

ONE ONE  
LSE STANDARD OF  
EDUCATION



# LSE Students' Response to Teaching Task Force 2 Proposals

## INTRODUCTION

In light of the proposals made by Teaching Task Force 2 to alter the way in which education is delivered at LSE, it was agreed by LSE's Pro-Director for Teaching and Learning (Paul Kelly) and LSE Students' Union Education Officer (Rosie Coleman) that LSESU would facilitate a wide-ranging education consultation with students. The 'ONE LSE' Education consultation is one of four parts of the Union's priority campaign for 2013-14 and was established to ascertain student opinion on the TTF2 recommendations which directly affect student experience. These include issues around the size of classes (or seminars), departmental discretion, methods of assessment, some preliminary questions regarding the structure of the school year, and the current capability of the Staff-Student Liaison Committees to hold departments to account.

The level of respondents was the largest in recent memory, with nearly one in three students at LSE taking part. The survey was nearly four times larger than LSE's 2012-13 National Student Survey, and 2.4 times larger than the last LSESU Annual Survey. The consultation has been an excellent opportunity to reveal the attitudes of LSE students towards how education is designed and delivered.

The results demonstrate that LSE students greatly appreciate the improvements to teaching and learning that have already been made as a result of Teaching Task Force 1, but also recognise that improvements must continue to be made. The results show that students decisively feel that small class sizes, and the intimate nature of seminars, are an integral part of how teaching quality is defined at LSE.

This report will seek to explain the findings of the 'ONE LSE' Education consultation, written in response to the proposals set out by TTF2, and make recommendations based on these findings on behalf of the LSE students to ensure that their views are respected in future education decisions. It is our belief that the recommendations made by TTF2 have the potential to offer an exciting opportunity to make teaching and learning even better at LSE, however only by ensuring that student voice is respected, both now at a school-wide level and continuously in departmental level, will this be made possible. It is the purpose of this report to lay out what the findings of the consultation mean for the TTF2 vision in practice

## **METHODOLOGY**

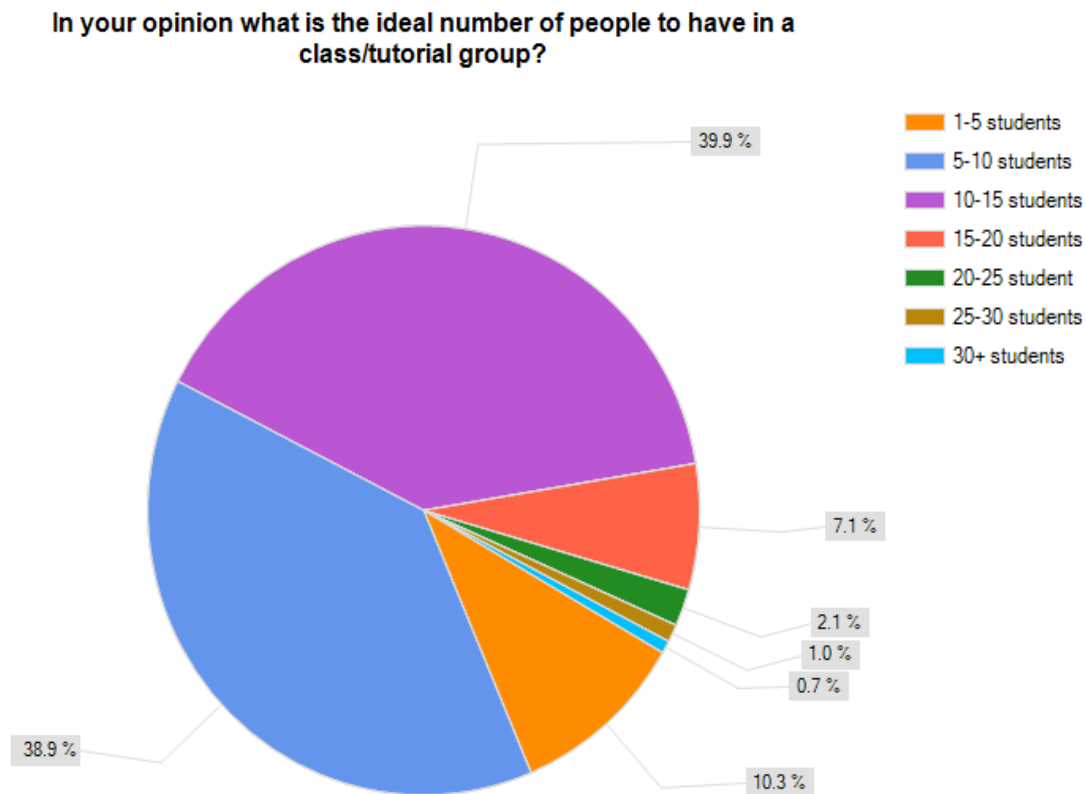
The survey was conducted by an oral questionnaire of 6 questions, distributed over a period of 5 days across LSE campus. Additionally, an electronic questionnaire of 24 close-ended and Likert-type questions was available on the LSESU's website from 11/11/13 to 28/11/13. It was promoted via all LSESU social media, including a large Facebook presence, sustained Twitter appearances, as well as Tumblr, YouTube and emails to SSLC Reps and the student body at large. It is acknowledged that the decision to administer the questionnaire both electronically and physically poses the methodological risk of a single respondent filling out more than one questionnaire, however it is considered highly unlikely given the historical difficulty faced by the School and the Union of getting students to engage once let alone multiple times! Furthermore the risk is mitigated when estimating the margin of error. Administering the questionnaire both physically and electronically ensured the maximum possible participation.

Overall there were 2,765 respondents to the survey, out of which 2,549 fully completed the survey. Out of the total respondents, 59.6% were undergraduate students and 38.8% were postgraduate taught students. There was a much lower response from postgraduate research students (1.7%). The responses were spread from across all the departments. No department was unrepresented. The most responses came from the department of Economics, with 321 respondents, (28% of total Economics students, 41% of their undergraduates, 11% their taught postgraduates). The part of the school with the lowest response rate was the Institute of Public Affairs, with 10% of IPA students responding. Overall 62.3% of the respondents described their course subject as qualitative and 37.7% as quantitative.

59.5% of the respondents identified English as their first language, compared to the 40.5% who spoke English as their second language. Finally, the majority of respondents (96.5%) did not consider themselves disabled since only the 3.5% described themselves as such.

## CLASS SIZES

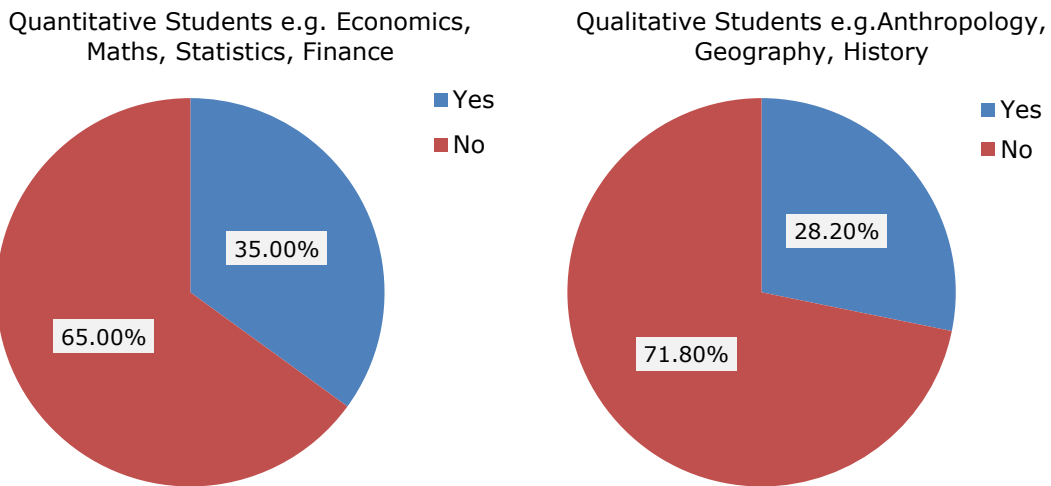
In stark contrast to the recommendations made by the TTF2 report, the findings of the 'ONE LSE' Education survey reveal a very different picture regarding the students' views on optimal class sizes. Specifically, the vast majority of students clearly prefer small classes, with 89.1% of students considering the ideal class size to be 15 students or less. 39.9% of the respondents consider the ideal number to be 10-15 people per class/tutorial group, 38.9% of the respondents want even smaller groups of 5-10 people. Only 15 students (0.7%) responded that the ideal number of people to have in a class/seminar is +30. These views are shared by qualitative and quantitative students: 40.3% of students on quantitative subjects and 40.0% of students on qualitative would prefer class/tutorial groups with 10-15 participants. Undergraduates favour a smaller class size than postgraduates, with 45.5% of undergraduates stating that 5-10 students is the ideal class/tutorial size whereas 46.3% postgraduates indicate 10-15 students as the preferable group size. Consequently a strong preference towards small class/tutorial groups with few participants is evident across all student demographics.



TTF2 explicitly recommends increasing class size allowance for those classes led by full time members of faculty, in recommendation 13.1. In line with this recommendation and departmental correspondence outlining desired changes, LSESU consulted students on

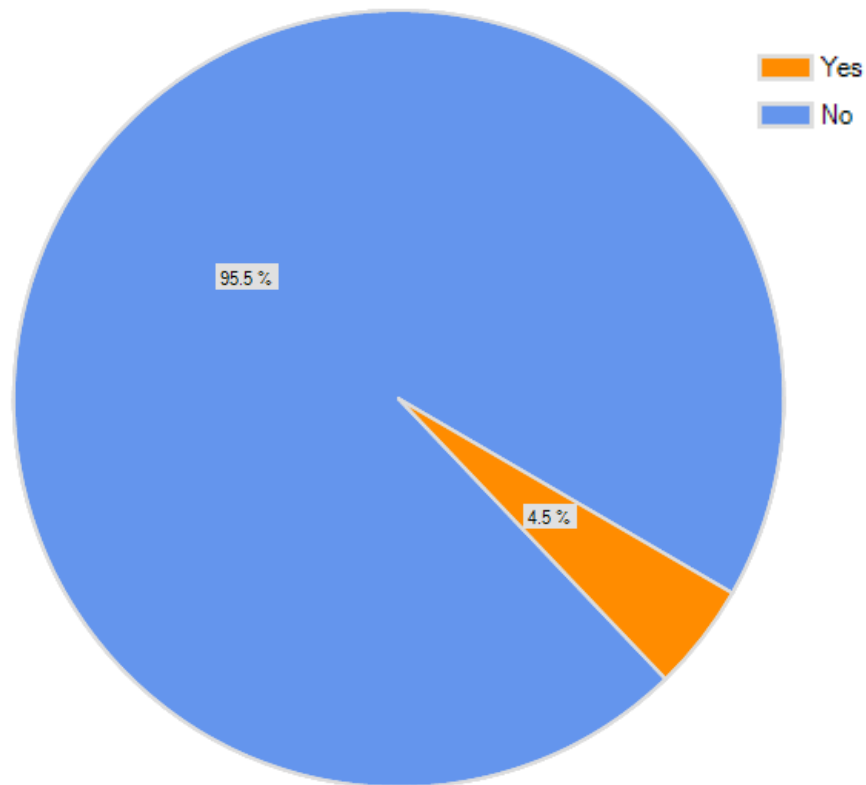
the trade-off between class size and greater contact between permanent faculty members. The overwhelming majority of students are explicitly against increasing the size of classes/seminars to either of the proposed sizes (30 or 60) even if they were to be taught by a senior academic or notable member of full-time staff. Specifically 69.3% of the respondents stated they were against increasing the size of their tutorial group to 30 students even if they were to be taught by a senior academic or notable member of full time staff. Undergraduate students are only marginally more opposed to the suggestions (70.5% postgraduates compared to 66.9% of postgraduates). Again there is only a small difference between qualitative and quantitative students' views: 71.8% of qualitative students were opposed to increasing class sizes compared to 65% of the respondents from quantitative disciplines.

**Would you be willing for the size of your tutorial group to increase to 30 students if you were being taught by a senior academic or notable member of full time staff?**



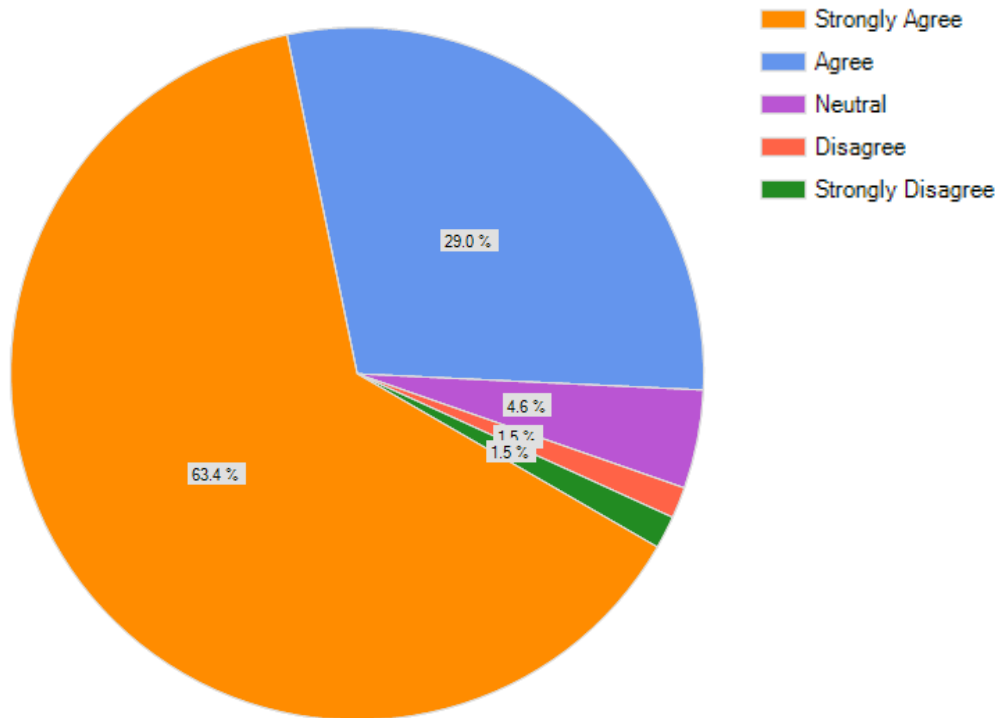
The suggestion of increasing the sizes of tutorial groups to 60 students was almost unanimously rejected by the student body, with 95.5% of the respondents saying they would not be willing for the size of the tutorial groups to increase even if they were to be taught by senior academics or notable members of full time staff. Whilst students may value the TTF2's desire to encourage greater contact between permanent faculty and students, and greater variation on the types of teaching occasions and curriculum innovation, the results of the 'ONE LSE' consultation prove that students do not want to compromise on class sizes for the privilege of a more high profile teacher.

**Would you be willing for the size of your tutorial group to increase to 60 students if you were being taught by a senior academic or notable member of full-time staff?**



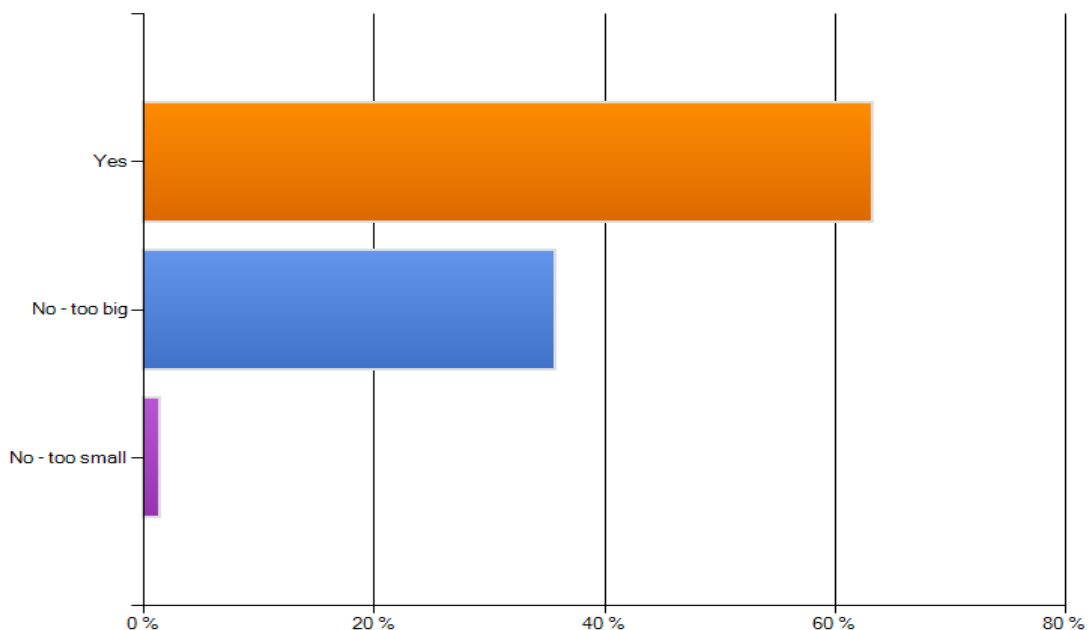
The reluctance of students to increase class sizes even if notable members of staff were to teach them is connected to the fact that students relate the size of class/tutorial groups with the quality of teaching and debate. Specifically, when asked if they think the size of a group impacts the standard of teaching and debate in class, 92.4% of the respondents strongly agreed or agreed that the size does impact the standard of teaching and debate. 4.6% of the respondents felt neutral about the impact of group sizes on the standard of teaching or debate and only 3% of the respondents stated that they disagree or strongly disagree. These percentages are largely consistent throughout undergraduate and postgraduate programs as well as quantitative and qualitative programmes.

**Do you think that the size of a group impacts on the standard of teaching and debate in class?**



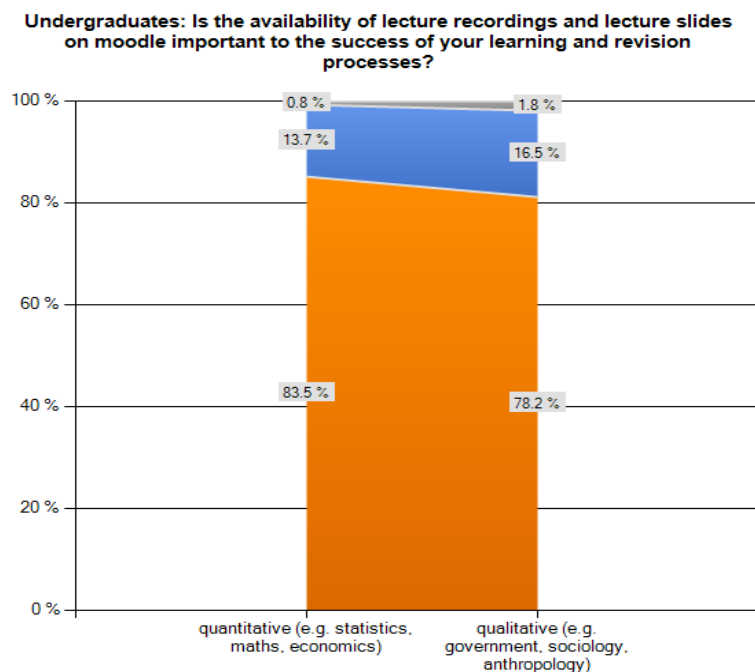
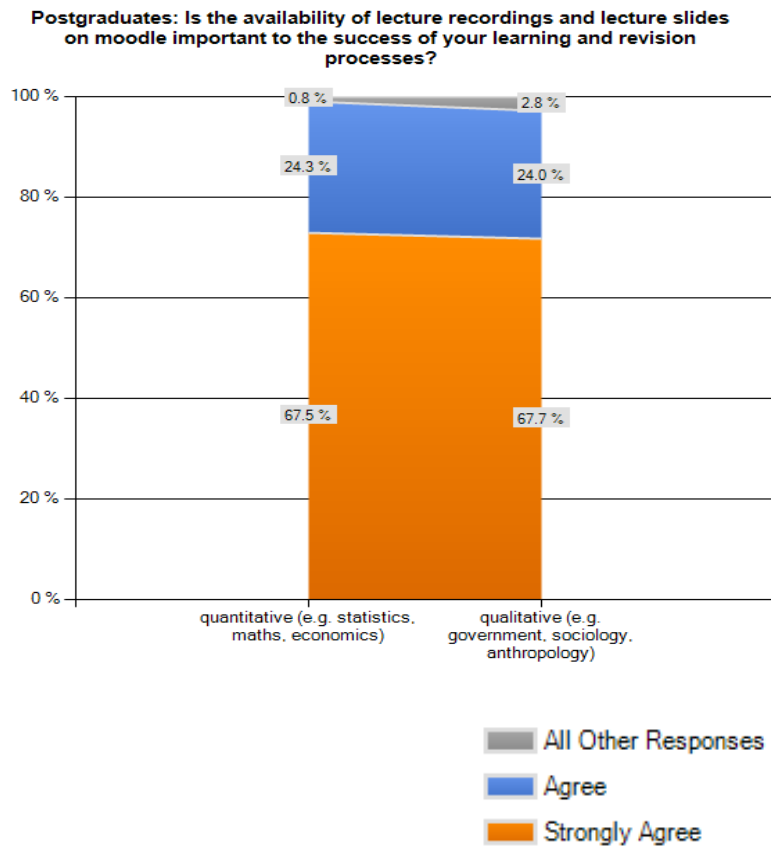
Respondents were asked in a closed ended question whether they were happy with the current size of their class/tutorial. 63.2% of the respondents stated they were happy with their current class sizes whereas 35.5% of the respondents stated that they were not happy with the current class sizes since they consider them too big. Only 1.3% of the respondents stated that they were unhappy with the current class sizes because they were too small. Undergraduate and postgraduate students presented equal levels of satisfaction with the current class sizes. Students from quantitative and qualitative alike were similarly happy with current class sizes.

**Are you happy with the current size of your class/tutorial groups at LSE?**



## ONLINE RESOURCES

The survey also showed that the overwhelming majority of the student body considers the availability of lecture recording and lecture slides on Moodle important to the success of its learning and revision process. 93.6% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the significance of lecture slides and recordings on Moodle for their academic success while less than 3% of the respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed. This 3% was not concentrated in any one department but scattered across the school. The Union strongly welcomes the decision from 4th December Academic Board, changing the default position for lecturers to opt in, to opt out.

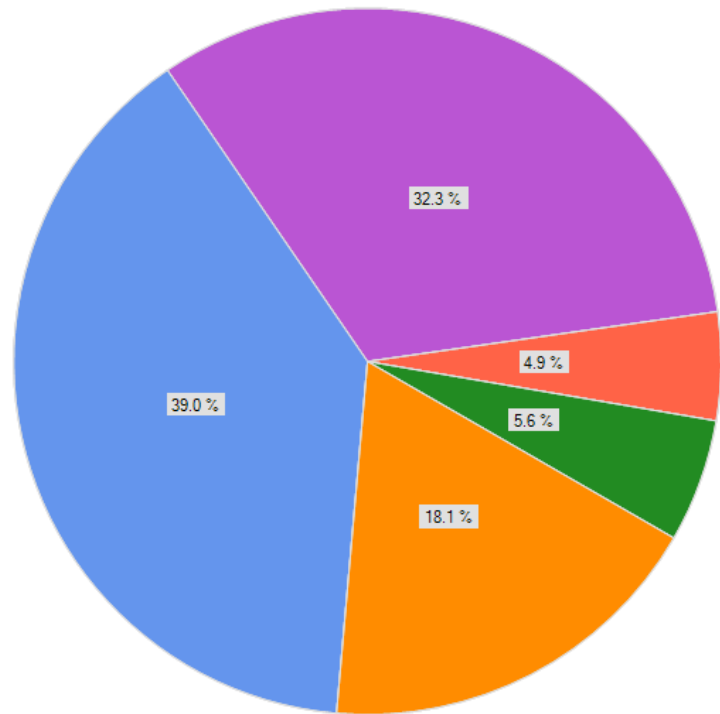




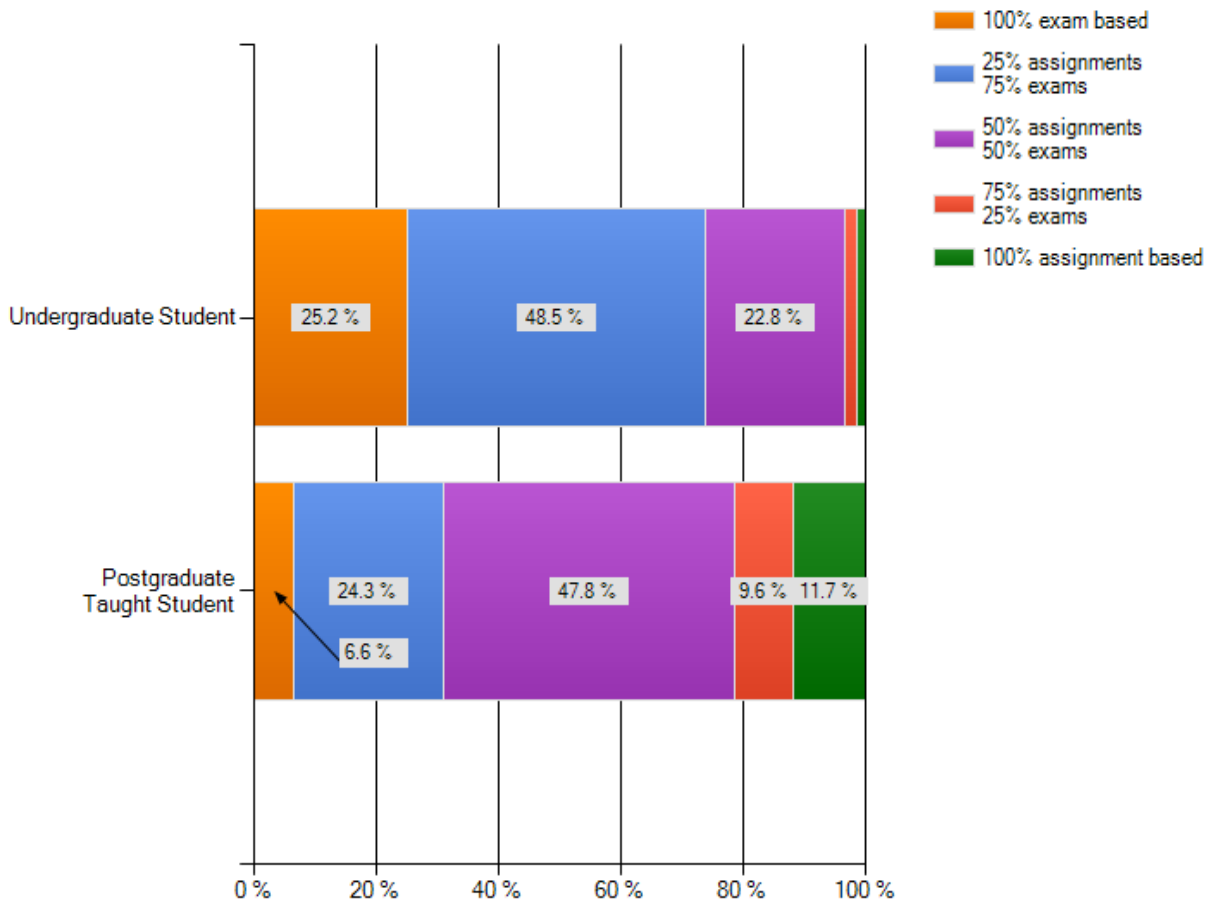
## ASSESSMENT METHODS

Respondents were asked to give their views on what the assessment method for their subject should be. Currently at undergraduate level, most students rely on a 100% exam approach for the majority of their module choices, whilst postgraduates experience more variety in assessment type. 18.3% of total students surveyed expressed favour towards 100% exam approach. 25.2% of undergraduates favoured 100% exam, compared to only 6.6% of postgraduates.

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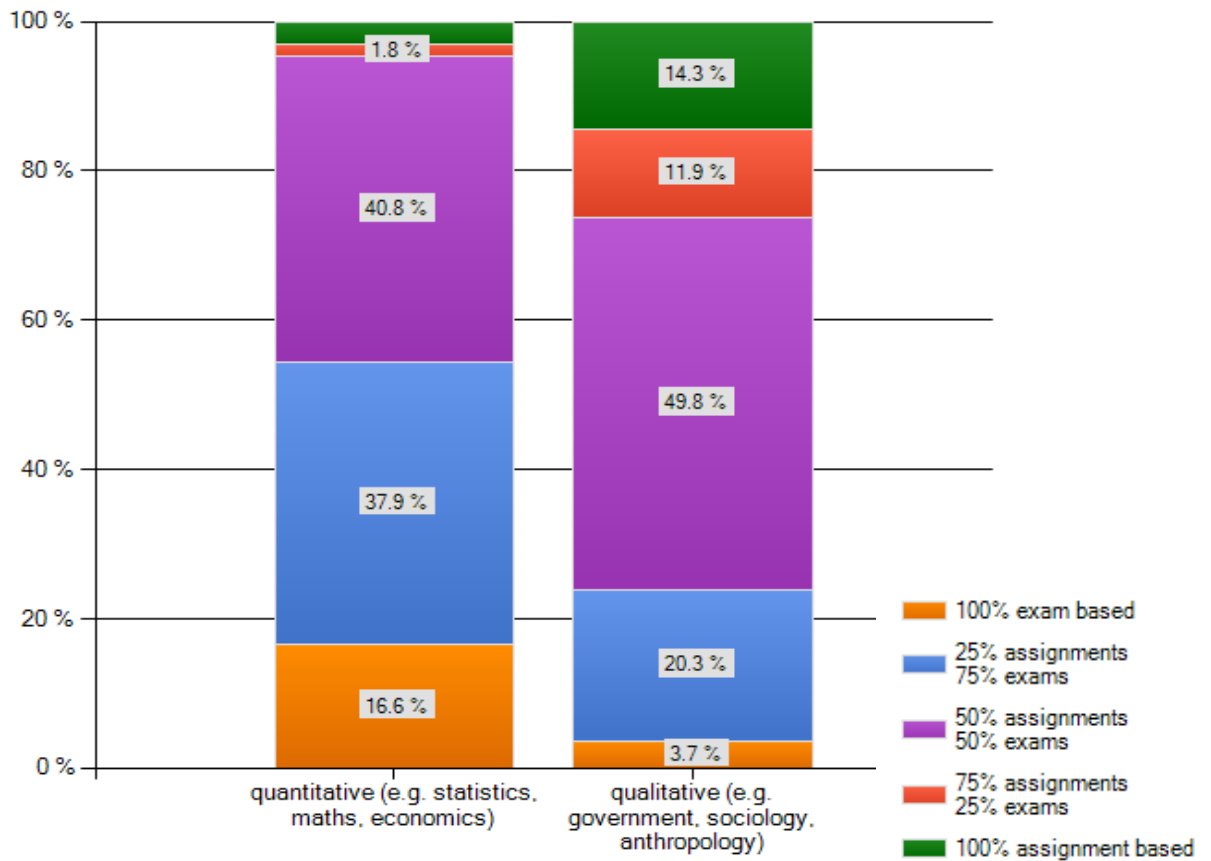
The quantitative undergraduates were unsurprisingly more in favour of 100% exam than their qualitative colleagues (32.8% and 18.5% respectively). This divide can be seen at postgraduate level also: 16.6% of quantitative postgraduates were in favour of 100% exam compared to only 3.7% of postgraduates.

There was also low support for 100% assignment approach: only 5.6% of total respondents thought that a 100% assignment approach would be ideal for their course. Only 1.3% of undergraduates expressed this preference, compared to 11.7% of postgraduates. Qualitative undergraduates were only marginally more supportive of this option than quantitative students (1.5% and 1% respectively). Anthropology undergraduates showed the most support, but even then this was less than 1%.

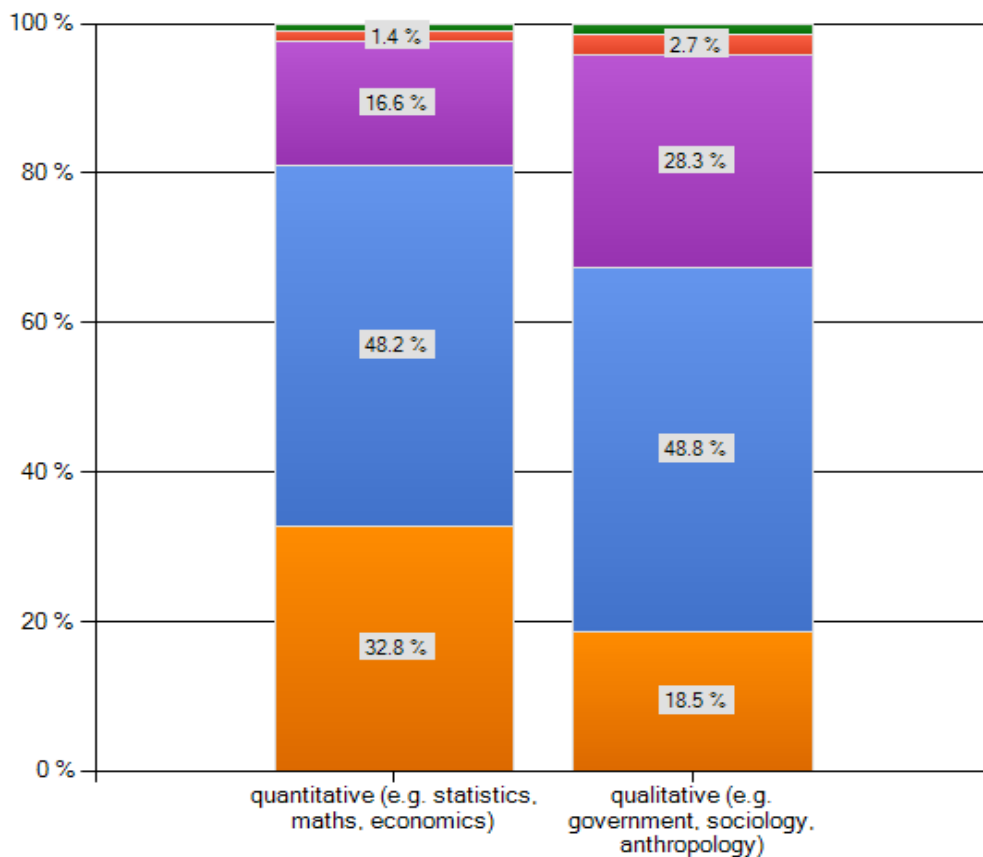
There is a much bigger discipline divide between postgraduates: 3% of quantitative postgraduates express responded that 100% assignment would be ideal compared to 14.3% qualitative.

The most popular assessment methods prove to be those encompassing both assignments and examinations: 76.2% of students identified a mixed approach as the ideal assessment methods, with 75% exams:25% assignment proving the most popular amongst undergraduates (48.5%) whilst Postgraduates favoured even heavier weighting on assignments, 47.8% identifying 50:50 exams to assignments as their ideal. Discipline impacts upon the results only slightly: a majority of both quantitative and qualitative postgraduates prefer 50:50, even if qualitative have 10% more support for this method. Qualitative postgraduates show a 10% greater preference for 100% assignment method, whereas quantitative students show a 10% greater preference for 100% exam. A mixed assessment approach is favoured by a vast majority of students.

**Postgraduates (Taught): Do you think that the assessment methods for your subject should be**



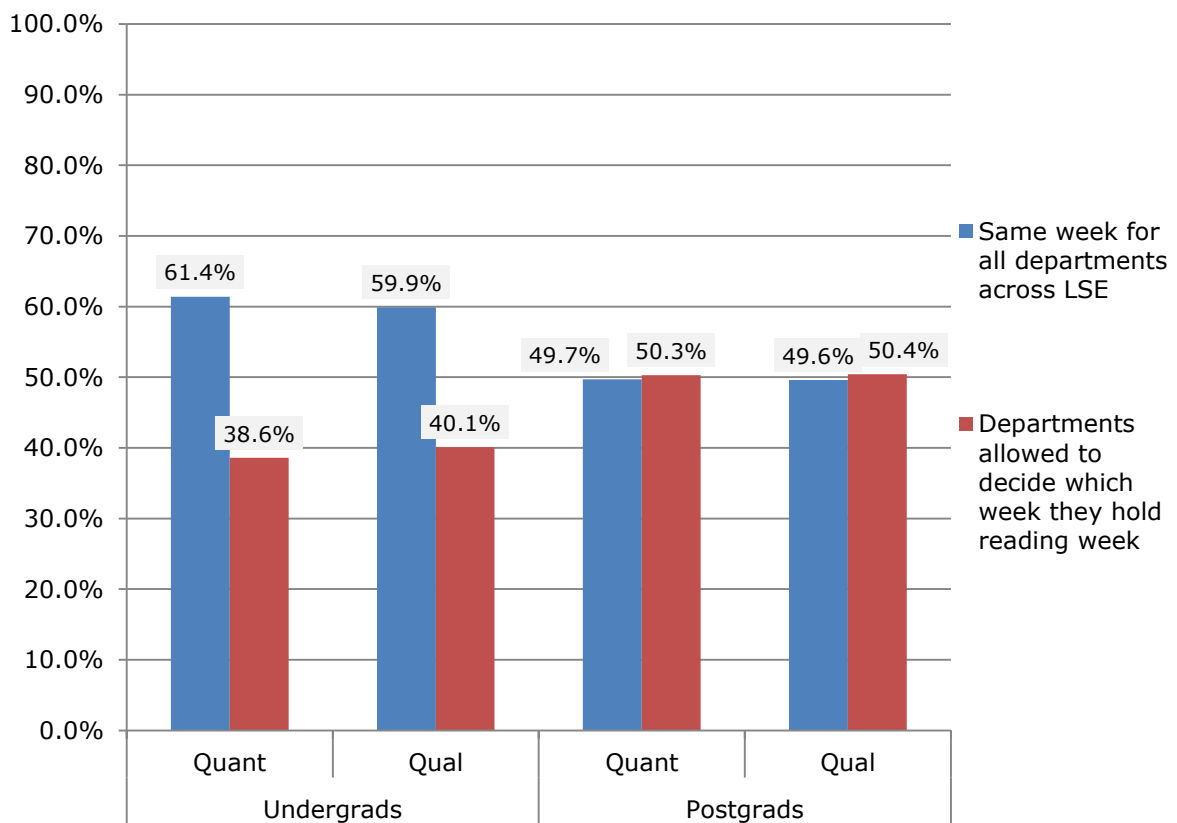
**Undergraduates: Do you think that the assessment methods for your subject should be**



## DEPARTMENTAL DISCRETION

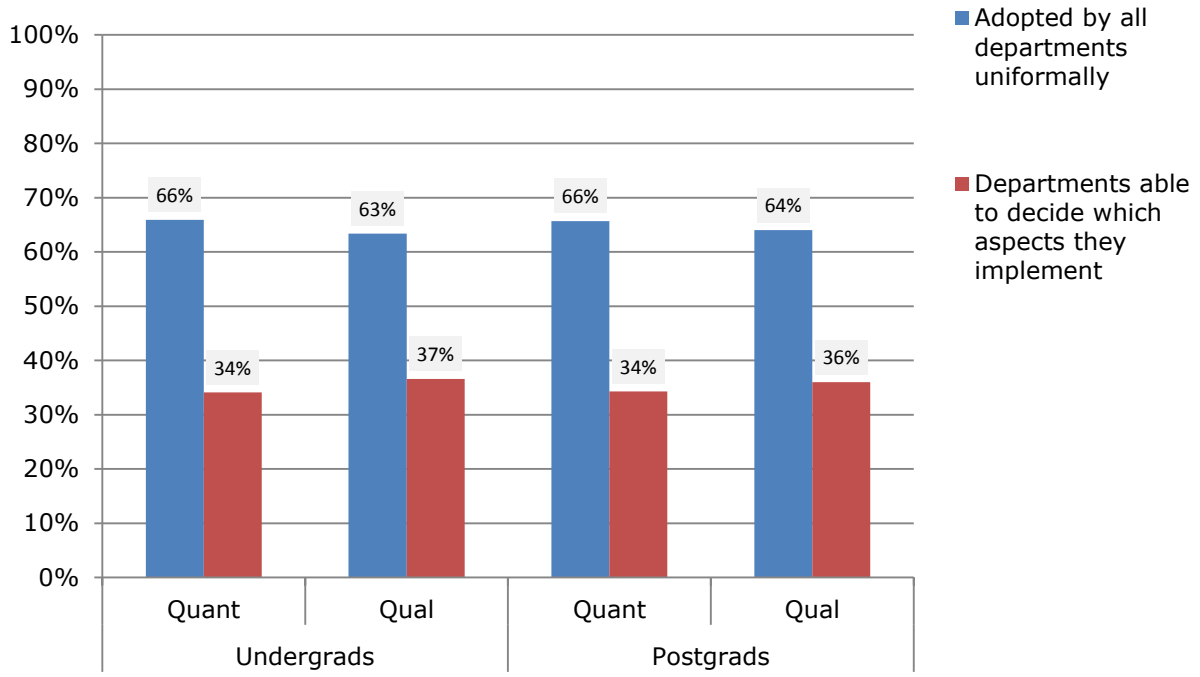
The survey reveals that the majority of students do desire departmental uniformity and cohesion. Specifically 53.9% of the respondents stated that in the case of LSE introducing reading weeks, they should be timetabled at the same time for all departments compared to the 46.1% which believe that departments should decide independently when to have them. Coordinated timetabling in all departments regarding reading weeks seems to be more important for undergrads since 57.9% of them consider it preferable, compared to 49.65% of postgraduates. Similarly, one in two respondents from undergraduate quantitative disciplines (61.4 %) stated that reading weeks should be the same for all departments across LSE, compared to 59.9% of qualitative undergraduates. Similarly, one in two respondents from undergraduate quantitative disciplines (61.4 %) stated that reading weeks should be the same for all departments across LSE, compared to 59.9% of qualitative undergraduates.

**If LSE does introduce reading weeks should they be timetabled at the same time for all departments or should departments independently be allowed to decide when they have reading week?**



The divide between undergraduate and postgraduate is quite small here but has significant implications. A more uniformed term-structure is favoured by undergraduates’.

**If LSE does choose to make changes to the structure of the school year (e.g. reading week, additional exams, different length terms) should these changes be adopted by all departments uniformly or should departments be able to decide which aspects they im**



Whilst postgraduates appear to be undecided on the particular issue of who should decide the timing of a reading week, they come to clearer conclusions for more general changes, as asked in question 15, such as additional exams, or different length terms. Two out of three students across the school favoured a uniform approach, encouraging the school to enforce these changes centrally whilst 1 in 3 welcomed the departments' freedom to decide.

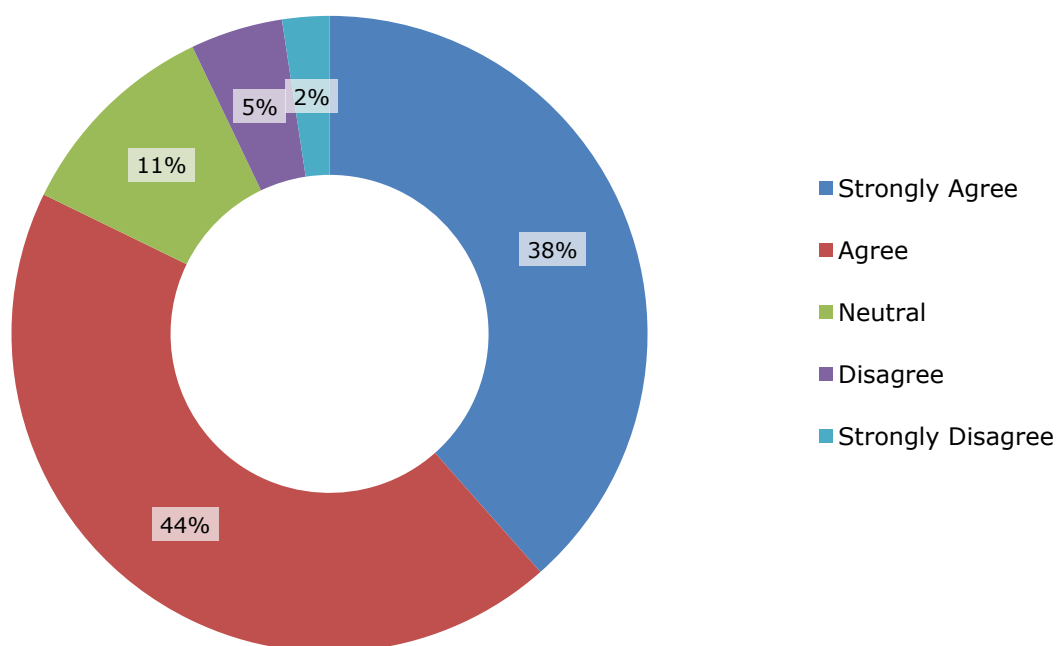
## STAFF-STUDENT LIAISON COMMITTEES

The online survey asked tailored questions especially for those students who are representatives to their department's Staff-Student Liaison committee. 197 students taking part in the survey identified themselves as SSLC reps. 83.5% of the reps who completed the survey had attended their SSLC meeting, while 16.5% had not yet attended an SSLC meeting. The reasons for their non-attendance were not documented.

Reps were asked questions about their perceptions of the SSLC system, including its usefulness, its capability to hold the departments to account, and also the involvement of the Students' Union in the SSLC system. Those who had stated that they had not attended their SSLC were removed from the questions which asked for their opinion on the delivery of their SSLC.

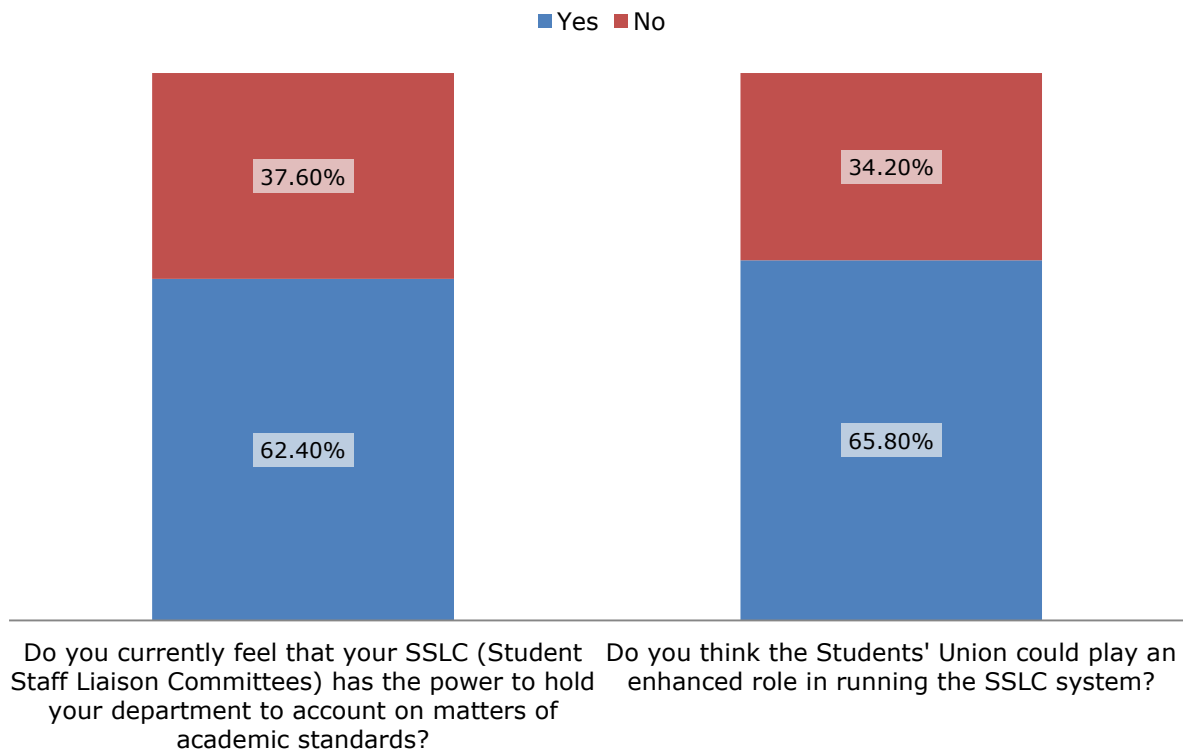
The reps were asked whether they felt that the issues and concerns they had raised with their SSLC had been taken seriously. The overwhelming majority of reps agreed or strongly agreed that they had been taken seriously, with only 17% of reps expressing a neutral or negative opinion. This demonstrates when students are engaged with and asked to express their opinions, staff appear to respect those views, and it is a positive sign that reps feel that they are being taken seriously by staff in their department. This confidence in the SSLC system is likely to be down to the increased engagement of both the School and the Students' Union in enhancing the role of SSLC system undertaken in recent years.

### **Do you feel that your opinions and concerns were taken seriously by department staff at your first SSLC meeting?**



There was a less overwhelming majority of reps who felt that the current SSLCs have the ability to hold their department to account on the issues of academic standards. Compared to the 83% who felt their concerns were taken seriously, only 62.4% of reps felt their SSLC has the power to hold their department to account on academic standards. SSLCs do not currently have the level of requirement or experience necessary to hold departments to account on academic standards as reforms proposed by TTF2 would involve.

### Questions to SSLC Reps



One such solution to this deficit would be increased participation from the Students' Union, in line with other Unions' roles in the UK. When reps were asked if the Union could play an increased role in running the SSLC system, 65.8% agreed, indicating a strong desire for increased school/SU collaboration with the SSLC system. The Students' Union already administers training of SSLC reps, as well as providing reps with briefing sessions for meetings such as the Consultative Fora. Student reps would feel more supported if the Students' Union had greater involvement in how the SSLC system is delivered. An increased Union role would help to centralize student opinions on the implementation of departmental discretion, at a time when student voice risks being segmented into departments.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

As a result of conducting the ONE LSE Education consultation, we have drawn out several recommendations which we feel must be listened to in light of our findings from students' opinion. Principally, the consultation has proven that students at LSE care a great deal about the education they receive, and have strong opinions on how this should look. Students strongly support the founding principle of Teaching Task Force 2 that teaching should be returned to the heart of education at LSE, however students feel that this great teaching is underpinned by greater flexibility of assessment, smaller and more intimate classes with more meaningful interactions between students and staff, better provision for online learning resources, uniformity and fairness of experiences across different departments, and a more robust SSLC system. These principles underpin our key recommendations.

- **Students reject the TTF2 Recommendation 13.1** "that the norm of 15 be relaxed for classes led by permanent faculty and LSE fellows to encourage greater contact between permanent faculty and students, and to encourage greater variation on the types of teaching occasions and curriculum innovation". Our research demonstrates that students are less concerned with the 'profile' of the teacher they are being taught by, than by the quality of the teaching experience overall. Students value the small, intimate nature of classes at LSE, with the overwhelming majority of students preferring classes of between 5 – 15 students. Most students either feel that the current cap of 15 is sufficient, or desire even smaller classes than they already receive. We feel this is because smaller classes facilitate a more personal experience with more meaningful interactions, which students do not receive in lectures, and underlines intimacy as a key facet of a high quality teaching experience. Whilst many classes already exceed the cap of 15, we feel the current procedure for exemption is robust and necessary. We welcome calls for innovation, but not at the expense of class sizes. The recommendation to increase class sizes is itself not innovative and LSESU, and students alike, recognise that there are alternative mechanisms to encourage greater contact between permanent faculty and students. Given the overwhelming response from students in on this issue, we cannot support the recommendation to relax the current cap of 15 students per class or the extensive exemption procedures, and we call for the rejection of recommendation 13.1 by the academic community.
- **In the eventuality of discretion, LSESU recommends departments discuss:**
  - **Better provision for online resources.** The most overwhelming response from students came on the issue of lecture slides and recordings, which almost all students felt was an integral tool for revision and learning enhancement. The Union welcomes the changes agreed at Academic Board to change the default position from opt in to opt out. If LSE is to look into future online education resources, such as MOOCs, we feel that lecture capture and recording should be established as a norm first. There remain too many courses that resist online lecture capture, a resource which we see as an essential component of a modern educational experience.
  - **Greater flexibility of assessment.** LSE students appreciate the shift towards more diverse methods of assessment and the move away from 100% exams in some departments. Students most strongly support either



a 75% exams 25% assignments or a 50/50 split. We feel that the departments which have embraced more mixed assessment should be praised, and assessment diversity should be promoted more rigorously as an example of good practice. The proposals to increase departmental autonomy offer the perfect opportunity for departments to assess and review their current practises and we urge them to listen to the clear conclusions this consultation draws on the issue of assessment type.

- **A more robust SSLC system.** SSLC reps clearly value the ability to express their opinions and feel these are taken seriously by the School, and this has come about due to the positive collaboration between the School and the Students' Union over supporting the reps in recent years. However, the proposed changes by TTF2 place increasing importance in the SSLCs' ability to hold the departments to account on areas of academic standards. While some reps currently feel they are able to hold departments to account, 37% do not. And given the vast scope of the proposed changes, it is crucial that this 37% who do not currently feel they can hold their department to account, are better supported. SSLCs, in their current form, will not be able to fairly or adequately perform their enhanced role. Students clearly value the Students' Union's increasing role in administering the SSLC system, and we feel that this is an appropriate time to increase this further. As it currently stands, there is not the capacity within the School to ensure that action points and minutes are being followed up on between meetings. With the Students' Union's full-time Academic Representation Coordinator, we would be able to more adequately ensure more comprehensive support for reps if the Students' Union had more influence in the delivery of the SSLC rep system.
  - Firstly, the Union wishes to **administer the elections** process within all departments at the beginning of each school year, to ensure the swift, consistent and democratic appointment of reps across the school. The Union has staff and expertise in running elections, with one of the highest turn-out rates in the UK for our SU elections. We are also increasingly involved in the administering of residences' halls' committee elections.
  - Secondly, the Union wishes to become responsible for **administrating an annual review of the role of student voice** in the school, to be presented to Academic Board, encouraging best practise between departments and facilitating an ongoing discussion amongst students. The SSLC system in every department must be reviewed on an annual basis, especially given their new responsibilities, and the Union would welcome the opportunity to take on this role.