

MICHAELMAS
2024



Democracy Consultation

The Results

Prepared By:

Dr Addi Haran Diman

Oxford SU President



enquiries@oxfordsu.ox.ac.uk



oxfordsu.org



[@oxfordstudents](https://www.instagram.com/oxfordstudents)



Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	03
PREVIOUS CONSULTATION	04
MT DEMOCRACY CONSULTATION	05
EXPOSURE AND ENGAGEMENT	06
PURPOSE AND MODEL FEEDBACK	10
MARGINALISED VOICES FEEDBACK	17
SABBATICAL ROLE FEEDBACK	19
NEXT STEPS	20

Executive Summary

Overview

These results follow extensive consultation in Trinity term on the principles students expect from the SU, the development of various alternative models over the summer, followed by extensive consultation for the last four weeks of Michaelmas term on these models. The MT consultation engaged seven times more students, achieving a representative sample of students and giving everyone an opportunity to take part. The consultation delivered clear-cut answers on what students see as our purpose, what democratic model we should adopt, how we should engage with common rooms, how we should represent marginalised communities, and what roles should the four sabbatical officers be. Below is a summary of the results.

Key findings

80,243

Views for the democracy consultation content via emails and social media

218

Responses to the survey on the democracy reforms

61%

Of survey respondents support or strongly support the Conference of Common Rooms model

76.8%

Support the introduction of Community Officers to represent marginalised communities

86.2%

Of open-ended responses support having a president or chair role and then three deputies.

Next steps

The SU Board of Trustees needs to decide the purpose and democratic model of the organisation, and how would these be implemented, as well as how to proceed with community officers and sabbatical roles.

Previous Consultation

Overview

In Trinity Term 2024, following the announcement of the Transformation process, an initial consultation was carried out through a feedback survey and an All-Student Meeting, as well as by re-utilising RepComs and visiting common room AGMs. Overall, 31 students responded to the survey, 32 attended the All-Student Meeting, and the sabbatical officer team attended 10 RepComs and 7 common room AGMs.

Purpose responses

The most important part of this consultation related to our purpose - students were asked what it should be. This did not reveal a clear answer - many of the responses related to university-level representation, advocacy, and change making, but many also related to various other purposes: welfare support, advice and signposting, support for common rooms, and acting as a unifying space across colleges - including by organising inter-collegiate events.

Other emerging themes

Accountability

Students were asked what good accountability and scrutiny looks like, and the vast majority focused their responses mostly on transparency, openness, honesty, and regular reporting - not on more punitive forms of scrutiny.

Marginalised students

Respondents were divided on the SU role in relation to minority students - some complained about the focus on identity, while others want the SU to help bring together communities and advocate for them.

Common Rooms

Students emphasised the importance of common rooms to student life and asked the SU to work on professionalising common rooms, as well as empowering them and supporting their work, but also highlighted their autonomy.

How feedback is reflected in our current approach

Theme	Actioning
Unclear purpose	We answered calls for more tangible options with the MT consultation, which pushes for more concrete purpose choices.
Accountability	We have introduced regular reporting of sabbatical officer activity, as well as greater transparency in committee work through the student taskforces. The democracy proposals highlight the need to add new forms of scrutiny in addition to no-confidence votes.
Marginalised students	The democracy proposals' Community Officers model allows for greater representation of the marginalised identities at the university level, and for these to work, to bring together existing stakeholders such as common room reps and societies, while Campaigns can have greater flexibility and freedom as independent societies.
Common Rooms	Through the College Monitor platform, as well as the common room briefings and multiple commercial ventures, we worked over the past six months to support and empower common rooms. We have drastically improved relationship with JCR and MCR PresCom and the democracy proposals consult on how we should relate to them.
Consultation	Students were also asked how we should gather views in our representative work. Responses were largely divided to two options - all-student surveys and votes, or through consultation with common rooms via their presidents. Both in our committee work, and with the democracy review, we pursued both surveys and engagement with presidents for feedback.

MT24 Democracy Consultation

Introduction

In Michaelmas Term 2024, we sought to move forward the Transformation process by sharpening and clarifying the possibilities students are facing through the Democracy Proposals document. Anecdotal feedback shows that students liked the document and its clarity, but also that some didn't feel like the all-student survey received enough exposure and prominence in SU communications.

Methods

The democracy proposals document and the all student survey was shared with key stakeholders on 07/11, and with all students at the top of our weekly email on 11/11, at which time these were also covered by the Oxford Student. The survey was open for 28 days. We also answered questions and encouraged engagement at one All Student Meeting and by attending multiple PresComs and common room AGMS.

MT24 All Student Survey Questions

Data protection statement and consent

Please provide your student number (this is the 7 digit code directly next to your photo on your BodCard). We will only use this to verify your student status.

Which College do you belong to?

How would you describe your ethnicity:

How do you describe your gender:

Do you define as having any of the following disabilities:

Do you currently, or have you previously held any of the following positions?

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about yourself?

Which of the proposed democratic structures do you prefer? Please rank in order of preference.

Please score your overall level of support for model out of 5 where 5 is highly unsupportive and 1 is highly supportive:

Please provide any further information you would like us to consider about your choice, below:

What do you think could be the barriers to success for these models?

What do you think the four sabbatical officer roles should include?

Do you agree with the proposal to introduce part-time officer roles to represent marginalised students?

Do you have any thoughts about the proposal to represent marginalised groups through the introduction of part-time officer roles?

Is there anything else you want to tell us?

If you would like to be contacted in relation to your responses please leave your email below:

Exposure and Engagement

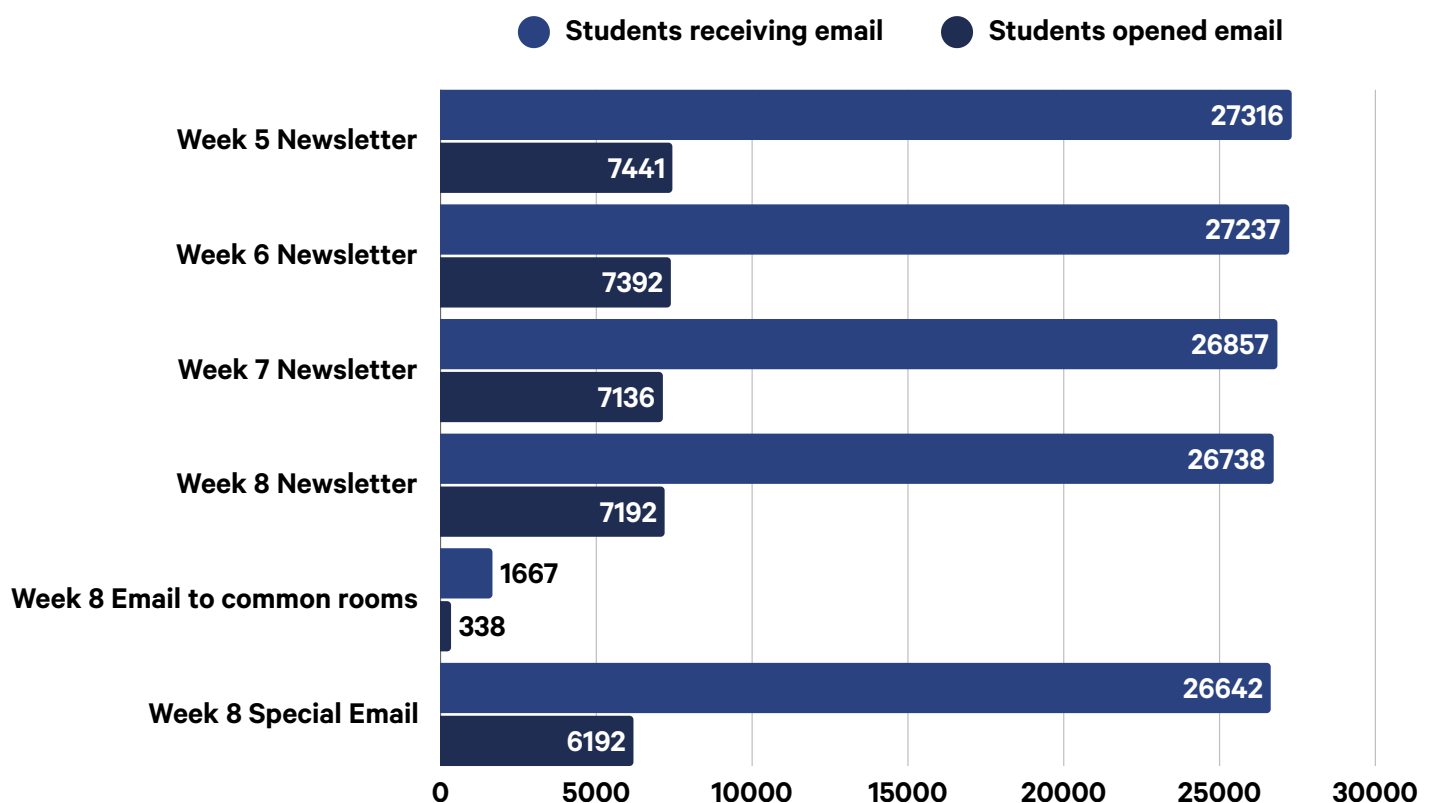
Overview

The MT24 democracy consultation received significant exposure and every student had ample opportunity to share their view. Only a percentage of the student body did participate, but there was a significant increase over participation in TT24, and the participation level is high given the expertise and investment needed to engage with the democracy reforms. Since the main method of consultation was a survey, not a vote, the considerations over the number of students engaged is different - this is not a question of turnout, but of sample size and statistical representativeness. Below we outline key statistics on the exposure of and engagement with the consultation.

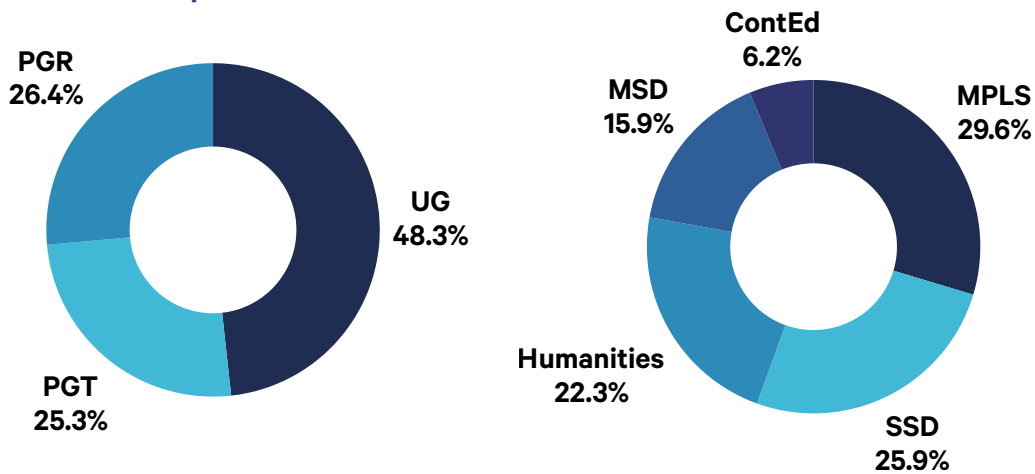
Exposure Over Email

A link to the democracy proposals and to the all-student survey featured at the top of the weekly SU newsletter in Monday of week 5, was also contained within the weekly newsletters in weeks 6, 7, and 8, and was the sole focus in a special all-student email sent on Friday of week 8. Below are key statistics about these emails.

Common room presidents, division reps, Campaign co-chairs, and other key stakeholders and students in leadership positions were individually emailed throughout week 8 with a request to advertise the document and survey with their groups.

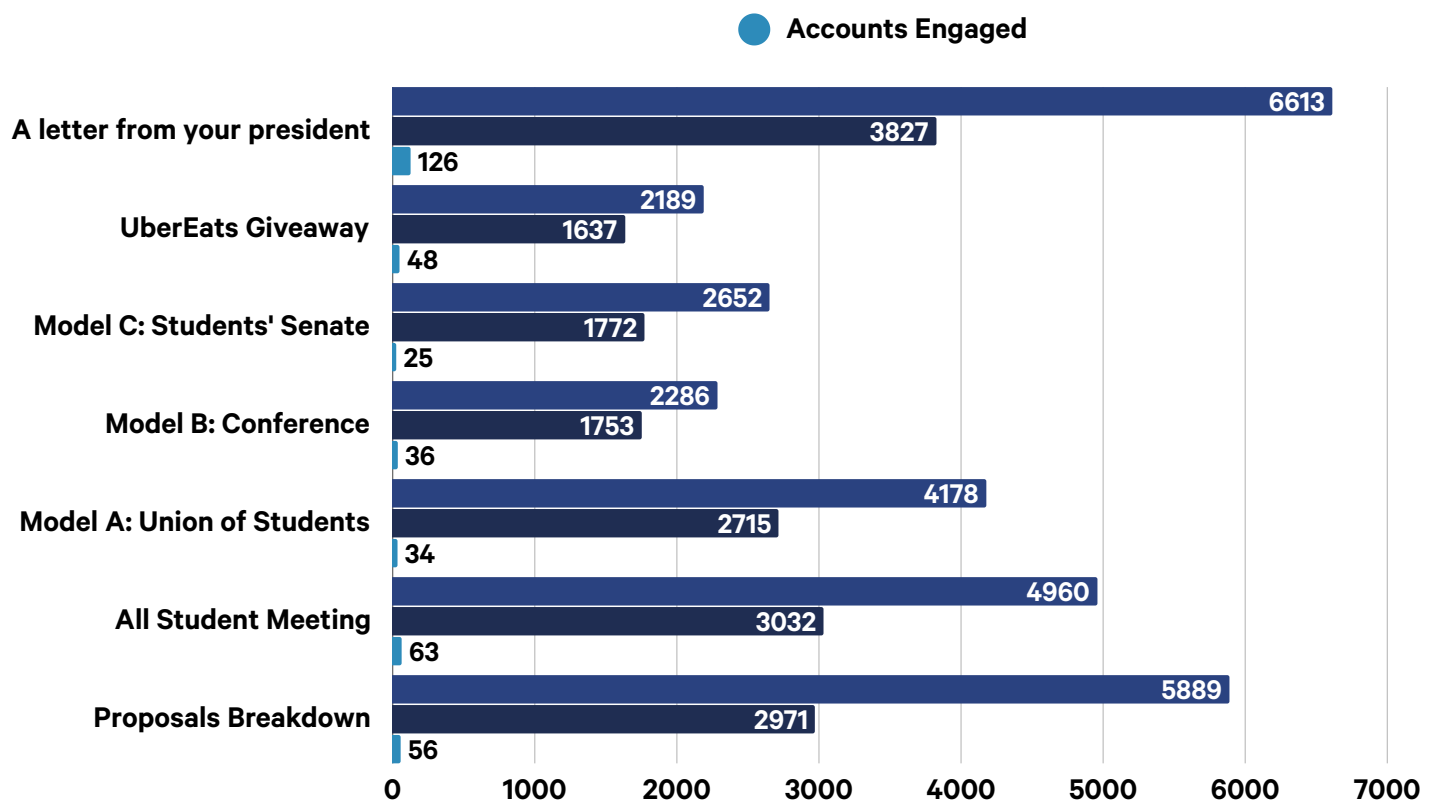


% of the students who opened emails



Exposure Over Social Media

The democracy consultation was promoted through seven Instagram grid posts and 18 story uploads on the SU's main account (15,000 followers), in addition to various posts on other accounts. Below is a breakdown of the various posts, how many times were they seen, how many people saw them, and how many people reacted to them. In addition, the 18 story uploads collectively received 10,128 views.



80,243

Overall confirmed views for democracy review content over email and on social media.

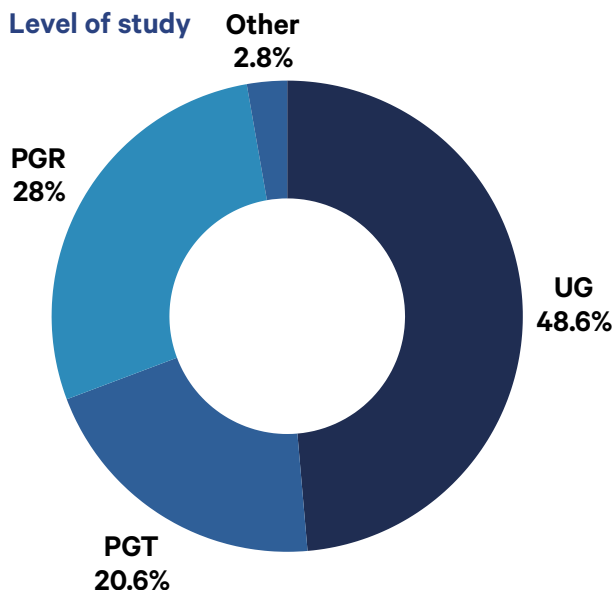
Engagement with the survey

218

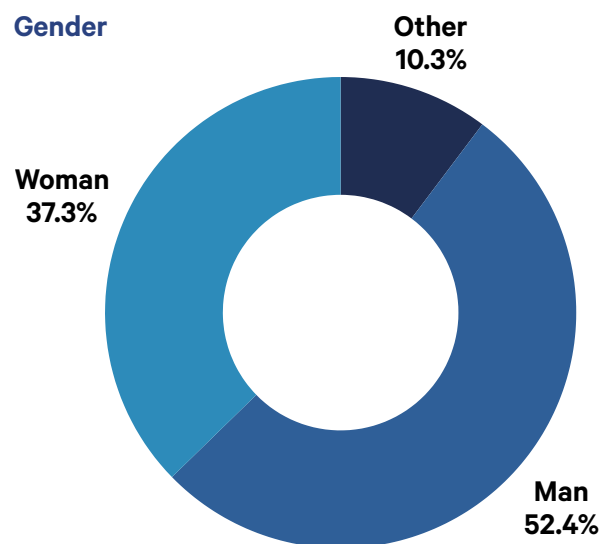
Student submissions
to the survey

Key statistical distributions of survey responses

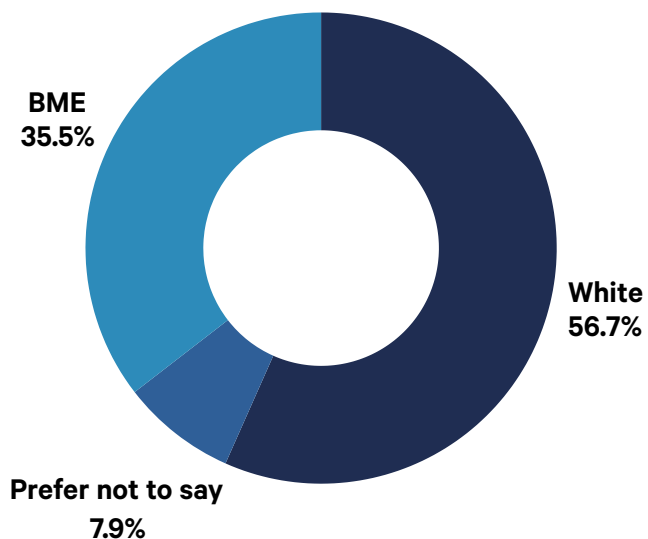
Level of study



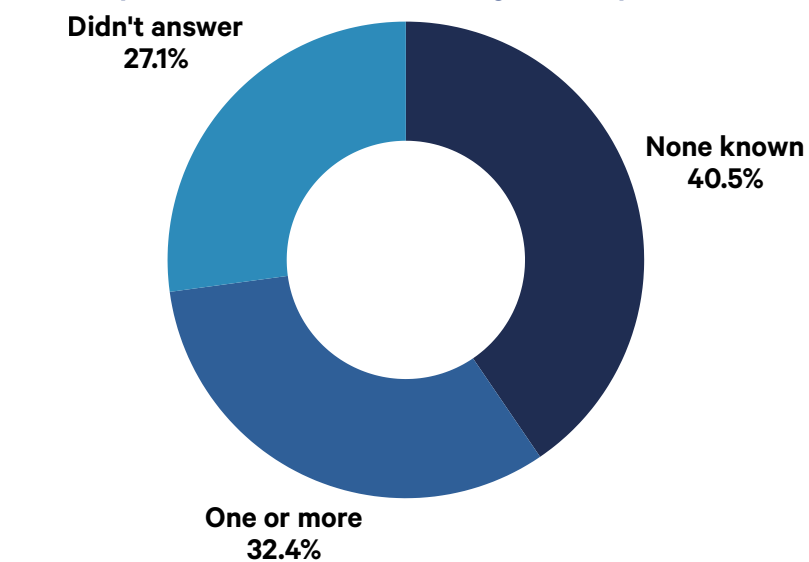
Gender



Ethnicity

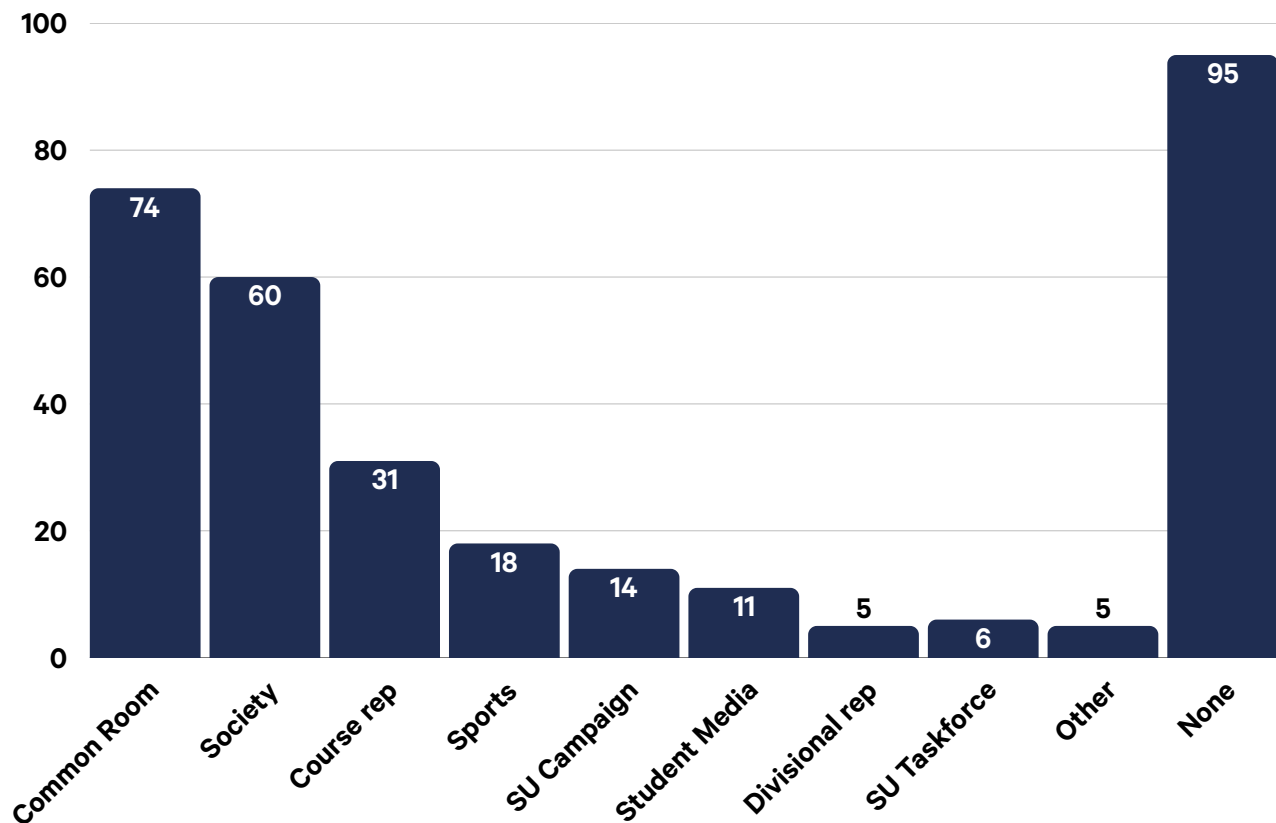


Disability, health condition, or learning difficulty



There were responses from non-matriculated students as well as all colleges barring All Souls, Blackfriars, Campion Hall, Nuffield, Ripon, St Stephen's. The most engaged college was Keble (9% of responses), followed by St Antony's (7%), Wadham (6%), and with a tie in fourth place between Balliol, Merton, St Catherine's, University, and Wolfson (5% each)

Committee positions of respondents



Analysis

We need to approach the analysis of responses with care, noting that in a normal vote, all responses would receive the same weight; in a more nuanced stakeholder consultation, responses from group leaders may be weighted more strongly, or responses from specific groups particularly affected may be taken more strongly into consideration; in a representative survey, statistical weighting that assigns different responses different weights to match the distribution of the population of interest is used to make sure the results are representative, particularly overcoming issues of selection bias in who chooses to respond to the survey.

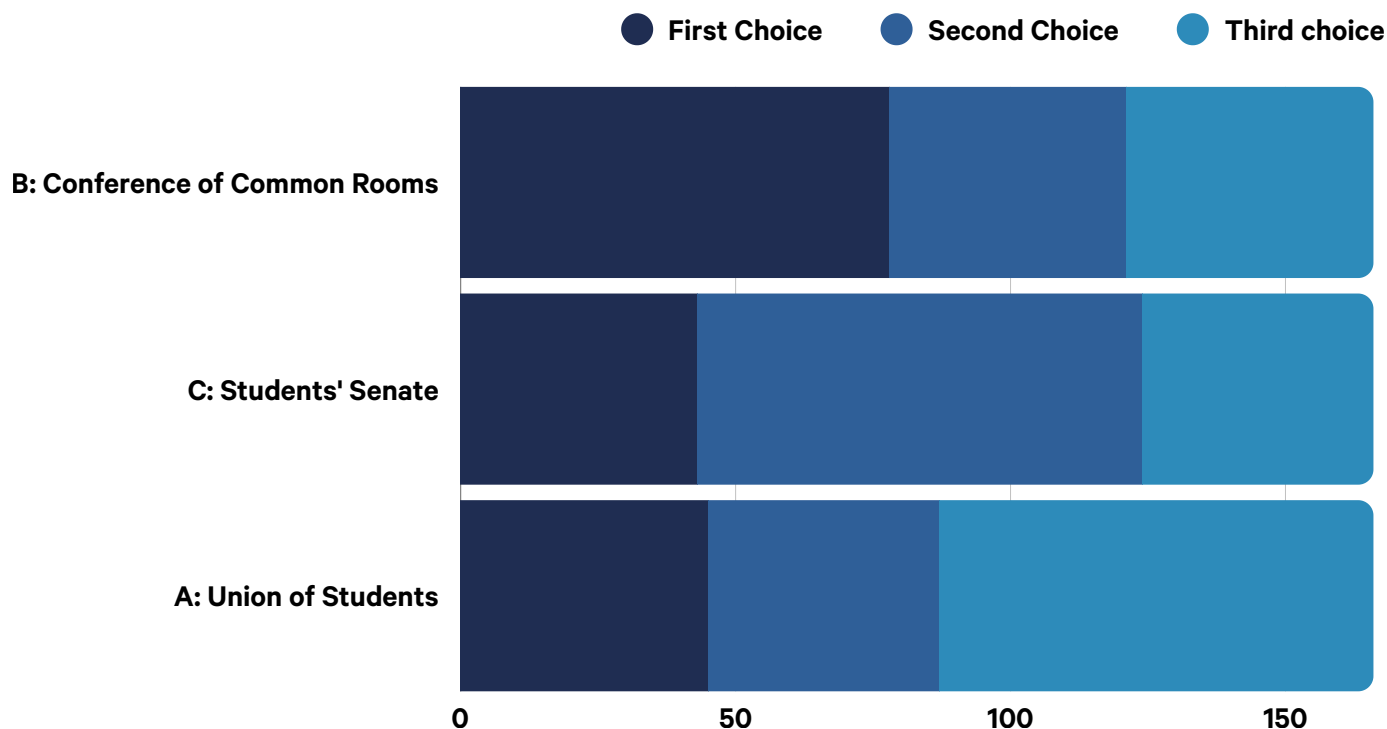
In the quantitative results below all three are used, to give the SU board of trustees a full picture.

Results are presented first in their raw form, then with demographic weights applied, then with different breakdowns of relevant groups. Statistical weighting is based on degree level, where there is the least amount of missing data.

Level of study	Distribution in student body	Distribution in survey	Weighting factor
Undergraduate	46.27	48.62	0.9516
Postgraduate Research	27.11	27.98	0.9689
Postgraduate Taught	24.55	20.64	1.1894
Other	2.05	2.75	0.7454

Purpose and Model Feedback

Preference voting (N=166)



The Conference model received most first choice votes, while the Senate received the most second choice votes, and Union of Students receiving the most third choice votes. This gives a clear indication of what the preference of Oxford students is.

If this was treated as a simple one-round vote, the Conference of Common Rooms model and “towards a confederation” purpose would win with 78 votes (47% of the 166 who answered this question), followed by model A with 45 (27%) and model C as a close third with 43 (26%).

If this was treated as a transferable vote, then model C would be eliminated on the first round and the 43 votes it received would be distributed to the models these respondents chose as second. 20 of these would be distributed to the Conference model, and 23 to the Union of Students, making the final tally 98 votes to the Conference (59%) and 68 to the Union of Students (41%).

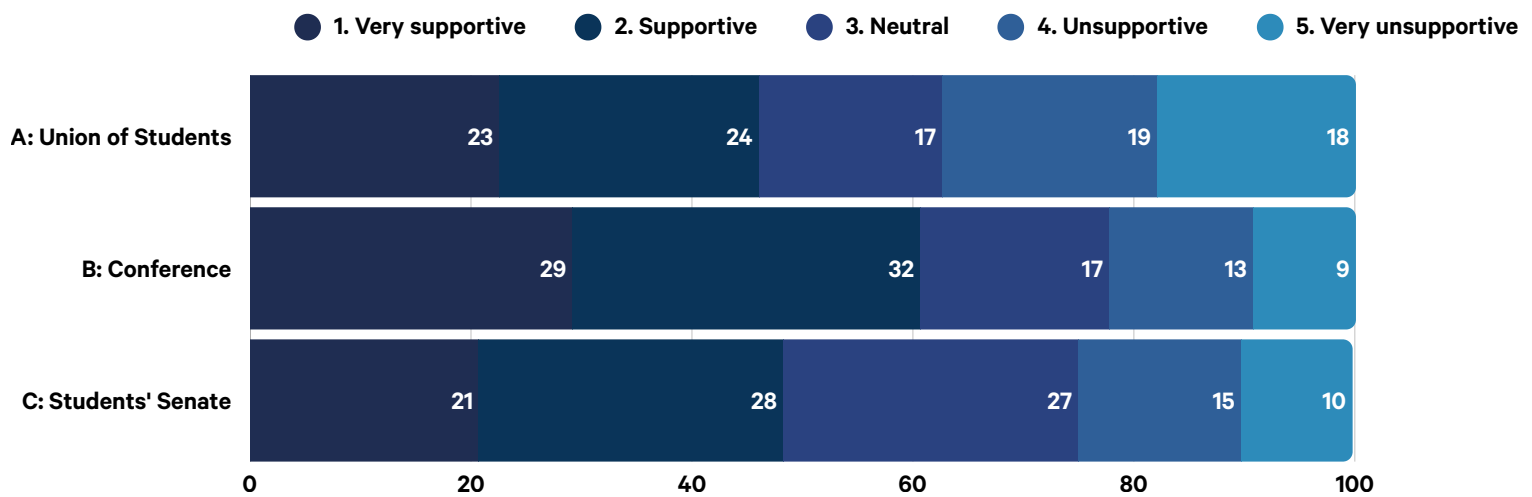
Overall, a clear winner of the survey question which mimicked voting is the Conference of Common Rooms: Towards a Confederation model and purpose.

Favorability (N=217)

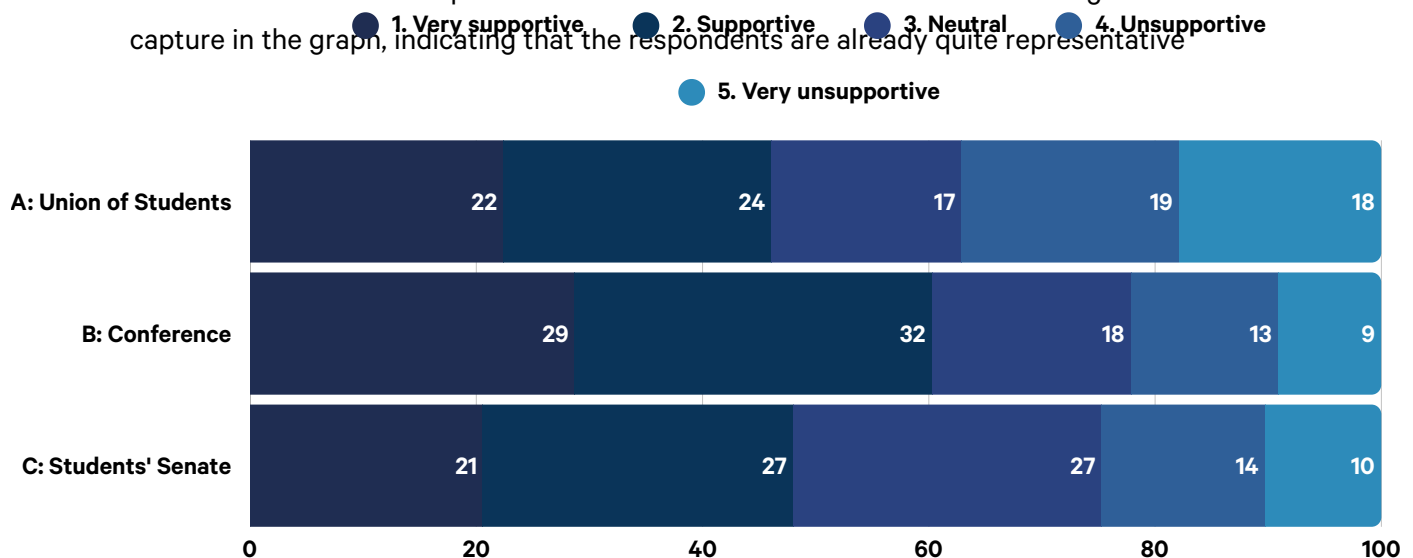
An argument could be made that students don't like any of these choices, or like them all equally, but that with the preference voting we made them choose between the models. Thus, in the next question we asked respondents to score their overall level of support for each model separately, from 1 (very supportive) to 5 (very unsupportive). Below are the results without any statistical filter.

61% of respondents are supportive or very supportive of the Conference model, in contrast to 47% in the Union of Students model and 49% in the Students' Senate model.

If we calculated the net favourability scores by deducing the percentage of students disapproving of a model from the percentage of students approving of it, then we would receive a favorability score of 39% for the Conference model, 10% for the Union model, and 24% for the Students' Senate model. It is clear from this question that the Conference of Common Rooms model is most supported and is most popular among survey respondents by a large margin, followed by the Students' Senate model and then the Union of Students model.



Next, survey weights can increase our confidence that the results are representative of the wider student population. The graph below presents the results with statistical weights on the level of study variable to increase the representativeness of the results. The difference is slight and too little to capture in the graph, indicating that the respondents are already quite representative.

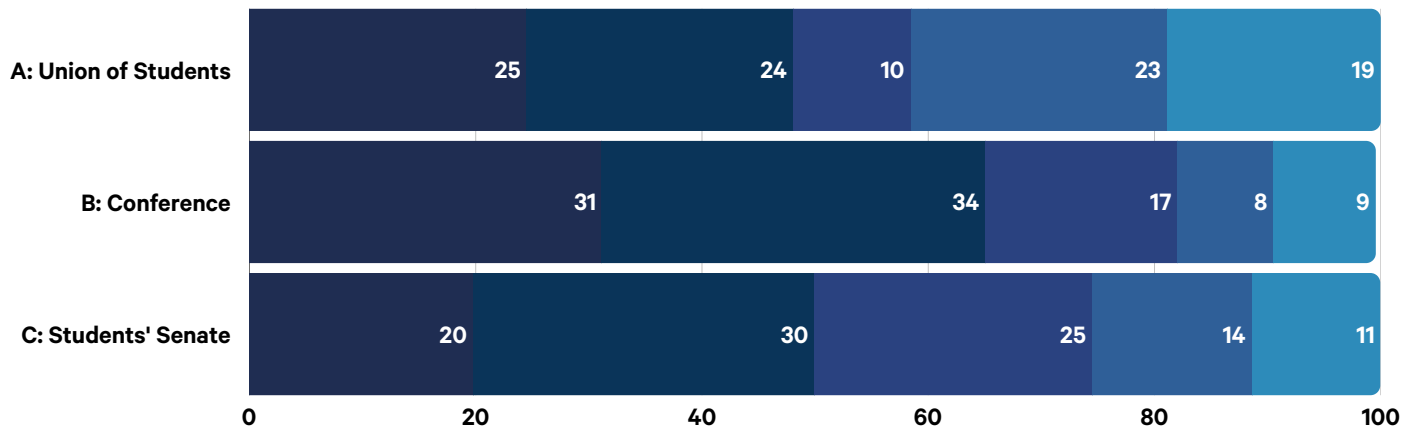


It is, however, key to have a look at the support for the different models among different subsections of respondents. There is some interesting variation across specified groups, though in none of these a model other than Conference receives a strong lead.

● 1. Very supportive ● 2. Supportive ● 3. Neutral ● 4. Unsupportive

Just undergraduates (N=106)

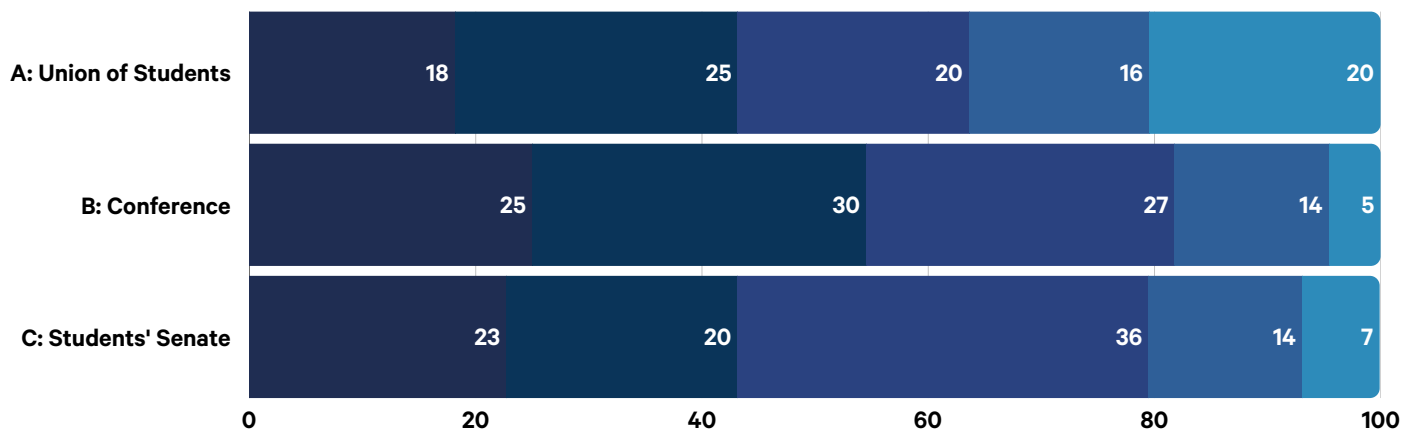
● 5. Very unsupportive



● 1. Very supportive ● 2. Supportive ● 3. Neutral ● 4. Unsupportive

Just postgraduate taught (N=45)

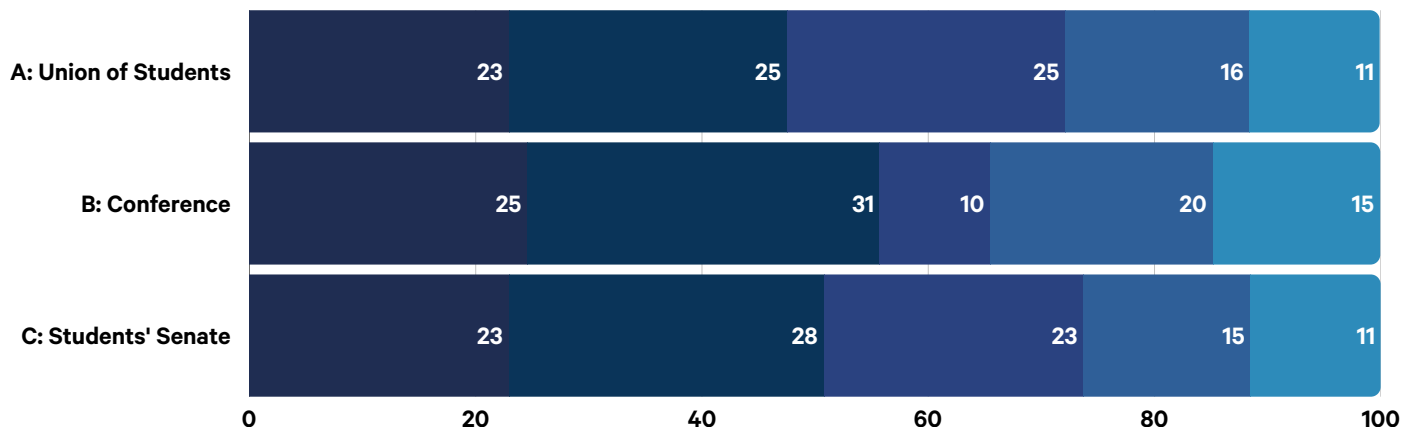
● 5. Very unsupportive

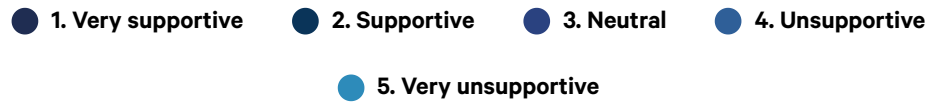


● 1. Very supportive ● 2. Supportive ● 3. Neutral ● 4. Unsupportive

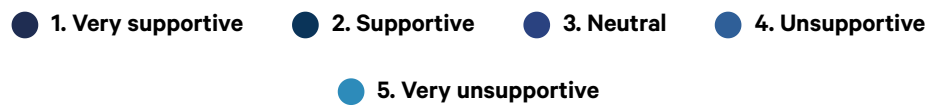
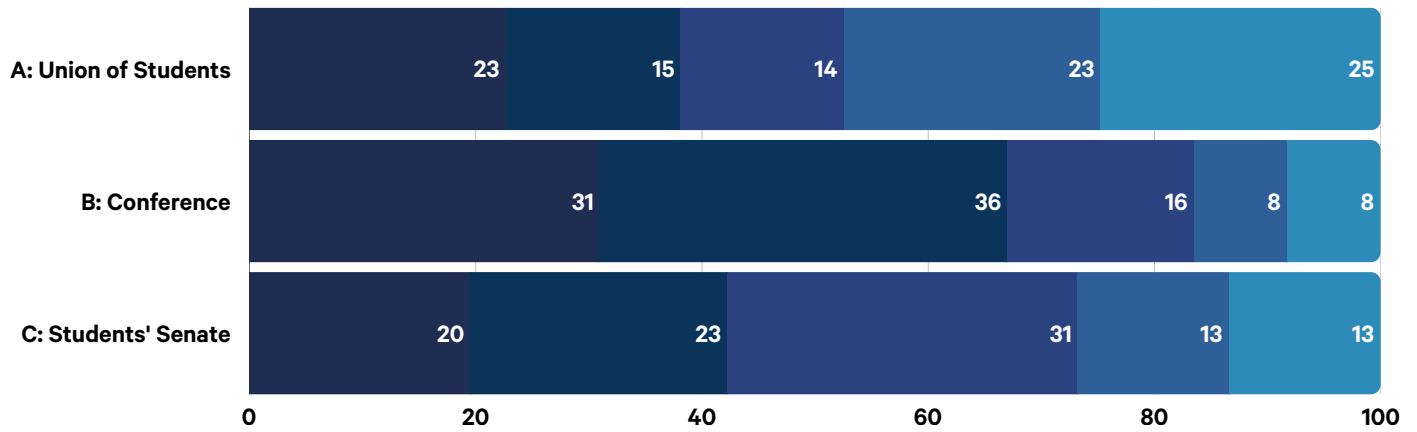
Just postgraduate research (N=61)

● 5. Very unsupportive

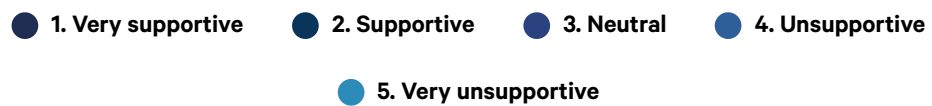
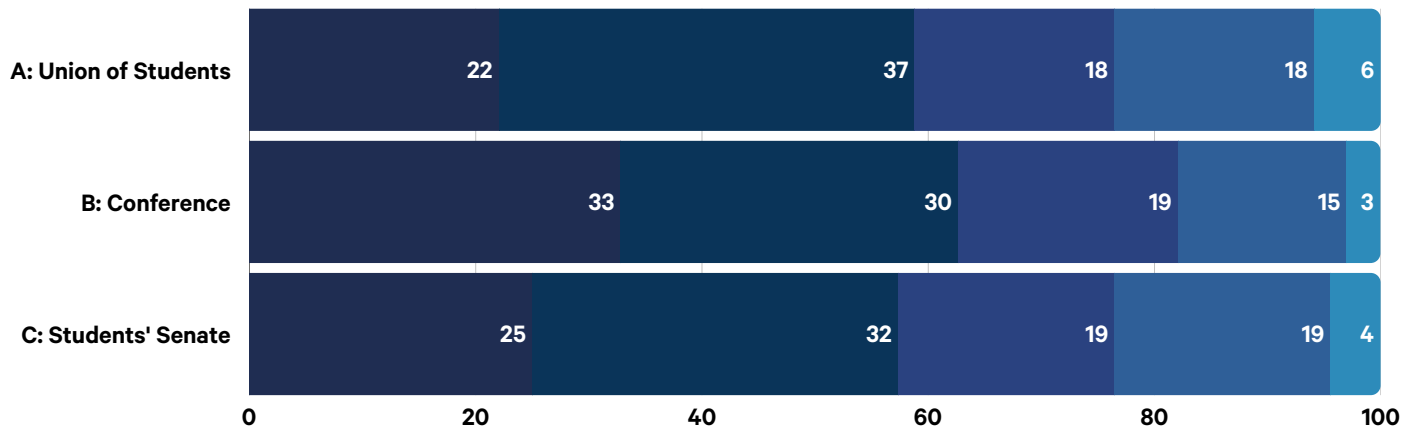




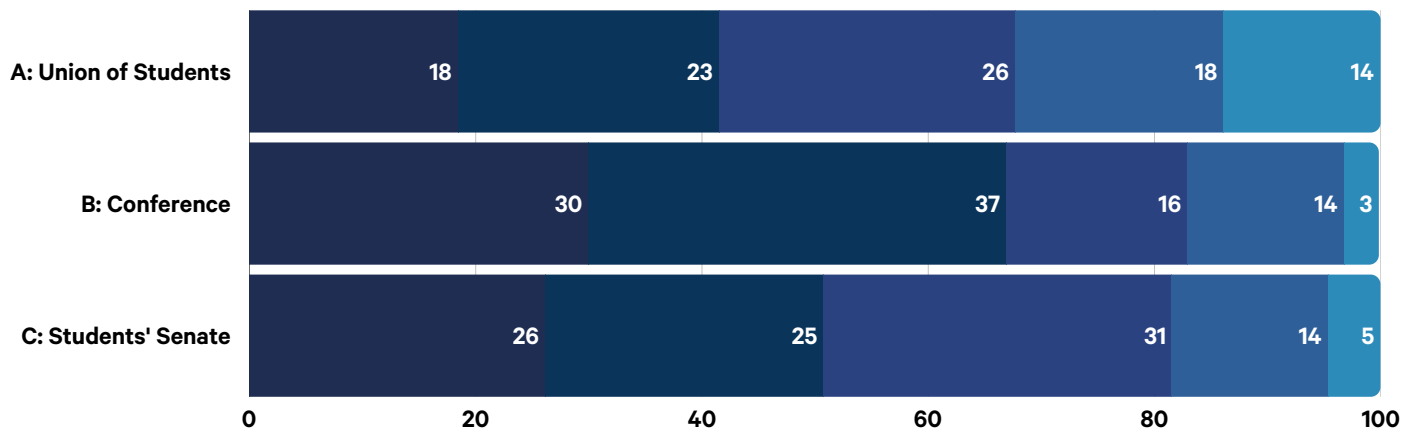
Just men (N=97)



Just women (N=69)



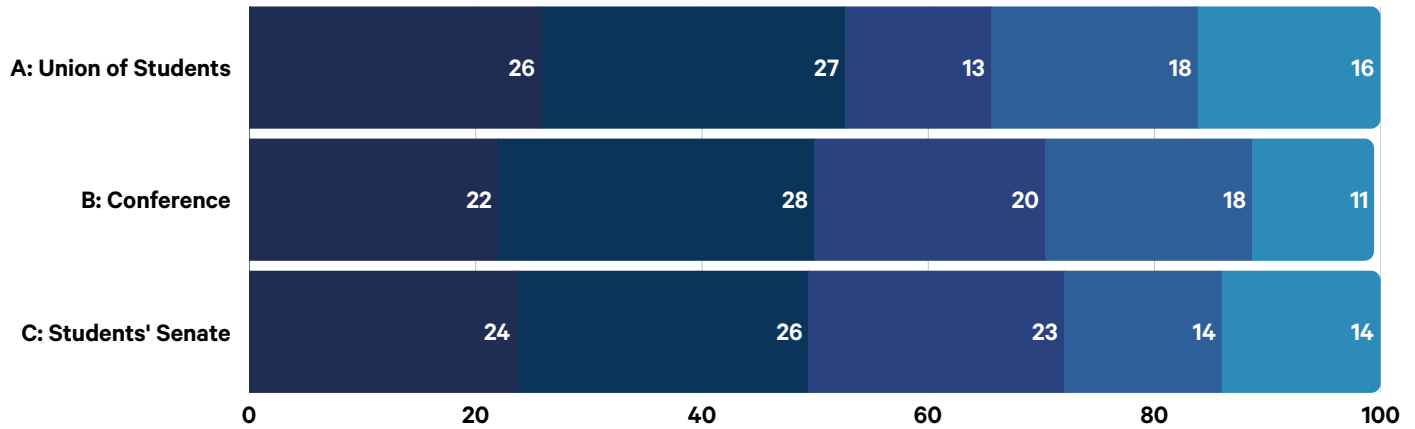
Just POC (N=65)



● 1. Very supportive ● 2. Supportive ● 3. Neutral ● 4. Unsupportive

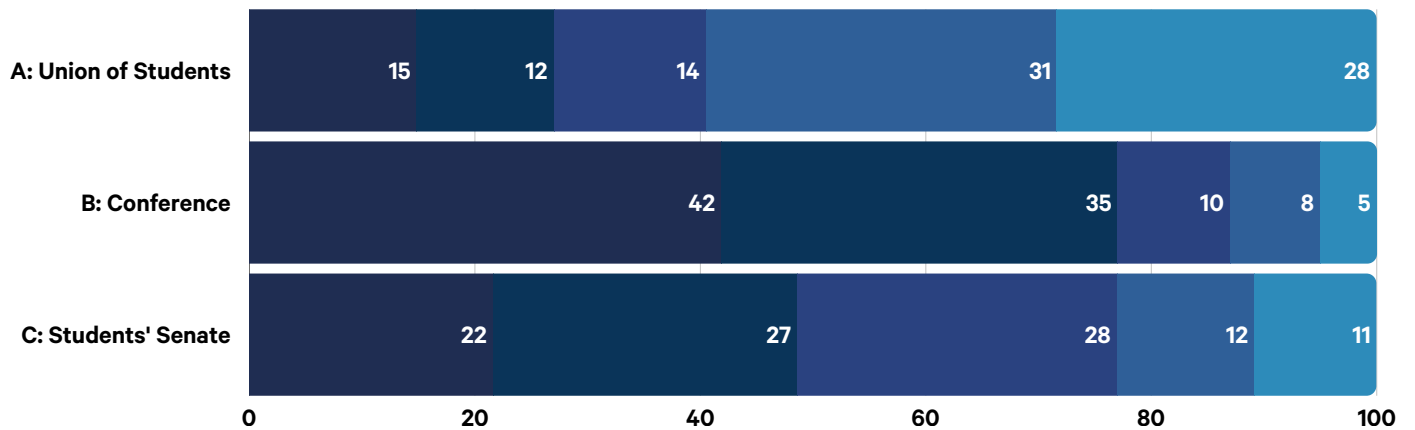
Just with a disability, health condition, or learning difficulty (N=93)

● 5. Very unsupportive



Just common room committee members (N=74)

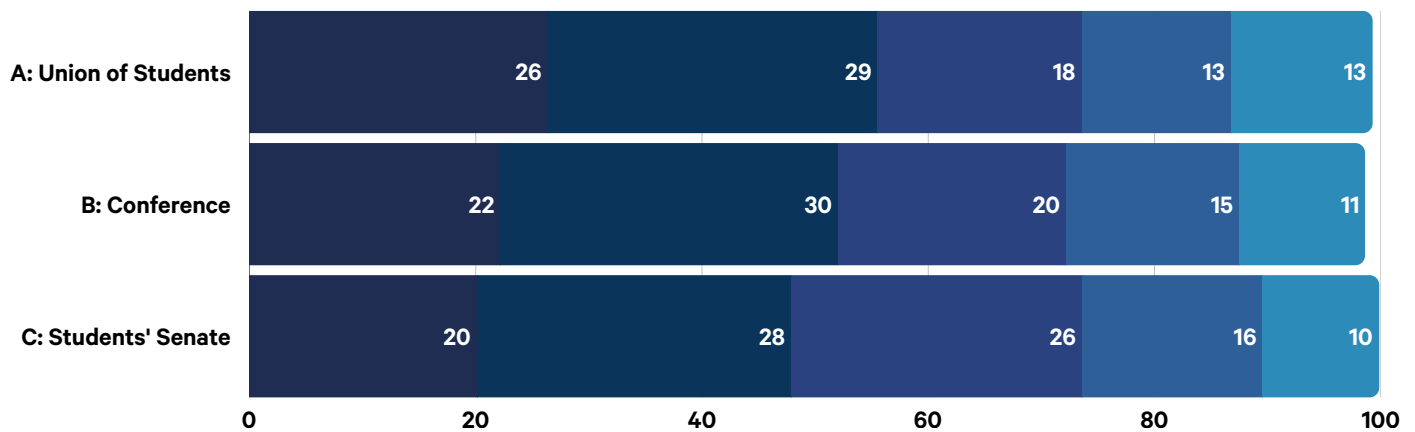
● 1. Very supportive ● 2. Supportive ● 3. Neutral ● 4. Unsupportive ● 5. Very unsupportive



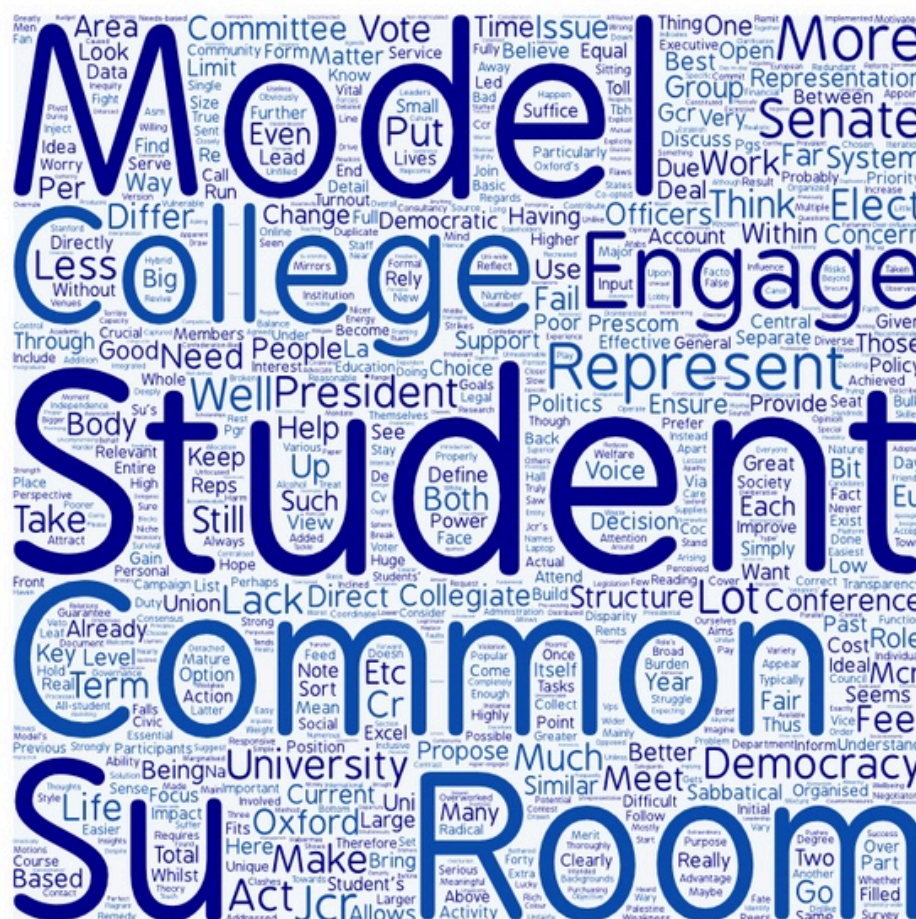
● 1. Very supportive ● 2. Supportive ● 3. Neutral ● 4. Unsupportive

Just non-common room committee members (N=144)

● 5. Very unsupportive



Respondents were also asked for open text feedback on the responses. First, they were asked to provide any further information they would like us to consider about their choice of model and purpose. 69 respondents opted to write in their thoughts - all of the responses are provided in full in the appendix, but a word cloud and summary of themes and notable answers are below.

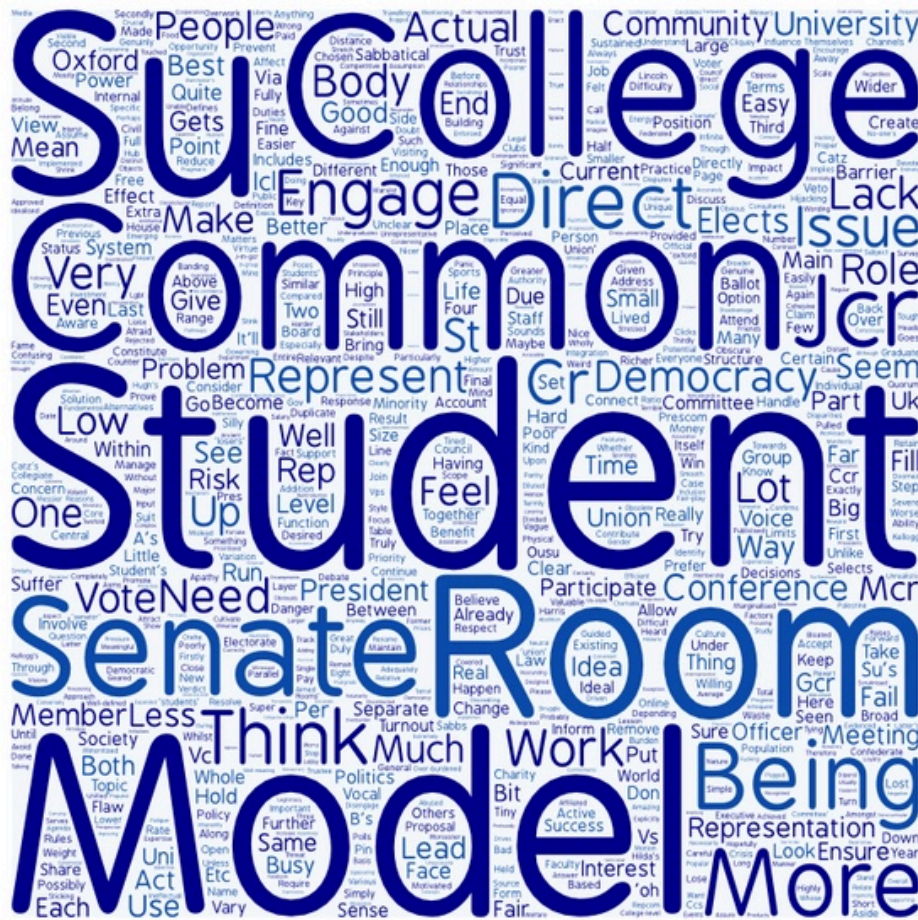


“MCR committees have a good understanding of their college community and are already accountable through general meetings in college”

“Although Common Room committees are overworked, they are more representative of real students. The SU has struggled in the past by being over-influenced by an hyper-engaged group of students with unrepresentative and uncompromising views.”

“A direct democracy model is best in theory, however, due to Oxford's organisational structure it is most likely to fail. Due to the collegiate structure taking more priority in student's lives, this will put the SU at the bottom of a priority list for individuals.”

Respondents were then asked “What do you think could be the barriers to success for these models?”. 80 respondents opted to write in their thoughts - as the above, all of the responses are provided in full in the appendix, but a word cloud and summary of themes and notable answers are below.



The most prominent theme in responses here is that respondents see low engagement as the main barrier for success of every model, but think that the Conference model mitigates against it better than the other two. A similar concern to the workload of common room committees is also a common theme in responses.

“2 of the 3 models require active participation by students, which is extremely unlikely to be sustained, if it is ever achieved.”

“Direct democracy approach is theoretically useful but will have little engagement.”

“Direct democracy does not work, the turnout is too low. J-M-GCR members/presidents are already too busy.”

“Direct democracy is doomed to fail in the same ways the current model of the SU has: a tiny minority of students actually engage with it, leading to the same eight students directing the agenda of the SU to suit their interests. Widespread dissatisfaction with the SU among the wider student population will continue.”

“Engagement with the SU is very low in Oxford. All models will face issues with getting proper student engagement. The common rooms do so much of the work that SUs in other unis do that OUSU barely gets any engagement.”

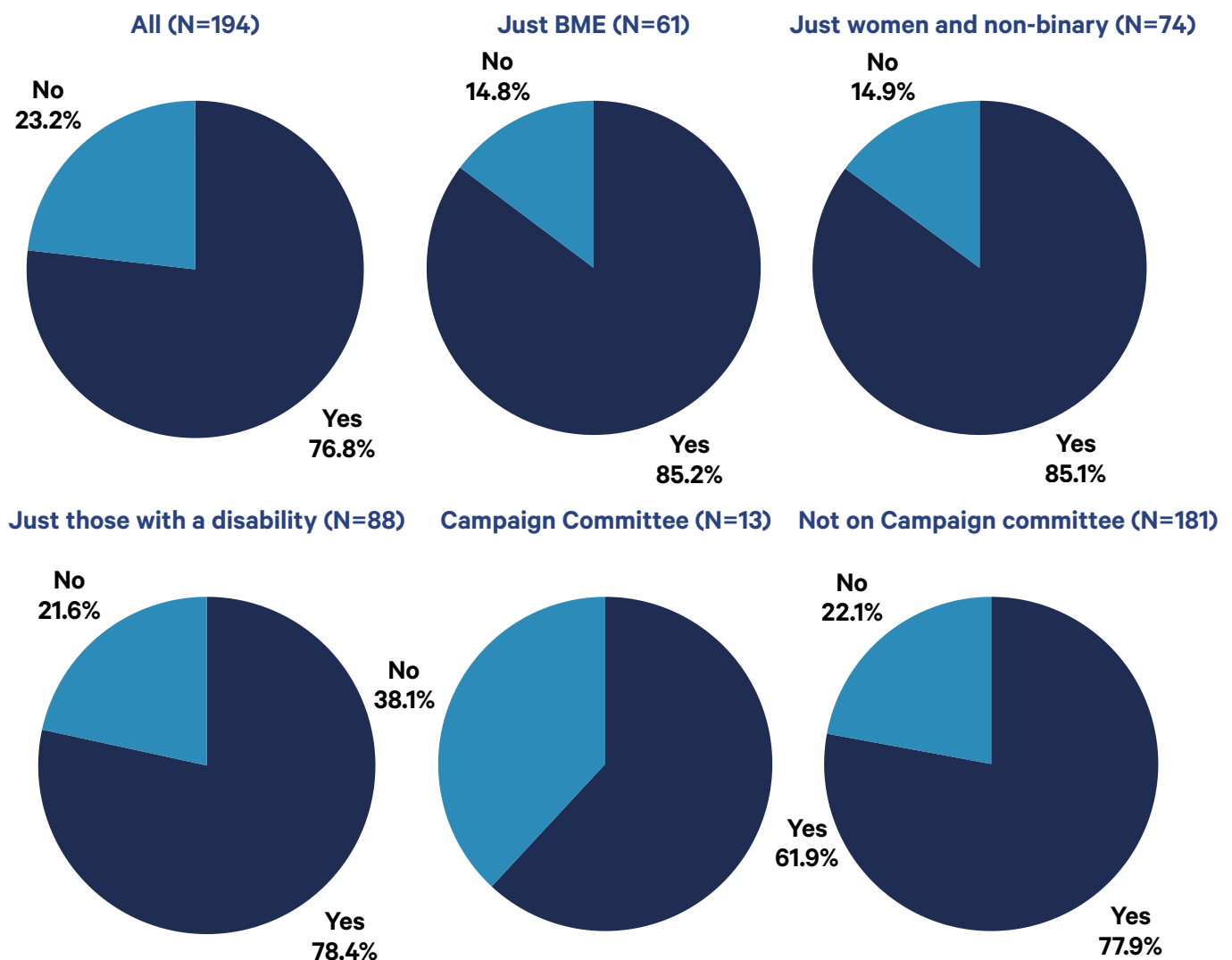
Representing marginalised communities

The democracy proposals also suggest to re-introduce part-time officers to serve as Community Officers, volunteers convene a network of relevant stakeholders from among a marginalised community and act as its representative within the SU.

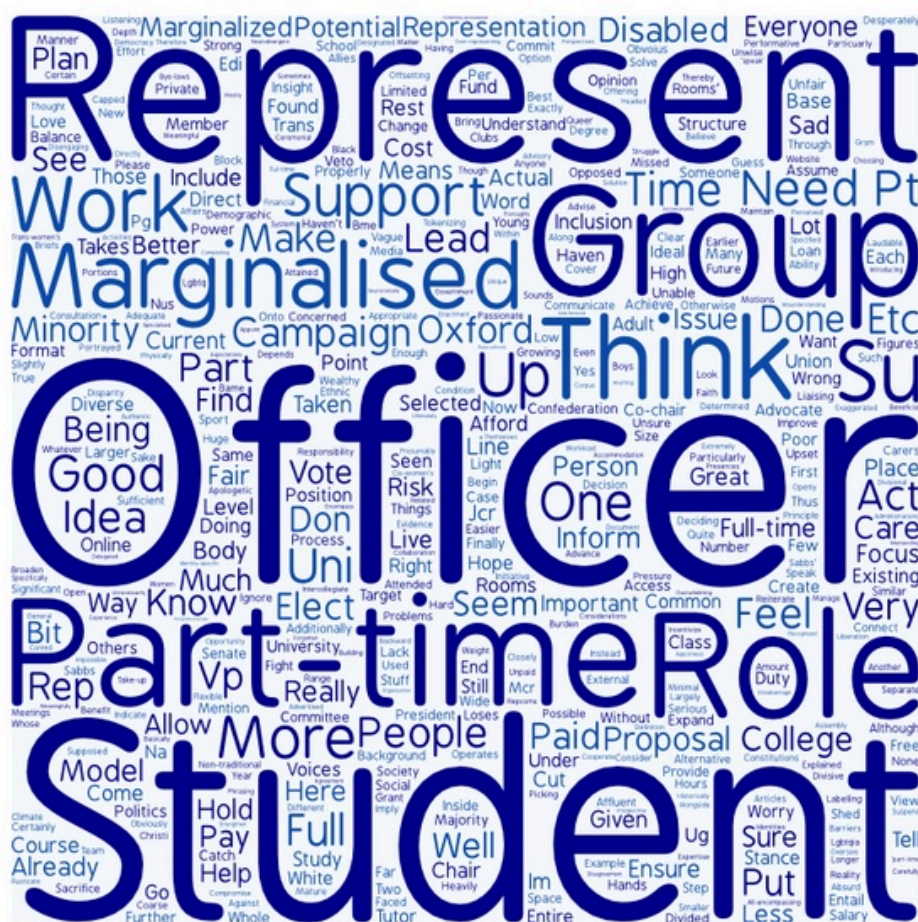
This is in response to feedback from the Trinity term consultation and from Campaigns, including requests for more representative powers, concerns over duplication of student society work, and issues with the burden of being part of a charity and the regulation of funds and statements this entails. Under model A and C, these Community Officers would be directly elected by all students who self-identify as part of the community during the annual elections; under model B these would be the chairs of repcoms and forums, elected by the relevant common room reps.

The Campaigns under this change could choose to become independent societies, giving them the associated freedoms and allowing them to be more flexible and self-governing, like other student societies.

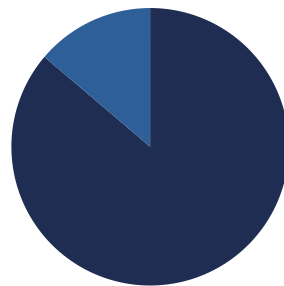
The survey asks “Do you agree with the proposal to introduce part-time officer roles to represent marginalised students?”. Overall, there was strong support for this proposal, both with and without the weighting. 194 respondents filled out this part, with 149 answering ‘yes’ and 45 answering ‘no’.



“Students should be represented through their own votes and/or voices, none of us need specialised officers to hold our hands just because we are perceived to have some disadvantage. Providing representation along these lines is unnecessarily divisive.”



Survey respondents were also asked what do they think the four sabbatical officer roles should include. 61 opted to answer this question, though some just wrote in that they don't have an opinion. There remains confusion on the SU being student-led and not student-run - with many respondents asking for sabbatical officer to handle HR, finance, and day-to-day running. However, 29 respondents did offer specific feedback on the role composition. Out of those, 25 suggested there should be a president or an equivalent role, while 4 suggested a more flat officer structure. For the fourth role, opinions tended to focus on equalities, welfare, and community, encompassing the three roles that were not explicitly covered this year.

[illegible]

Next Steps

Recommendations for the SU board of trustees

Announce the SU's focus would be on common room engagement and support

How should this be operationalised?

Announce that the SU will adopt the Conference of Common Rooms as a democratic model, pending development of its details and building support structure.

What should the timeline for implementation be?

The SU should adopt Community Officers as a model for the representation of marginalised groups.

How should we handle Campaigns and what should be the timeline for implementation?

The SU should decide and announce the four sabbatical roles up for elections.

What these should be is up for debate, but a decision is required as soon as possible to allow the elections to go ahead.

The SU should publish this report in the interest of transparency.

Are there risks involved and are there any suggestions for revisions or additions?

100
Oxford SU
— | • —