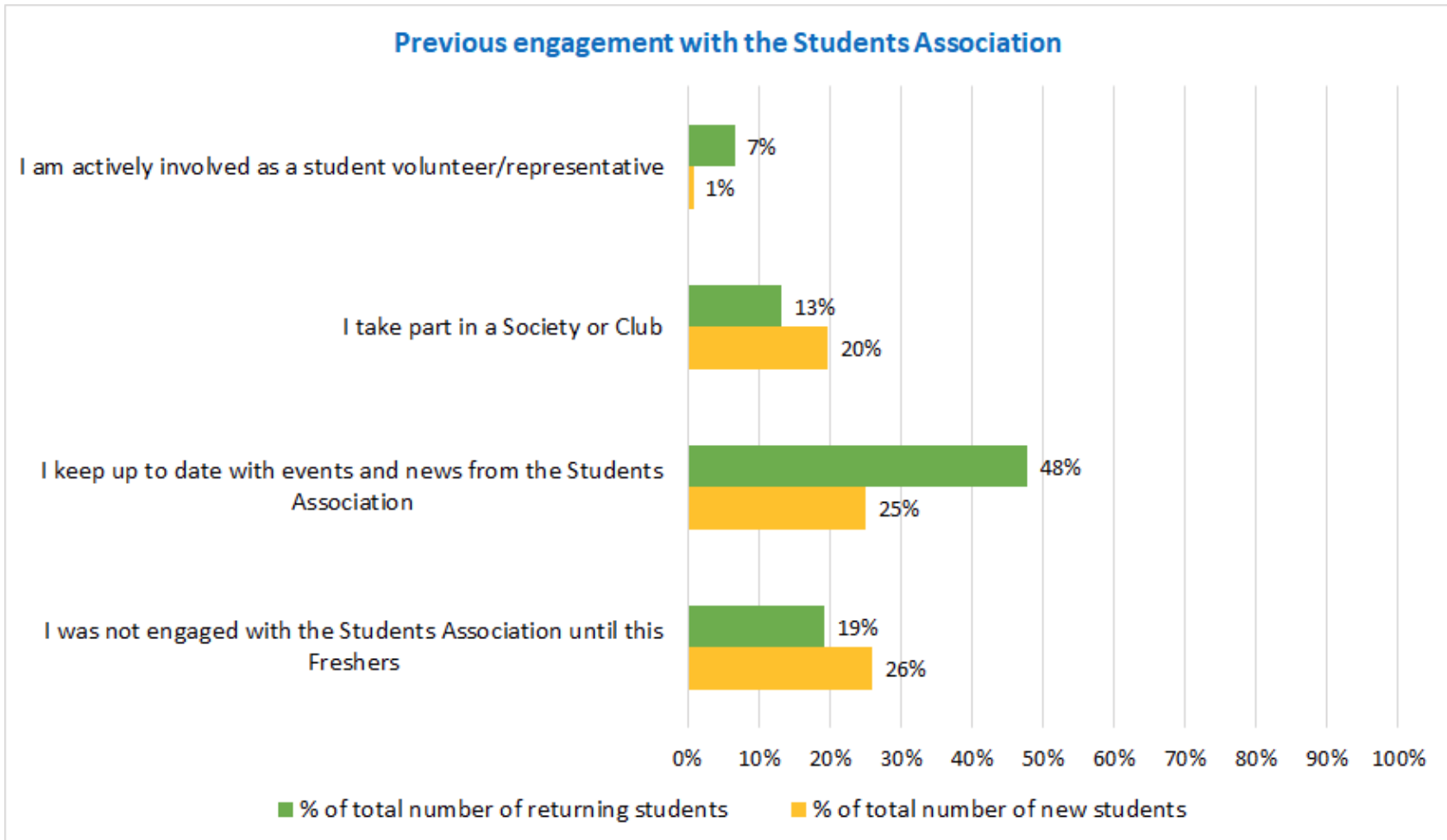


Figure 1: Previous engagement with the OU Students Association.

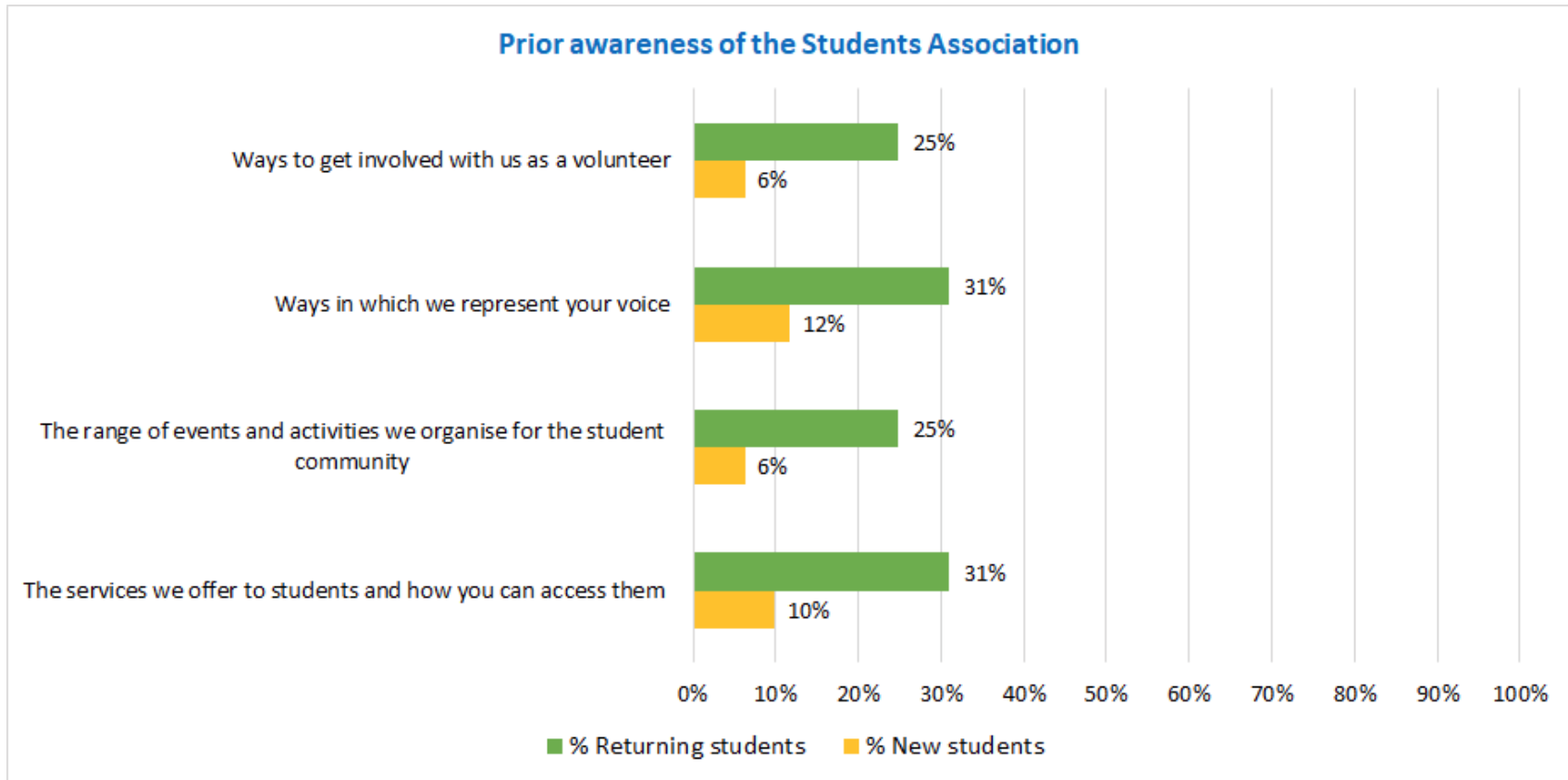


Figure 2: Prior awareness of the OU Students Association.

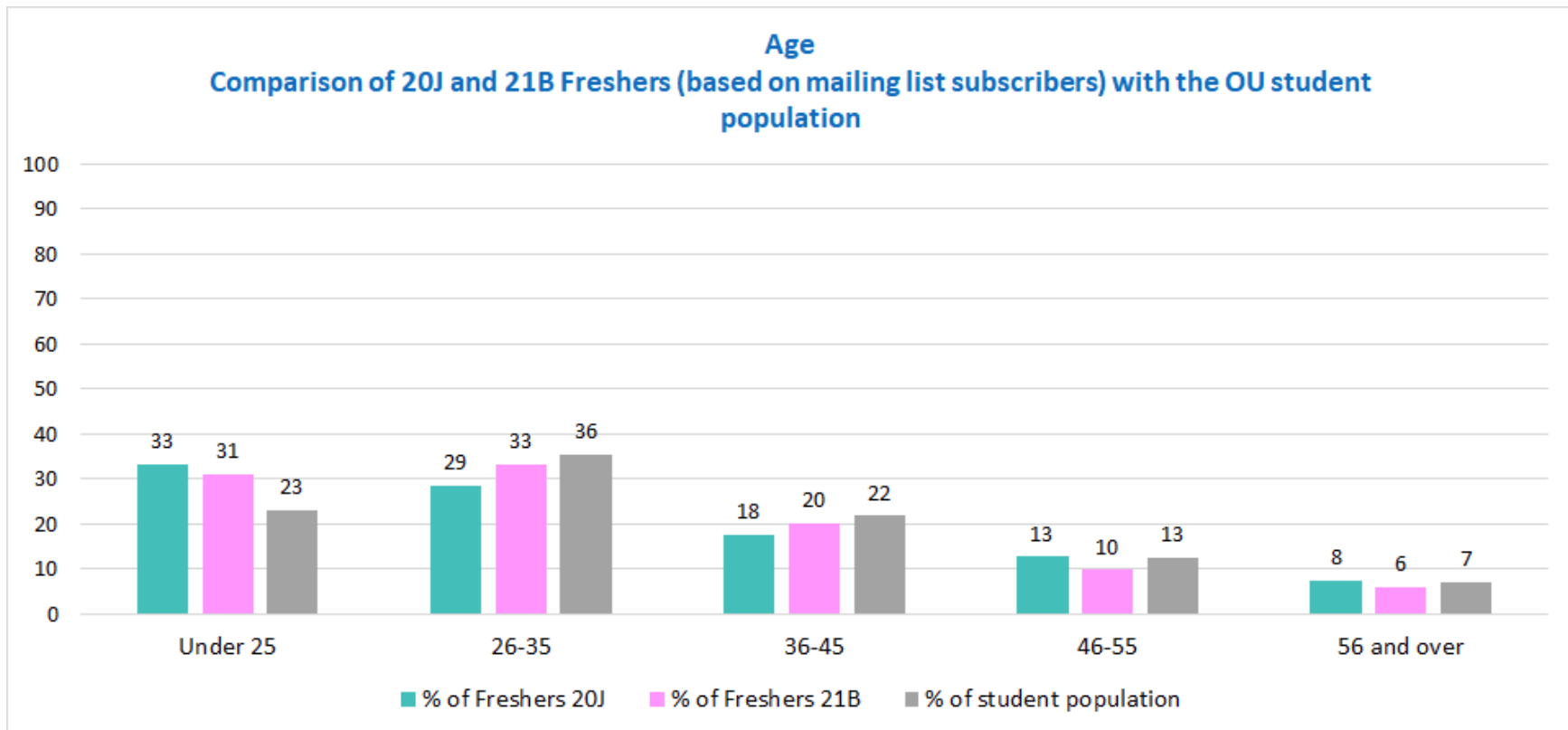


Figure 3: Age: The subscriber profiles for the Freshers mailing list for the 20J and 21B intake are compared against the OU student population.

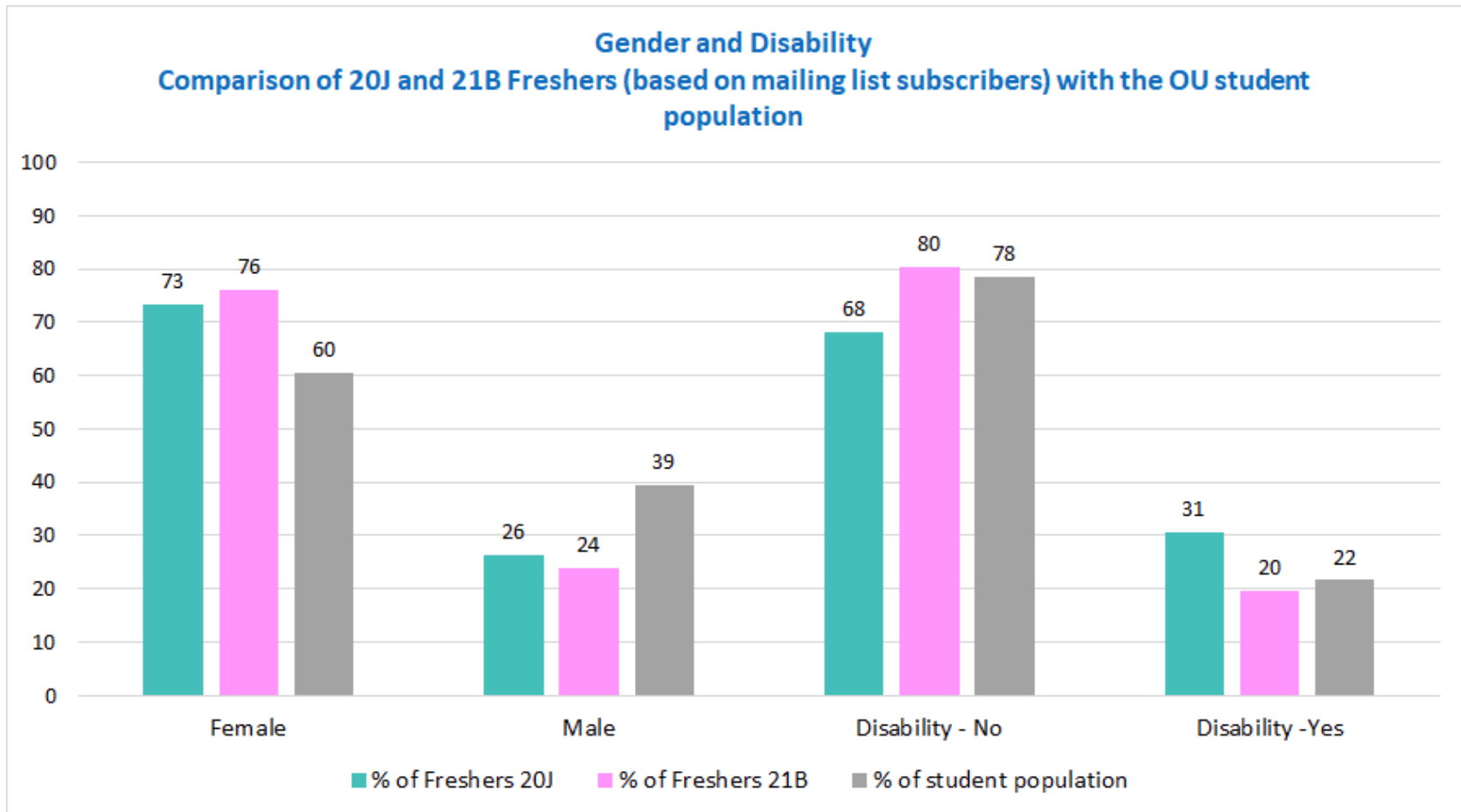


Figure 4: Gender and disability: The subscriber profiles for the Freshers mailing list for the 20J and 21B intake are compared against the OU student population.

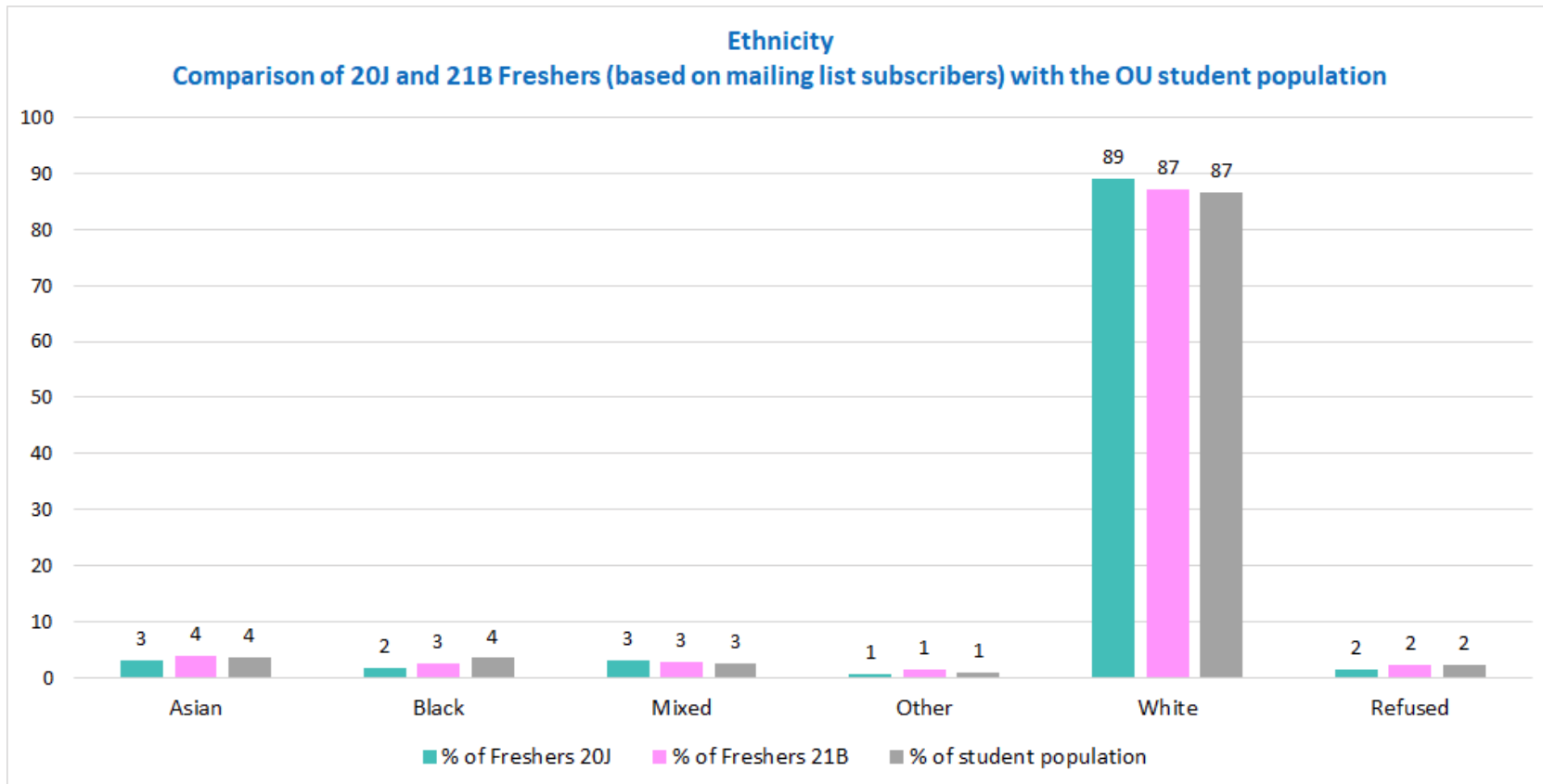


Figure 5: Ethnicity: The subscriber profiles for the Freshers mailing list for the 20J and 21B intake are compared against the OU student population.

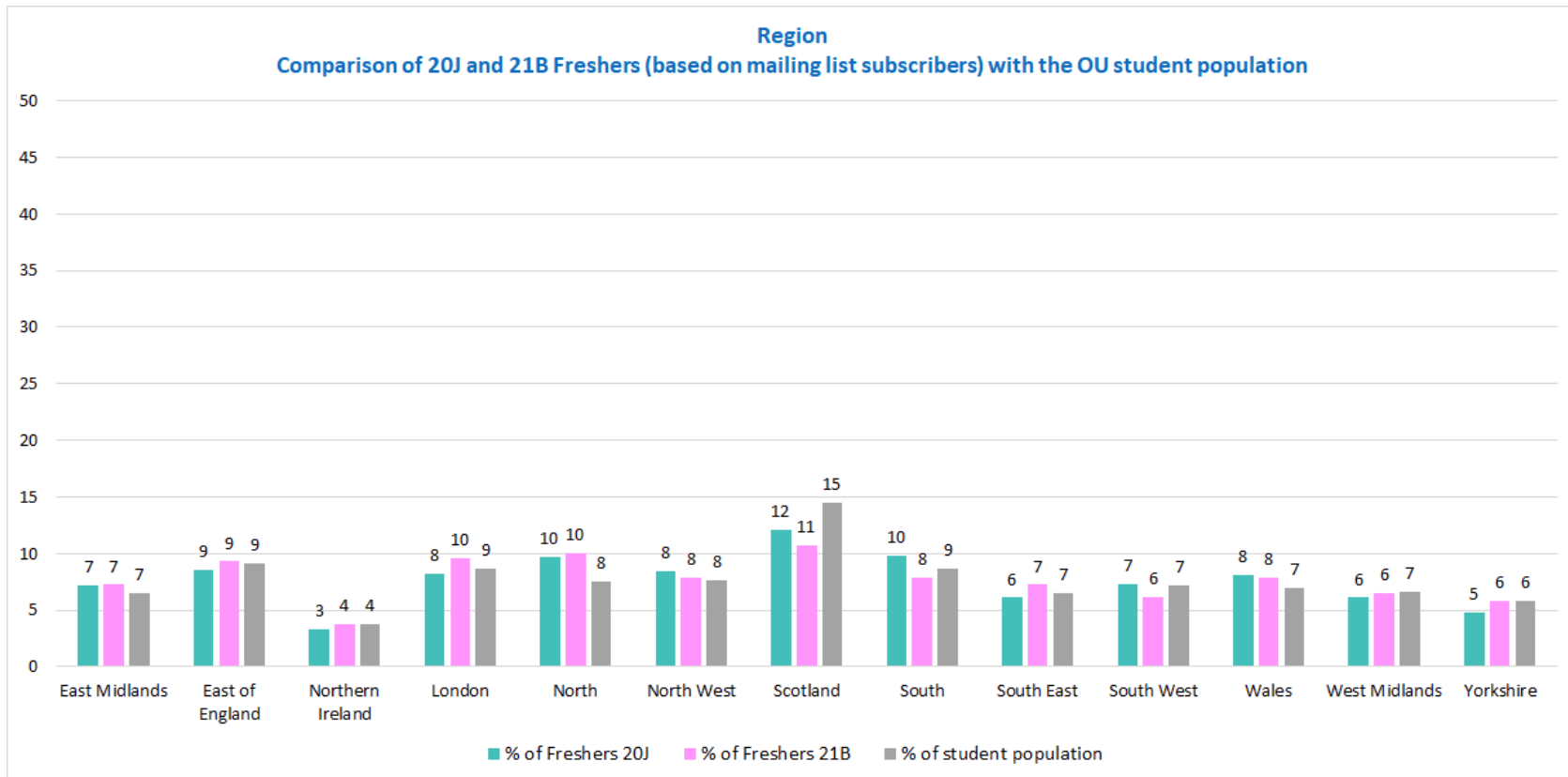


Figure 6: Region: The subscriber profiles for the Freshers mailing list for the 20J and 21B intake are compared against the OU student population. The only region showing a difference of more than 2% between the 20J and 21B subscribers and the OU student population is Scotland.

3. Motivations for attending Freshers Fortnight 21B and overall experience

3.1 The Feedback Survey invited respondents to indicate what motivated them to attend Freshers Fortnight 21B [Figure 7]. Respondents chose 'to try something new' (53%) and 'to learn more about the Open University' (50%) as their two key motivations. Other motivations for attending the event, in order of the number of survey respondents choosing each option, were: 'to meet with fellow OU students online' (48%), 'to learn more about the Students Association' (48%), 'to explore ways to get involved with the Students Association' (25%), and 'to get to know the elected student leadership team' (8%).

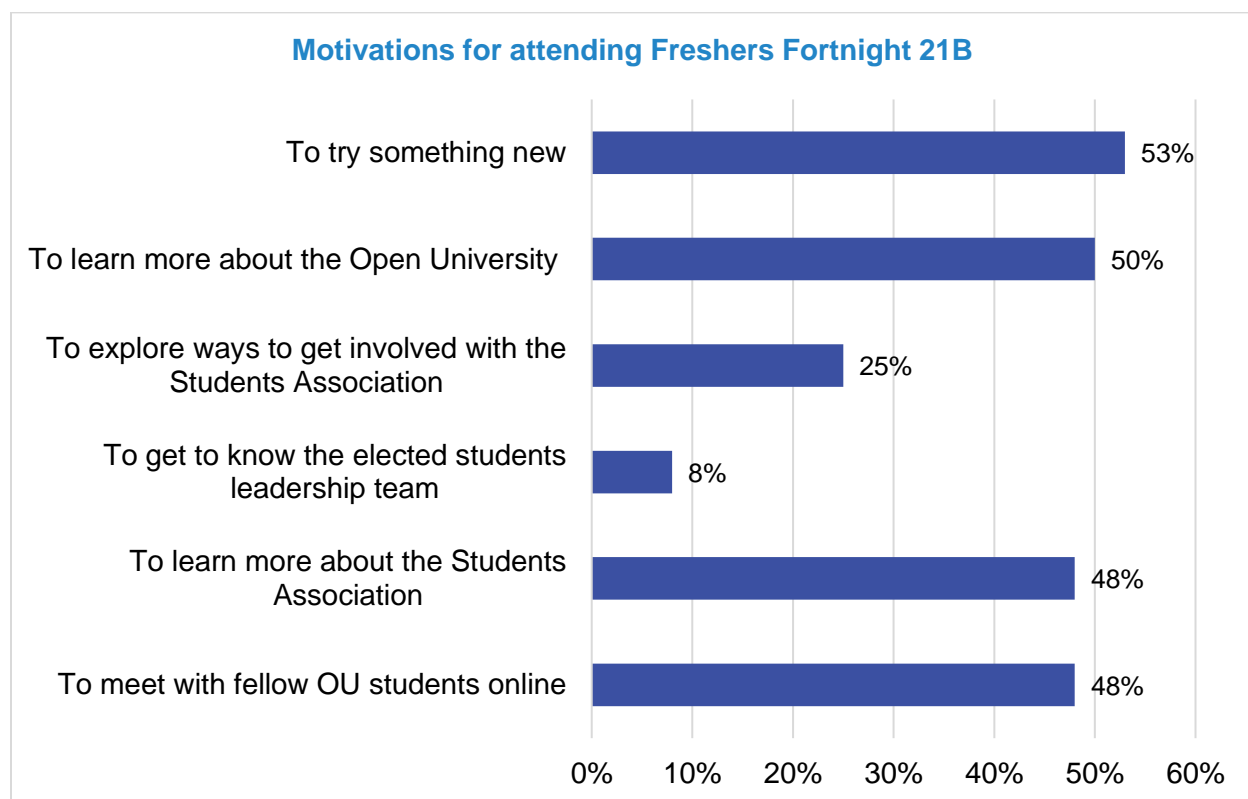


Figure 7: Attendee feedback on what motivated them to attend Freshers Fortnight 21B.

3.2 In response to the question, 'How well did Freshers Fortnight 2021 meet your expectations?', 39% of the respondents selected 'very well, it met or exceeded all my expectations' and 41% selected 'moderately well, it met most of my expectations', giving an overall satisfaction figure of 80%. However, 3% of the delegates selected 'not very well, it only met a few of my expectations' and 1% selected 'not at all, it did not meet my expectations', while 15% were not sure.

3.3 In response to the question, 'Thinking about your overall experience of attending Freshers Fortnight 2021, to what extent would you agree or disagree with the following?', 80.9% of the survey respondents agreed with the statement 'I found the hosts and facilitators friendly and welcoming' (53.5% selected 'strongly agree' and 27.4% selected 'agree'). Furthermore, 77.1% of the survey respondents agreed with the statement 'I felt that the Freshers Fortnight reflected the Association's commitment to inclusivity and diversity' (41.9% selected 'strongly agree' and 35.2% selected 'agree'). 68.7% of the survey respondents agreed with the statement 'I feel that attending Freshers has made a positive contribution to my student experience' (37.7% selected 'strongly agree' and 31% selected 'agree'). Additionally, 68.3% of the survey respondents agreed with the statement 'I felt encouraged to participate in the Freshers sessions' (34.8% selected 'strongly agree' and 33.5% selected 'agree'). 62.3% of survey respondents agreed with the statement 'I felt there were plenty of opportunities for my voice to be heard' (31% selected 'strongly agree' and 31.3% selected 'agree'). Finally, 64.9% of survey respondents agreed with the statement 'I feel that attending Freshers has increased my sense of belonging to the OU student community' (33.9% selected 'strongly agree' and 31% selected 'agree') [Figure 8].

Experience of attending Freshers Fortnight 21B

■ Strongly agree
 ■ Agree
 ■ Neutral
 ■ Disagree
 ■ Strongly disagree
 ■ Not applicable

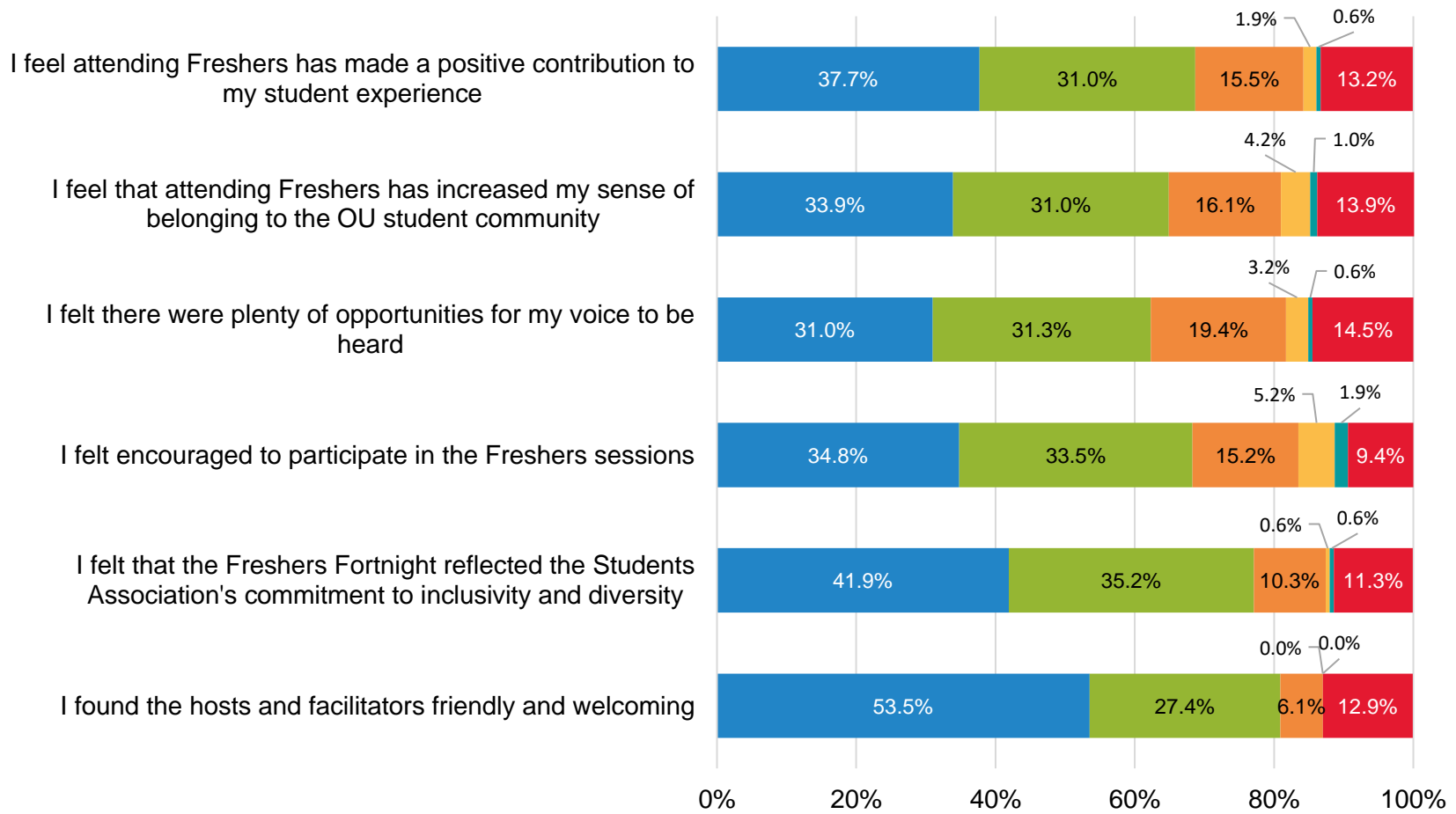


Figure 8: Attendee's responses about their overall experience of attending Freshers Fortnight 21B.

4. Freshers Fortnight 20J and 21B Communications

4.1 Information about Freshers Fortnight 20J and 21B was communicated through various platforms to raise awareness – CAMEL mailings, social media, StudentHome, the Association monthly newsletter, oustudents.com and the Freshers mailing list. The most popular channels through which attendees heard about Freshers Fortnight 21B was 'StudentHome' (53.2%) and 'Emails from the Students Association' (32.6%) [Figure 9].

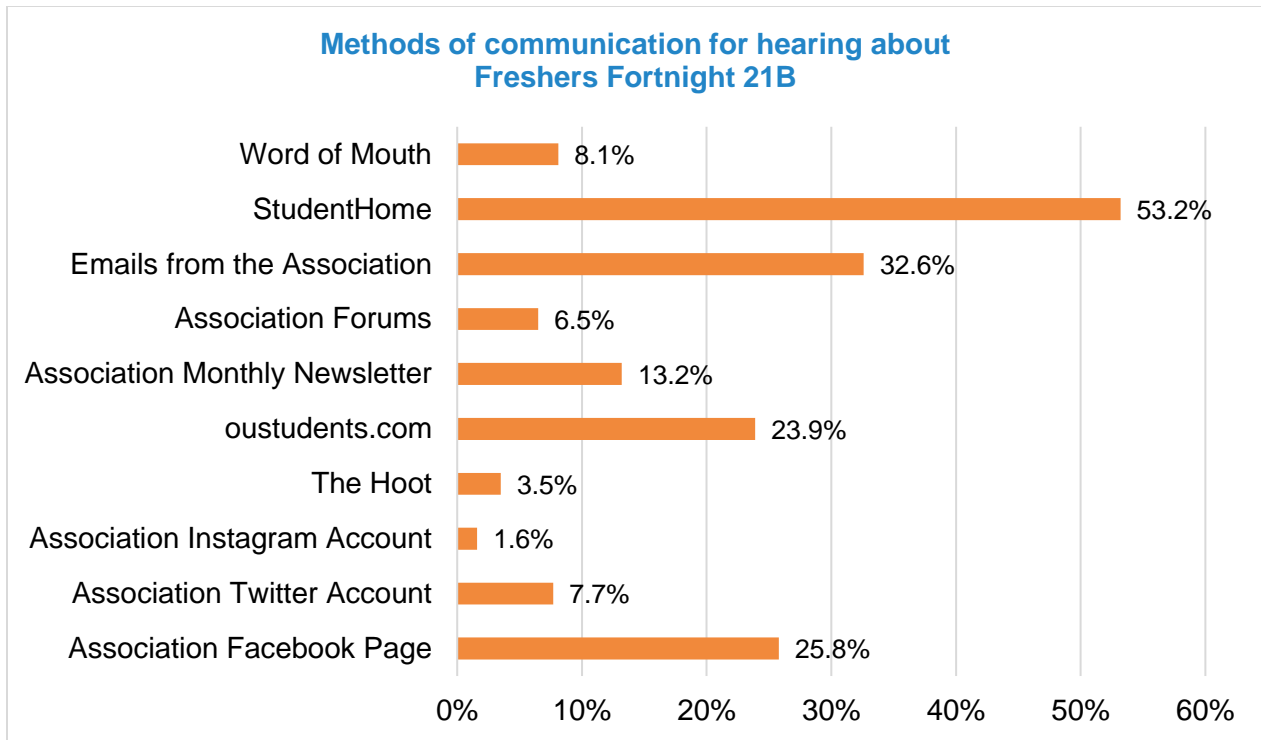


Figure 9: Survey responses to the question 'How did you hear about Freshers Fortnight 2021?'

4.2 **CAMEL mailings:** The final 20J Freshers CAMEL mailing was sent to 28,395 students and the final 21B Freshers CAMEL mailing was sent to 17,853 students.

4.3 **oustudents.com:** The home page on oustudents.com was visited 20,028 times during the 20J Freshers Fortnight. During 21B Freshers Fortnight, the home page was visited 10,641 times.

4.4 **Freshers microsite:** There was a dedicated Freshers microsite for both Freshers Fortnights, which contained the full programme and links to attend, a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) page, information on Competitions and Digital Freebies, a Useful Information page and more. 76.5% of survey respondents agreed with the statement 'I

found the Freshers website easy to navigate' (31.3% selected 'strongly agree' and 45.2% selected 'agree').

4.5 Freshers microsite views: The Freshers microsite on oustudents.com was the top-viewed page in September 2020 with 26,563 views, and the fifth most-viewed page in October 2020 with 4,304 views. The Freshers microsite on oustudents.com was the top-viewed page in January 2021 with 9,704 views, and the sixth most-viewed page in February 2021 with 2,091 views. The most popular pages on the Freshers microsite during Freshers Fortnight 20J was the *Freshers timetable Week 1* (5,783 views), *Freshers timetable Week 2* (4,048 views), *Freshers timetable* (2,241 views), *Freshers toolkit* (1,908 views), and *Digital freebies* (629 views). The most popular pages on the Freshers microsite during Freshers Fortnight 21B were *Freshers timetable* (7,089 views), *Freshers toolkit* (1,391 views), *Freshers Welcome session* (338 views), *Freshers FAQs* (203 views) and *Freshers Societies and Clubs session* (196 views). Note that for Freshers Fortnight 20J, the timetable was split into separate pages for Week 1 and 2, whereas for 21B the timetable was on one page, and in 21B there were separate links for each individual session too.

4.6 Social media 20J: The top post on the Association's Facebook page for Freshers Fortnight 20J was the *Academic Resolutions Prize Draw* – which reached 14,958 people, had 606 reactions, comments and shares and 1,776 post clicks. The top post on the Association's Twitter page for Freshers Fortnight 20J was also the *Academic Resolutions Prize Draw* – which had 17,455 impressions, 60 comments, 59 retweets and likes, and 77 clicks to the T&Cs.

4.7 Social media 21B: The top Freshers-related post on the Association's Facebook page for 21B was the *Freshers week one at a glance* post – which reached 11,333 people, had 189 reactions, comments and shares and 397 post clicks. It was the second most popular post on the Facebook page during the month and was sent two days before the start of Freshers Fortnight. The top post on the Association's Twitter page in January 2021 was the *Freshers week one at a glance* post – which received 16,058 impressions, 34 retweets and likes, and 77 link clicks to the Freshers timetable page.

4.8 Freshers mailing list: There were 1765 students who subscribed to the Freshers mailing list for both Freshers Fortnight 20J and 21B. There were three mailings sent during Freshers Fortnight 20J, and seven mailings sent prior to, during and after Freshers Fortnight 21B – as sending more regular mailings over the Freshers 21B period was trialed. 59.1% of survey respondents agreed with the statement 'I found it helpful to receive the Freshers mailing over the Freshers Fortnight' (26.8% selected 'strongly agree' and 32.3% selected 'agree'). Notably, 28.1% of survey respondents stated 'Not applicable – did not sign up to the mailing list', showing that more promotion of the mailing list in future would be beneficial.

4.9 Freshers mailing list engagement: The average open rate for 20J mailings was 65.7%, and the average click rate was 22.8%. The highest performing mailing for 20J in terms of open and click rate was the first mailing introducing Freshers Fortnight which

was sent on 28 September 2020, which had 73% opens and 32.4% clicks (the *Freshers timetable* page and the *Passport Bingo Prize Draw* page received the most clicks). For the 21B mailings, the average open rate was 47.3% and the click rate 7.1%. The highest performing mailing in terms of click rate for 21B was the penultimate mailing sent on 8 February 2021 which promoted the *Writing Competition* and *Feedback Survey*, which had 57.4% open rate. The highest performing mailing in terms of click rate for 21B was the mailing on 28 January 2021 which had 12.6% click rate, with the top links being *Competitions and Prize Draws*, *University Challenge Quiz* and the *Freshers timetable* page. The reduction in engagement when comparing both Freshers Fortnights could be because the same mailing list was used for both – so potentially students who attended Freshers Fortnight 20J stayed subscribed to the list but may not have been engaged with the Freshers Fortnight 21B mailings.

4.9 Clarity of information: 76.8% of survey respondents agreed with the statement 'There was clear information on how to join in with Freshers' (38.7% selected 'strongly agree' and 38.1% selected 'agree').

4.10 Frequency of communications: 73.5% of survey respondents agreed with the statement 'I was happy with the frequency of communications to me in the run-up to Freshers' (31.6% selected 'strongly agree' and 41.9% selected 'agree').

5. Freshers Fortnight 20J and 21B Programme

5.1 There was an extensive programme of online events and sessions for OU students to take part in during both Freshers Fortnights. There were 40 sessions at 20J Freshers Fortnight and 49 sessions at 21B Freshers Fortnight. 30 sessions were run at both Freshers Fortnights and the remainder of the sessions were unique to each Freshers Fortnight. The sessions ranged from:

- Faculty chats
- Area chats
- Social events (*Bingo, Friday Night Quiz, Speed Friending, Movie Night* and more)
- Informative sessions from students (*Welcome session, Meet your student reps, Study Tips, Societies and Clubs Fair* and more)
- OU sessions (*Careers, Library, and Student Support Team* in the 21B programme)
- Societies and Clubs sessions
- Wellbeing themed sessions (*Mindapples* and a *Looking after your mental wellbeing*)

5.2 Attendee numbers were collected for many of our sessions, by staff or student representatives who were present. Note that attendee numbers used are the highest number reached in the session, as attendee numbers fluctuated throughout sessions. The top 5 most popular sessions for both Freshers Fortnights (from the attendee numbers we received) are as follows. For Freshers Fortnight 20J, the most popular session was

Welcome to the OU Students Association and Freshers Fortnight with 197 attendees, closely followed by *Study Tips* with 166 attendees. These were followed by *Societies and Clubs Fair* with 148 attendees, *Friday Night Quiz* with 134 attendees and *Making the most of your OU Tutor* with 133 attendees. For Freshers Fortnight 21B, the most popular session was once again *Welcome to the OU Students Association and Freshers Fortnight* with 165 attendees. This was followed by the *Space Science Club Event – A Guide to Leaving the Planet* which had 118 attendees. The *Societies and Clubs Fair* had 112 attendees, followed by the 110 attendees at the *University Challenge Live Event*. Finally, *Meet your student reps* and the *London Region Arts Club (LRAC) Event – Experiencing the Roman Taverns of Pompeii* both had 83 attendees each [Figure 10].

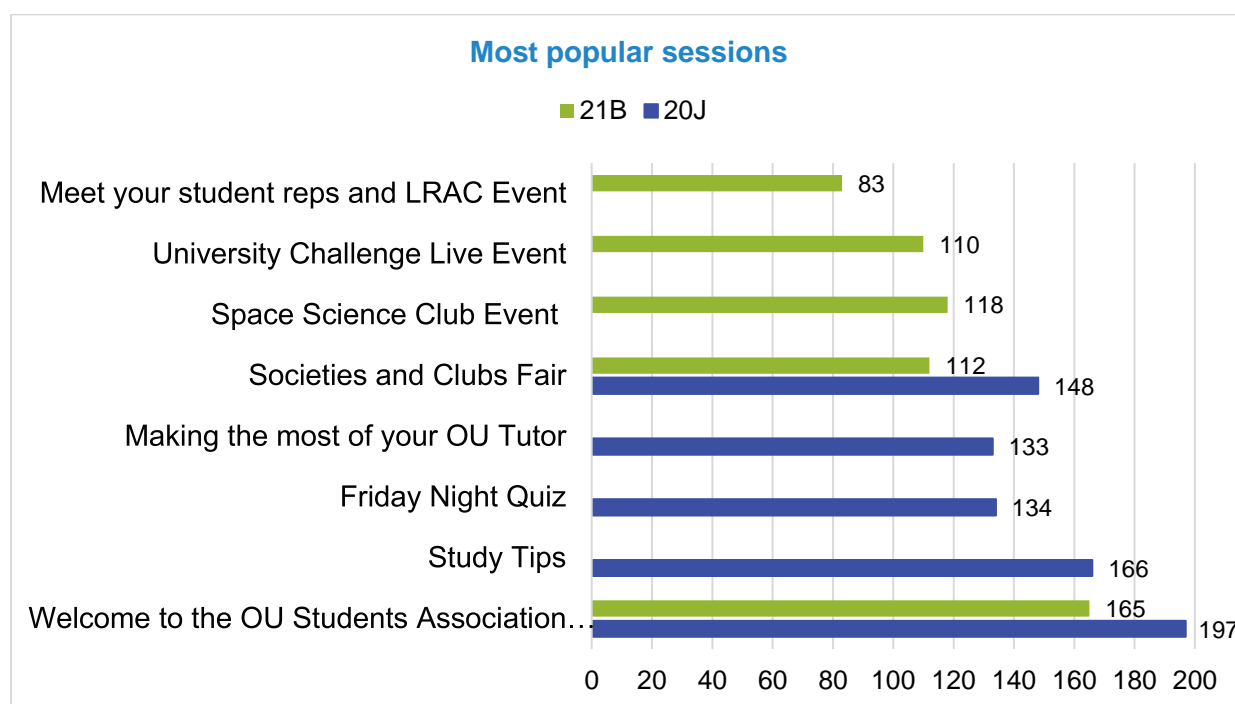


Figure 10: The five most popular sessions at Freshers Fortnight 20J and 21B.

It is worth noting that both the *Welcome to the OU Students Association and Freshers Fortnight* and *Societies and Clubs Fair* feature as some of the most popular sessions for both Freshers Fortnights. The *Societies and Clubs Fair* session was a new session for Freshers Fortnight 20J and gives Societies and Clubs a few minutes each to talk about who they are and encourage students to join. One Club and One Society event feature in our top 5 most popular sessions for Freshers Fortnight 21B, which shows the success that Clubs and Societies have been having with hosting online events, especially over the last year.

5.3 Of the 30 sessions that were run at both Freshers Fortnights, attendee numbers of 20 sessions that we had both attendee numbers for have been compared, as can be seen in Figure 11.

The generally higher attendance at sessions during Freshers Fortnight 20J is likely due to a higher intake of students compared to 21B, reflected by the final 20J Freshers CAMEL being sent to 28,395 students and the final 21B Freshers CAMEL being sent to 17,853 students. Timing of events is likely also a factor in differing attendance numbers, as we know a significant percentage (38%) of survey respondents preferred to engage with Freshers 21B activities (Sessions and competitions) on Weekday evenings (compared to 19% who stated 'Weekend evening', 15% who stated 'Not sure', 14% who stated 'Weekday daytime, and 13% who stated 'Weekend daytime'). Also, events in the second week of Freshers Fortnight tend to be less popular, for example *Study Tips* in the first week of 20J Freshers Fortnight had 166 attendees, whereas *Study Tips* in the second week of 21B Freshers Fortnight had 34 attendees. To address these points, we attempted to have a wide variety of events at a range of times during the Fortnight, and we focused on having an even spread of events into the second week of 21B Freshers Fortnight. For both Freshers Fortnights we also ran a *Passport Bingo Prize Draw* (more details in Section 6) to encourage participation in a range of sessions across the Fortnights.

5.4 As shown in Figure 12, in response to the statement 'Please let us know what you thought of our online sessions', respondents enjoyed the OU sessions the most, with 81% of respondents who attended the OU sessions stating the sessions were 'very enjoyable' or 'enjoyable'. This is closely followed by the Informative sessions from students, with 80% of respondents who attended the Informative sessions stating the sessions were 'very enjoyable' or 'enjoyable'. This is followed by the Social sessions, with 78% of respondents who attended the sessions selecting 'very enjoyable' and 'enjoyable'. The overall enjoyment from the rest of the sessions – Faculty, Societies and Clubs, Wellbeing and Area – can also be seen in Figure 12.

5.5 The vast majority of respondents of the Freshers Fortnight 2021 Feedback Survey (82.9%) said they attended 0-5 sessions during Freshers Fortnight 21B. This is followed by 10% of respondents saying they attended 6-10 sessions, 4% attending 11-15 sessions, 0.6% attending 16-20, 26-30, 31-35 and Over 35 sessions, and 0.3% attending 21-25 sessions.

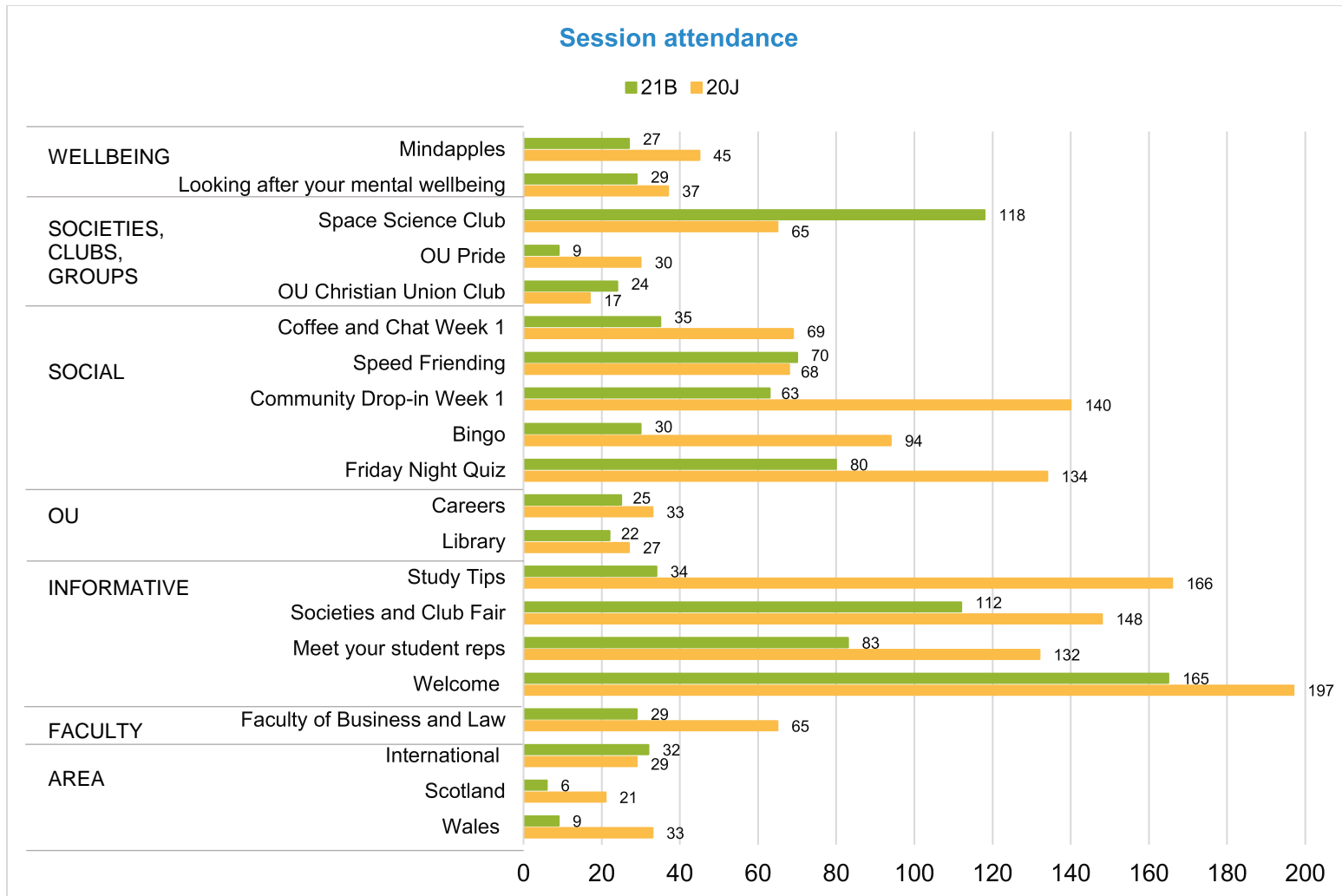


Figure 11: Attendance at 20 sessions that were run at both Freshers Fortnight 20J and 21B.

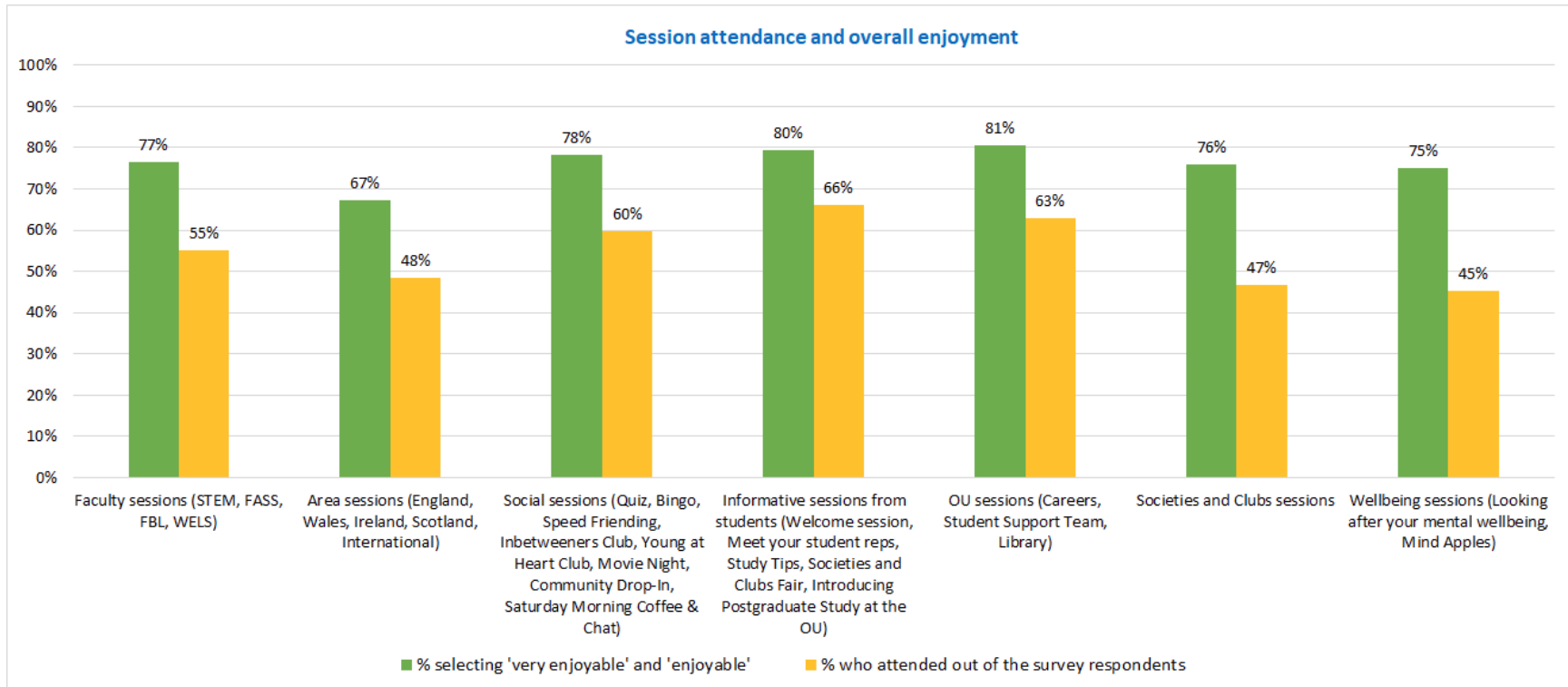


Figure 12: Overall enjoyment (those selecting 'very enjoyable' and 'enjoyable') of the different types of events offered as part of Freshers Fortnight 21B.

6. Activities at Freshers Fortnight 20J and 21B

6.1 Throughout both Freshers Fortnights several competitions and prize draws took place. There were a total number of 1603 entries for all our competitions and prize draws over both 20J and 21B Freshers Fortnights (1039 for 20J and 564 for 21B).

6.2 Throughout Freshers Fortnight 20J, there were eight competitions and prize draws. The competitions and prize draws took place on various platforms including social media, during sessions, and via email. These competitions and prize draws were: *Passport Bingo Prize Draw*, *Study Helper Photography Competition*, *Academic Resolutions Prize Draw*, *Faculty of Business and Law (FBL) Prize Draw*, *Wales Prize Draw*, *Friday Night Quiz*, *Bingo*, and *Student Journey Writing Competition*. The *Competitions and Prize Draws* page on the Freshers site had 2,026 views over Freshers Fortnight 20J.

6.2.1 The *Passport Bingo Prize Draw* gave entrants an opportunity to win an iPad, by collecting key secret phrases from various sessions throughout Freshers Fortnight. There were five secret phrases to collect. Entrants could collect as many or as few secret phrases as they wanted to. For example, students could attend one session and have one entry to the prize draw, or attend all five and have five entries to the prize draw. There were 250 entries. The *Passport Bingo Prize Draw* page on the Freshers site had 165 views over Freshers Fortnight 20J.

6.2.2 The *Study Helper Photography Competition* took place mainly on social media, although entries were also accepted via email. Entrants were asked to submit a photograph of their number 1 study helper (e.g. stationery, a pet, a snack). Entrants also had to sign up to our Freshers newsletter to be eligible to win the prize – an Amazon Kindle. There were 126 entries. The *Study Helper Photography Competition* page on the Freshers site had 158 views over Freshers Fortnight 20J.

6.2.3 The *Academic Resolutions Prize Draw* took place mainly on social media, although entries were also accepted via email. Entrants were asked to submit an academic resolution for the upcoming academic year. The prize was a study kit from the OU Students Shop. There were 370 entries.

6.2.4 The *Faculty of Business and Law (FBL) Prize Draw* took place on social media and via email. Entrants were asked to submit what they were looking forward to about the new academic year. The prize was an ECoffee Cup and Pen from the OU Students Shop. There were 9 entries.

6.2.5 The *Wales Prize Draw* was a quiz that took place during the Clwb Cymru session on 30 September 2020 at 8pm. The prize was a Luxury Notebook and Pen from the OU Students Shop. There were 33 attendees.

6.2.6 The *Friday Night Quiz* took place on 2 October 2020 at 8pm. The prize was OU T-Shirts from the OU Students Shop for the winning team members. There were 134 attendees.

6.2.7 The *Bingo* took place on 9 October 2020 at 8pm. The prize was an OU mug from the OU Students Shop for the first person to get a line on their Bingo board, and a water bottle and fridge magnet from the OU Students Shop for the first person to get a full house on their Bingo board. There were 94 attendees.

6.2.8 For the *Student Journey Writing Competition*, students were asked to submit an article, poem or creative writing piece on their student journey, of up to 1000 words. There were 23 entries, and the 1st 2nd and 3rd place winners won a £100 Waterstones eGift voucher, £50 Waterstones eGift voucher and £25 Waterstones eGift voucher respectively. The three winning pieces, and 3 highly commended pieces, can be viewed on our online magazine *The Hoot*.

6.3 Throughout and after Freshers Fortnight 21B, there were seven competitions and prize draws. The competitions and prize draws took place on various platforms including social media, during sessions, and via email. These competitions and prize draws were: *Passport Bingo Prize Draw*, *Time Capsule Prize Draw*, *Faculty of Business and Law (FBL) Freshers Quiz*, *Friday Night Quiz*, *Bingo*, *Wellbeing Writing Competition* and *Feedback Survey Prize Draw*. The Competitions and Prize Draws page on the Freshers site had 1,243 views over Freshers Fortnight 21B.

6.3.1 The *Passport Bingo Prize Draw* had the same structure as in Freshers Fortnight 20J, except there were eight secret phrases this time. It was decided to increase the number of sessions that were part of the prize draw to encourage more engagement over the two weeks. There were 108 entries.

6.3.2 The *Time Capsule Prize Draw* took place mainly on social media, although entries were also accepted via email. Entrants were asked to submit a photograph of an item they would put in a time capsule as a reminder of their OU study in 2021. Entrants also had to sign up to our Freshers newsletter to be eligible to win the prize – a £50 bundle from the OU Students Shop. There were 55 entries.

6.3.3 The *Faculty of Business and Law Freshers Quiz* took place during the FBL session on 1 February 2021. There were 29 attendees and the prize was a Luxury Notebook from the OU Students Shop.

6.3.4 The *Friday Night Quiz* took place on 5 February 2021. There were 80 attendees and the winning team won an OU Sweatshirt each.

6.3.5 The *Bingo* took place on 6 February 2021. There were 30 attendees and the two winners won a Luxury Notebook and an OU Sweatshirt.

6.3.6 The *Wellbeing Writing Competition* opened on the last day of Freshers Fortnight 21B. We asked students to submit an article, poem or creative writing piece of up to 1000 words on wellbeing. There were 34 entries, and the 1st 2nd and 3rd place winners won a £100 Waterstones eGift voucher, a bundle from the OU Students Shop and £25 Waterstones eGift voucher respectively. The three winning pieces, and 3 highly commended pieces, can be viewed on our online magazine *The Hoot*.

6.3.7 The *Freshers Fortnight 2021 Feedback Survey* opened on 3 February until 21 February 2021. Attendees were asked 32 questions on what they thought of Freshers. There were 310 total responses and 278 entries to the prize draw. Two respondents won an Amazon Kindle each.

6.4 Feedback on the competitions and prize draws was collected in the *Freshers Fortnight 2021 Feedback Survey* [Figure 13]. In response to the question ‘How did you find the Freshers Competitions and Prize Draws?’, of the respondents who took part 79.5% enjoyed the *Passport Bingo Prize Draw* (35.7% selected ‘Very enjoyable’ and 43.8% selected ‘Enjoyable’). 79.6% of respondents who attended the *Friday Night Quiz* enjoyed it (39.8% selected ‘Very enjoyable’ and 39.8% selected ‘Enjoyable’). This is followed by the *Bingo*, which 75.5% of respondents who attended said they enjoyed (41% selected ‘Very enjoyable’ and 34.5% selected ‘Enjoyable’). 67.5% of respondents who took part stated that they enjoyed the *Wellbeing Writing Competition* (35% selected ‘Very enjoyable’ and 32.5% selected ‘Enjoyable’). Finally, the *Time Capsule Prize Draw* was enjoyed by 67.8% of respondents who took part (24% selected ‘Very enjoyable’ and 43.8% selected ‘Enjoyable’). Notably, the majority of respondents selected ‘Did not take part’ for all competitions and prize draws (75.8% for the *Time Capsule Prize Draw*, 73.2% for the *Wellbeing Writing Competition*, 71% for the *Bingo*, 66.1% for the *Friday Night Quiz*, and 63.9% for the *Passport Bingo Prize Draw*). This shows that, despite a good amount of engagement with the competitions and prize draws and high enjoyment from those who took part during both 20J and 21B Freshers Fortnights, more work could be done to increase awareness and involvement in the competitions.

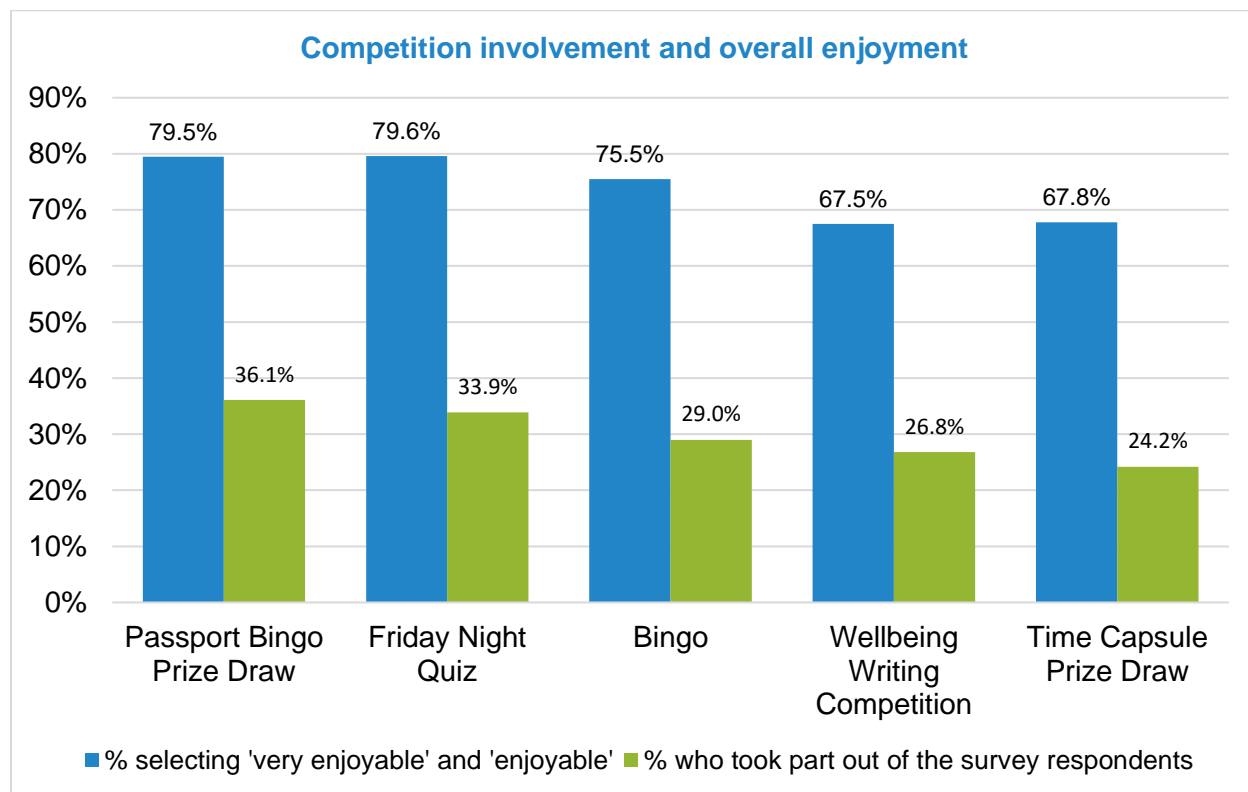


Figure 13: Overall enjoyment (those selecting 'very enjoyable' and 'enjoyable') of the different competitions and prize draws offered as part of Freshers Fortnight 21B.

6.4.1 There were 65 responses to the open comment question 'Are there any different competitions you'd like to see us run in future?'. Popular responses included more quiz nights, more photography competitions, more writing competitions, a fitness challenge, and creative competitions such as art and craft.

6.5 Feedback on prizes was also collected in the Freshers Fortnight 2021 Feedback Survey. In response to the question 'What type of prizes do you prefer?', the two most popular options were 'Electronic items' (34%) and 'Gift vouchers' (34%). This was followed by 'OU branded products' (24%), and 'Stationery' at (8%).

6.4.1 There were 71 responses to the open comment question 'Are there any different prizes you'd like to see us offer in future?'. Popular responses included books, gift vouchers, OU branded products, stationery, activity experiences, and subscriptions to services students use (suggestions given were Amazon, Audible, Spotify, Skillshare, Adobe, and Educational programmes).

6.5 In previous years a limited number of 'Physical Freebies' packs have been offered, for students to sign up for and be entered into a prize draw to receive. For 20J and 21B Freshers Fortnights, it was decided not to offer 'Physical Freebies' due to the logistical difficulties of compiling and sending packs while working remotely. Instead, 'Digital Freebies' were supplied, available on the Freshers microsite for all students to download for free.

6.5.1 For 20J Freshers Fortnight, the Digital Freebies available were: an academic year planner for 2020/21, an assignment planner and posters. The Digital Freebies page on the Freshers microsite had 629 views over Freshers Fortnight 20J.

6.5.2 For 21B Freshers Fortnight, the Digital Freebies available were: an academic year planner for 2021, an assignment planner, posters and a bookmark. The Digital Freebies page on the Freshers microsite had 796 views over Freshers Fortnight 21B.

6.5.3 In the Freshers Fortnight 2021 Feedback Survey, respondents were asked 'How satisfied were you with the Digital Freebies?'. The most popular option was 'Assignment planner' with 85.7% of respondents who used the planner satisfied (40.5% selected 'Very satisfied' and 45.1% selected 'Satisfied'). The next most popular was 'Academic year planner' with 84.9% of respondents who used the planner satisfied (45.2% selected 'Very satisfied' and 39.7% selected 'Satisfied'). 'Posters' was the next most popular option, with 81.5% of respondents who used the posters satisfied (37.2% selected 'Very satisfied' and 44.3% selected 'Satisfied'). Finally, 79.6% of respondents who used the 'Bookmark' said they were satisfied (36.8% stated 'Very satisfied' and 42.8% responded 'Satisfied'). Notably, significant numbers of respondents selected that they 'Did not use' the Digital Freebies (43.5% of total respondents for the Assignment planner, 47.1% for the Academic

year planner, 49.7% for the Posters and 51.9% for the Bookmark). This could be improved next time, taking into account further feedback outlined next in 6.5.4.

6.5.4 There were 54 responses to the open comment question ‘Are there any different Digital Freebies you’d like to see us offer in future?’. Suggestions included more study aids such as planners and timetables, and activities such as colouring and games. There were also 8 comments that students did not know about the Digital Freebies, so this will be considered for the next Freshers Fortnight.

6.5.5 In response to the question ‘Would you prefer to download Digital Freebies online (available to all students), or receive Physical Freebies in the post that a limited number of students would receive as a result of a prize draw?’ the most popular response was ‘Both Digital and Physical Freebies’ at 54%. The next most popular option was ‘Physical Freebies’ with 20% of respondents choosing this option. 18% of respondents selected ‘Digital Freebies’, and 8% selected ‘Not sure’. These figures will help with decisions on what Freebies will be offered at future Freshers Fortnights.

7. Feedback from Event Hosts for Freshers Fortnight 21B

7.1 In addition to the Feedback Survey for attendees of Freshers Fortnight 21B, a Feedback Survey for hosts of the Freshers Fortnight 21B sessions was also compiled. There were 23 responses.

7.2 As can be seen in Figure 14, Freshers Fortnight 21B hosts cover a variety of roles; from student reps, to Club Leads and Society Committee Members, to OU and OU Students Association staff.

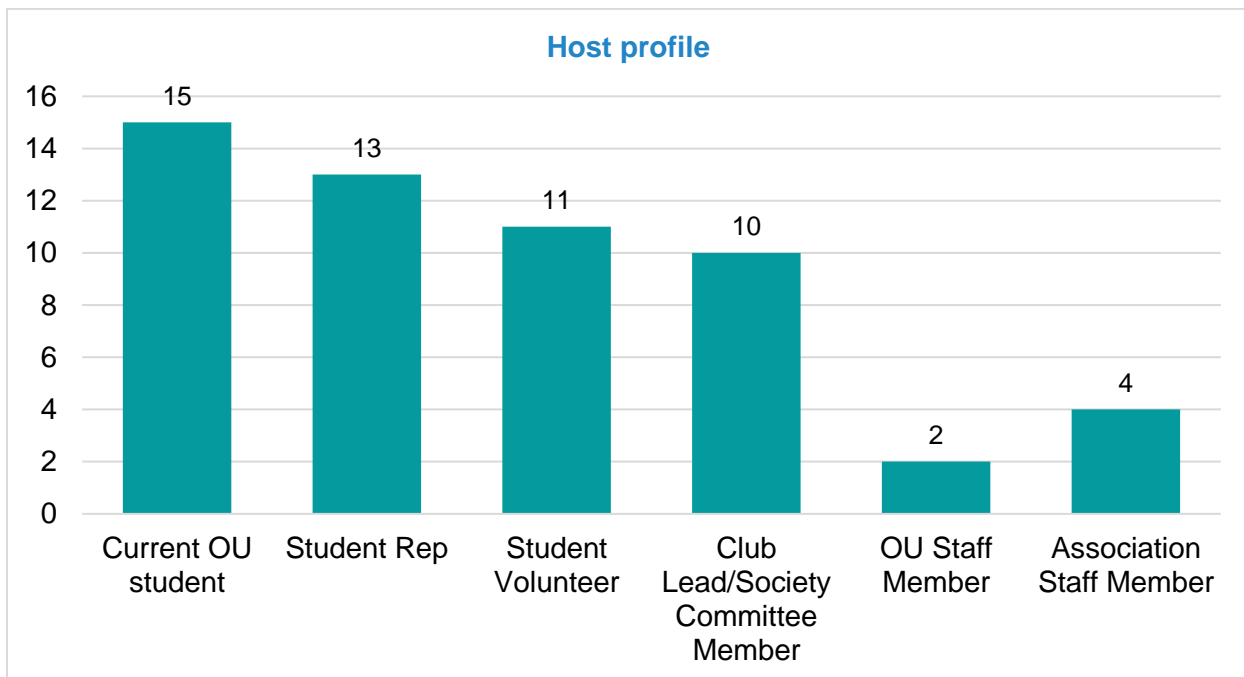


Figure 14: The roles that the respondents of the Freshers Fortnight 21B host survey have, relating to the Students Association and OU.

7.3 In response to the question 'How did you find Freshers Fortnight 2021?', 95.6% of survey respondents found raising awareness about resources and support enjoyable (73.9% selected 5, the equivalent of 'very enjoyable', and 21.7% of respondents selected 4, the equivalent of 'enjoyable'). Also, 95.6% of survey respondents found delivering an online session enjoyable (73.9% selected 5, the equivalent of 'very enjoyable', and 21.7% of respondents selected 4, the equivalent of 'enjoyable'). Finally, 91.3% of survey respondents found the overall atmosphere and student engagement enjoyable (69.6% selected 5, the equivalent of 'very enjoyable', and 21.7% selected 4, the equivalent of 'enjoyable') [Figure 15].

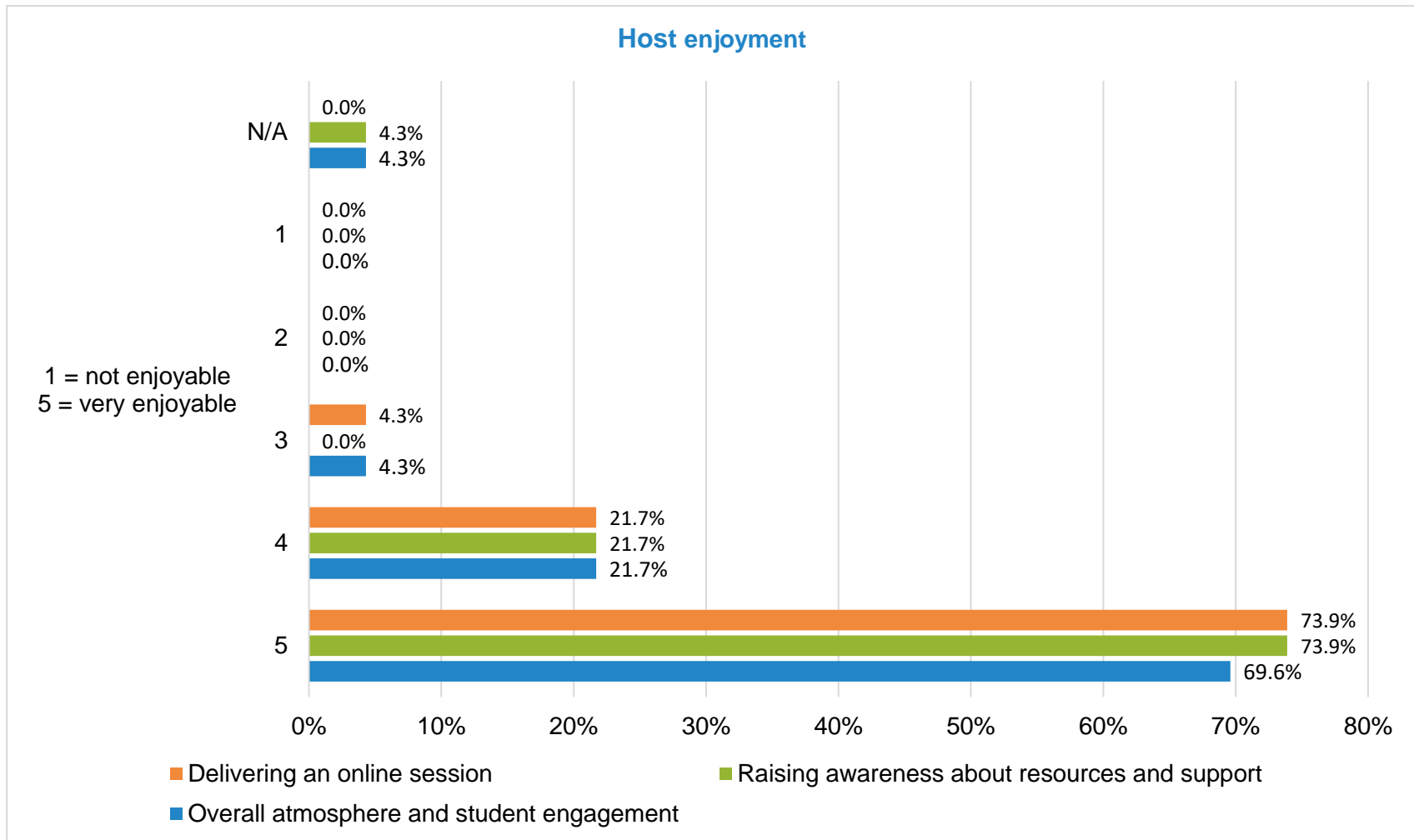


Figure 15: Host enjoyment of Freshers Fortnight 21B, in response to the three statements 'Delivering an online session', 'Raising awareness about resources and support' and 'Overall atmosphere and student engagement'.

7.4 Survey respondents also stated that they felt they had clear information on how to join in and felt supported in setting up their session. In response to the statement 'There was clear information on how to join in with Freshers', 100% of survey respondents agreed (73.9% selected 'strongly agree' and 26.1% selected 'agree'). In response to the statement 'I found it straight-forward to set up my session(s)', 95.6% of respondents agreed (73.9% selected 'strongly agree' and 21.7% selected 'agree'). 91.3% of respondents agreed with the statement 'I felt supported in setting up my session(s)' (73.9% selected 'strongly agree' and 17.4% selected 'agree'). Finally, in response to the statement 'I was happy with the frequency of communications to me in the run-up to Freshers', 87% of respondents agreed (60.9% selected 'strongly agree' and 26.1% selected 'agree').

7.5 In response to the question 'How successful do you think your session(s) was/were?', 87% of respondents thought student participation during the session was successful (52.2% selected 5, equivalent to 'very successful', and 34.7% selected 4, equivalent to 'successful'). 78.3% of respondents thought there were positive outcomes from the session e.g. increased student engagement (52.2% selected 5, equivalent to 'very successful', and 26.1% selected 4, equivalent to 'successful'). Finally, 65.2% of respondents thought the number of students attending the session was successful (39.1% selected 5, equivalent to 'very successful', and 26.1% selected 4, equivalent to 'successful').

7.6 100% of survey respondents answered that they would be likely to get involved with Freshers Fortnight again in future (91.3% selected 5, equivalent to 'very likely', and 8.7% selected 4, equivalent to 'likely').

8. Online Freshers Fortnight

8.1 Respondents were asked 'How do you prefer to engage with online events? Please select all that apply.' The most popular statement was 'I like to use the chat function where possible', which 60.3% of respondents selected. This is followed by 59.7% selecting 'I prefer it when speakers/facilitators share their videos (audio and visual)'. 35.8% selected 'I prefer to listen to the speaker/facilitator (audio only)'. 20.3% selected 'I like to use my microphone and speak where possible' whereas 10.3% selected 'I like to share my video where possible'. 7.4% selected 'Don't know/not sure'. These responses will be taken into account when deciding what platforms to use for future events.

8.2 When asked 'Which device did you use to 'attend' Freshers Fortnight 2021?', the majority of respondents (65%) selected 'Laptop'. This is followed by 13% of respondents who selected 'Smartphone' and 12% of respondents who selected 'Desktop PC'. 8% of respondents selected 'Tablet', and 1% of respondents selected 'Other'.

8.3 In response to the question 'Thinking about the technical side of Freshers, how satisfied were you with the following?', out of those who selected that they used each

platform, 79.2% were satisfied with the ease of attending sessions on Microsoft Teams (37.1% selected 'very satisfied' and 42.1% selected 'satisfied'). Out of the respondents who said they used Adobe Connect, 77.8% of respondents were satisfied with the ease of attending sessions on Adobe Connect (37.6% selected 'very satisfied' and 40.2% selected 'satisfied'). Finally, when asked about the helpfulness of the FAQs on the Freshers site, out of the respondents who said they had used the FAQs, 79.8% said they were satisfied (33.5% stated 'very satisfied' and 46.3% selected 'satisfied'). 14.2% of respondents selected 'Did not use/Not applicable' for 'The ease of attending sessions on Adobe Connect', 21.9% for Microsoft Teams and 27.7% for the FAQs on the Freshers site.

8.4 Overall, holding Freshers Fortnight 20J and 21B online was a success. Inevitably using online platforms can lead to technical issues, but this was mitigated with training for hosts and FAQs on the Freshers site for attendees. A fully online Freshers Fortnight also makes the activities more accessible – to people who are unable to travel to campus or local meet-ups, for international students, and for students who have limited time to take part. Online events also raises the concern of safety and mitigating the likelihood of non-OU students attending sessions, which will be discussed more in Section 10.6.

9. Impact beyond Freshers Fortnight

9.1 As was discussed in Section 3.3 and as can be seen in Figure 8, the majority of respondents felt that attending Freshers made a positive contribution to their student experience and increased their sense of belonging to the OU student community. Moreover, many of the comments from respondents in the Feedback Survey for Freshers Fortnight 21B show students feel a part of the student community as a result of attending Freshers:

“as a distant learner it has made me feel more part of a society and that we're not alone in this”

“I really got a sense of belonging by attending Freshers fortnight. Thank you so much for all your hard work.”

“It has been very easy to engage in activities and I feel like I am part of a large community of like minded people who are all keen to learn.”

9.2 Societies and Clubs: As mentioned in Section 5.2, Society and Club events have been popular at both Freshers Fortnight 20J and 21B. As a result of this, a number of Clubs and Societies have reported increased engagement since Freshers Fortnight 20J and 21B. Write Club reported 78 new members after Freshers Fortnight 21B and reported that all attendees at their Drop-In event during Freshers Fortnight 20J became members. The Space Science Club reported 100 new members by 25 October 2020, a month after formally launching, which can in part be attributed to their involvement at Freshers Fortnight 20J along with other promotional activity they undertook. London Region Arts Club (LRAC) also reported a rise of 200 members, which can in part be attributed to their Freshers involvement. There has also been a rise in the number of Clubs being created – by the end of August 2020 there was a total number of 55 Clubs, which rose to 65 by the end of October 2020 and to 76 by the end of February 2021. Further, Figure 1 shows that 20% of total new students who took part in the Freshers Fortnight 21B Feedback Survey had previous engagement with the Students Association by taking part in Clubs and Societies – this is notably higher than how many returning students said the same (13%). This shows that Clubs and Societies play an important role in Freshers Fortnight and providing communities for students, particularly new students, to continue to stay involved after Freshers.

9.3 Newsletter: The monthly Association newsletter has also shown an increase in new subscribers over both Freshers Fortnight periods. In September and October 2020, there were 535 new subscribers, and in January and February 2021 there were 256 new subscribers. There was also an increase in open rates during these two periods.

9.4 Volunteering recruitment: The micro-volunteering role opened on 2 February 2021 and had a very successful uptake, with 120 applications in total. The role was aimed at students who had not volunteered or had minimal involvement with the Association before. The Volunteering and Representation Team held a Freshers event on 2 February 2021, and 69 out of 120 applications were received between the open date and 2 weeks after Freshers (21 February 2021). The role was also advertised on numerous other platforms, so it is difficult to determine how much of an impact Freshers had, however it's useful to note for future volunteer recruitment that advertising roles during Freshers has the potential to engage more students.

10. Recommendations

10.1 These recommendations follow from feedback from the Freshers Fortnight 21B Feedback Survey, where respondents suggested areas that did not work well for them or could be improved.

10.2 Reduce reliance on social media: Exploring alternatives for including students who might not be on social media. This was kept in mind for both Freshers Fortnights, as all competitions were able to be entered by email and we also had a mailing list where students could keep up to date with Freshers activities. However, this is an area for

improvement, especially with Societies and Clubs who often use Facebook groups as one of their main areas for interaction and communication. Social media is a useful way of engaging many students, but communication via other methods could be improved.

10.3 Presentation of sessions: Presenting the sessions on the programme under different categories or by colour according to categories, so as to enable attendees to see similar sessions grouped together.

10.4 Visibility on OU platforms: Increasing the visibility of Freshers on OU platforms such as StudentHome and module pages. The Community Team did multiple posts on the Bulletin Board on StudentHome to promote Freshers Fortnight, and there has been an increase in engagement when events and projects are posted on StudentHome. Freshers was not advertised on module pages, so this is a consideration for future Freshers Fortnights.

10.5 There are further recommendations that can be made based on feedback from the Community Team and fellow Association staff and volunteers.

10.6 Security of online events: There were two disruptive incidents during events at Freshers Fortnight 21B. This led to discussions around safety of Association online events, and guidance for hosts of sessions to be able to deal with any similar incidents in future. The Community Team acted on these incidents immediately – circulating guidance to Online Meet-Up Hosts, Association Online Hosts, Societies and Clubs, CEC and Association staff on keeping online events secure, a new Code of Conduct to display at the start of online events and on the events pages on oustudents.com, and training sessions on general guidance for keeping events secure; updated Online Platform Training for Adobe Connect and Microsoft Teams and planned training for Dealing with Online Behaviours. The Community Team will be undertaking a Meet-Ups Review in Spring-Summer 2021 which will continue this work on keeping online events secure and event hosts prepared and supported.

10.7 Number of sessions: The vast majority of respondents of the Freshers Fortnight 2021 Feedback Survey (82.9%) said they attended 0-5 sessions during Freshers Fortnight 21B. Perhaps fewer sessions could be an option to explore for future Freshers Fortnights, but a balance will need to be made with ensuring there are still a broad range of topics covered to provide something for everyone.

10.8 Sustainability: Although an Online Freshers Fortnight with no face-to-face meet-ups and no Physical Freebies being sent out could be seen as improvement in terms of environmental impact, more work could be doing to ensure other areas of Freshers Fortnight are sustainable, for example the prizes on offer.

10.9 Involvement with the OU: As can be seen in Figure 12, OU sessions were popular and so the Community Team will continue to work with the OU on delivering sessions at Freshers. There was some feedback that showed a confusion between the OU and the Association, as some respondents believed the OU had organised Freshers. Freshers

emails were clear in that Freshers was organised by the Association, so perhaps this relates to a wider lack of awareness surrounding the Association [Figure 2].

10.10 Impact after Freshers: Future evaluation surveys could also include questions about the type of activities that attendees felt they might get involved in as a result of attending Freshers.

10.11 Time-flexible activities: Some students suggested the inclusion of activities that could be done in the participants' own time. There were events over a variety of times – weekdays, evenings, weekends – to cater for as many people as possible. Three sessions were recorded (and uploaded to the Association's YouTube Channel in March/April 2021) and a number of session presentation slides were uploaded to the Freshers microsite. However, many Freshers sessions are not suitable to be recorded or do not use presentation slides (e.g. online meet-ups and chats), so this is not always an option. The Competitions are able to be completed in the participants' own time. However other activities that are more flexible for students to take part in in their own time could be considered in future.

10.12 Taking these recommendations into account, Freshers Fortnight 20J and 21B have been positive and engaging events, showing an entirely online Freshers experience can provide a sense of community.

“Being an OU student can, at times, feel like a lonely experience. Freshers reminds us that we are far from alone. There's an entire student community out there!”

Lara Munday

Projects Officer (Student Community)

Pooja Sinha

Research and Information Officer

Anca Seaton

Vice President Community