



Elections Review Survey Findings

1. Introduction

The Open University Students Association holds biennial elections where student representatives are elected to its Central Executive Committee. In 2016, elections were held between 11 March 2016 (with the Elections Portal going live) and 10 June 2016 (when voting closed). Email communications and social media posts, such as the hashtag *#voteOUstudents*, were used to raise awareness and encourage student members to engage with Elections 2016.

Elections 2016 introduced two key changes to the Students Association elections processes. The introduction of One Member One Vote meant that all student members of the Association could take part in voting, and the introduction of self-nominations meant that candidates could stand for election without the need for other students to nominate them. Engagement levels with the Students Association levels improved in 2016, with 4368 voters and 68 candidates standing for 28 roles.

The Election Review Working Group was set up to evaluate the elections processes in 2016 and recommend improvements for future Students Association elections. As part of this review, two surveys were launched between January and February 2017 to gather feedback from students and candidates. This report presents the findings from these two surveys (referred to as the Student Survey and the Candidate Survey), which will inform further refinements to the election processes in anticipation of Elections 2018.

2. Summary of findings

- The Student Survey included questions around awareness of Elections 2016 and the barriers to effective engagement, and invited suggestions for ways in which the Association could improve student participation in future elections. This survey received 2165 responses. The Candidate Survey included questions around different aspects of the election process, such as nominations, campaigning, and the information provided in the key election documents. This survey received 32 responses.
- Overall awareness of Elections 2016 was at 47%; the Student Survey received suggestions for improving engagement with elections in the future. Both students and candidates felt that the overall duration of Elections 2016 had been too long, and that future scheduling of Students Association elections need to take into consideration key exam periods.

- Candidates found the information provided for Elections 2016 to be useful overall, but suggested further details, specifically regarding time commitments, to be added to the 'Description of responsibilities for CEC members'. Better guidance on good practice around campaigning, and easy comparability of candidates' manifestos were also mentioned by both candidates and students.
- Overall, candidates were satisfied with the nominations process, but asked for more clarity in terms of eligibility, especially around candidates being able to stand for multiple roles. Overall satisfaction with the campaigning and hustings processes was also good, with candidates suggesting changes to the duration of the campaigning and voting periods. Both candidates and students felt that the moderation of discussions on the VLE forums and during hustings needs to be stronger in the future.
- Suggestions for improving students' engagement with future elections included providing better information in candidates' manifestos, such as the areas of student experience that candidates intended to work on, and being able to compare candidates' answers. Students also laid emphasis on the need to highlight the relevance of the Association's work and thereby the importance of the elections, and that this should be done throughout the term of the elected representatives.

3. Awareness of Elections 2016

The Student Survey asked the question: *Are you aware that the Students Association holds elections every two years where all OU students can vote to elect their student representatives?*

- The overall response is split between those who responded as being aware (47%) and not aware (43%) of the Students Association elections, with 10% opting for 'I am not sure' (Figure 1). Open comments also suggest that students who were aware of the Students Association elections were often unsure about the frequency of the elections.
- Awareness seems to increase with length of study with the OU (Figure 2), although it is of interest that students with '6-10 years' and 'over 10 years' study experience were also unsure about the Association elections (at 11% each). Awareness was lowest for those who had studied for 'less than 1 year' with the OU (17%) and highest for those who had studied for '6-10 years' (66%). The figures for those not aware of the elections decreased with increasing length of study, but stabilised for those having studied for '3-5 years', '6-10 years' and 'over 10 years' with the OU (Figure 2).
- Awareness of the elections increased with age, with 26% of students in the '25 and under' age group indicated that they were aware of the elections, compared to 62% of students in the '56 and over' age group (Figure 3). Students also gave suggestions for improving awareness, covered below in the 'Improving Engagement with the Students Association' section.

4. Timing and Duration

The Student Survey asked respondents whether the duration of Elections 2016 as 'too long' had been a barrier to engaging with the elections; the Candidate Survey asked respondents' thoughts on 'duration of the voting period' and indicate their satisfaction with the 'time available to answer hustings questions'.

- Of responses to the Student Survey, 2% indicated that the duration of Elections 2016 as 'too long' was a barrier to engagement; 6% felt that one of the barriers was that 'the elections were held at an inconvenient time (e.g., clashed with exams/TMA)'. Both students and candidates pointed to clashes between the timing of the elections and the scheduling of assessments and exams.
- A bigger number of candidates felt that the voting period was too long (14 out of 23 candidates who answered the question, or 61%) than those who were in favour of a long voting period (2 out of 23 candidates). One respondent felt there was an inconsistency in the 2016 election schedule, so that while the voting period was long, candidates had a short period in which to submit their answers.

"Voting period was too long, students were finding it a long process as well as other candidates"

"Could have been shorter - I think many people (students, staff, candidates) had election fatigue by the end of the process."

"It was a long process with tight turn around deadlines for candidates responding to questions"

"The time from nomination to election and starting post was far too long. This could be cut by several weeks."

Feedback to Consider

- Consider revisiting the timeline for the elections and the time allowed for campaigning, hustings and voting.

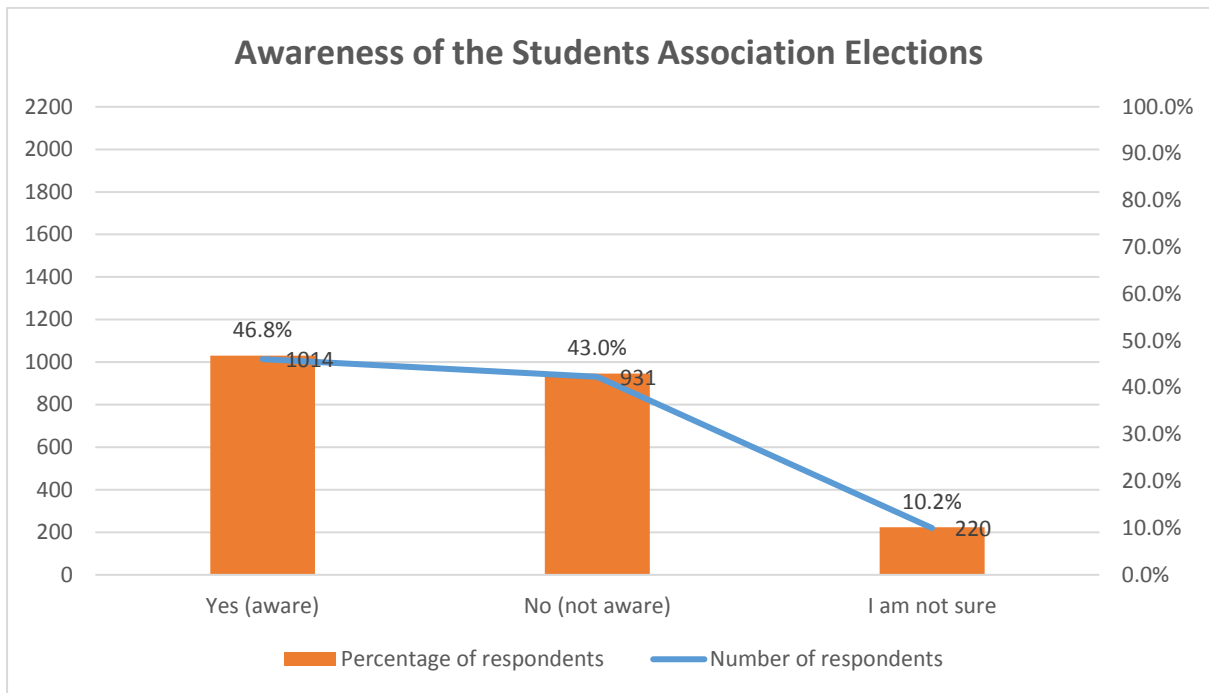


Figure 1. This chart shows the overall awareness figures for the Students Association elections, based on 2165 responses received for the Student Survey.

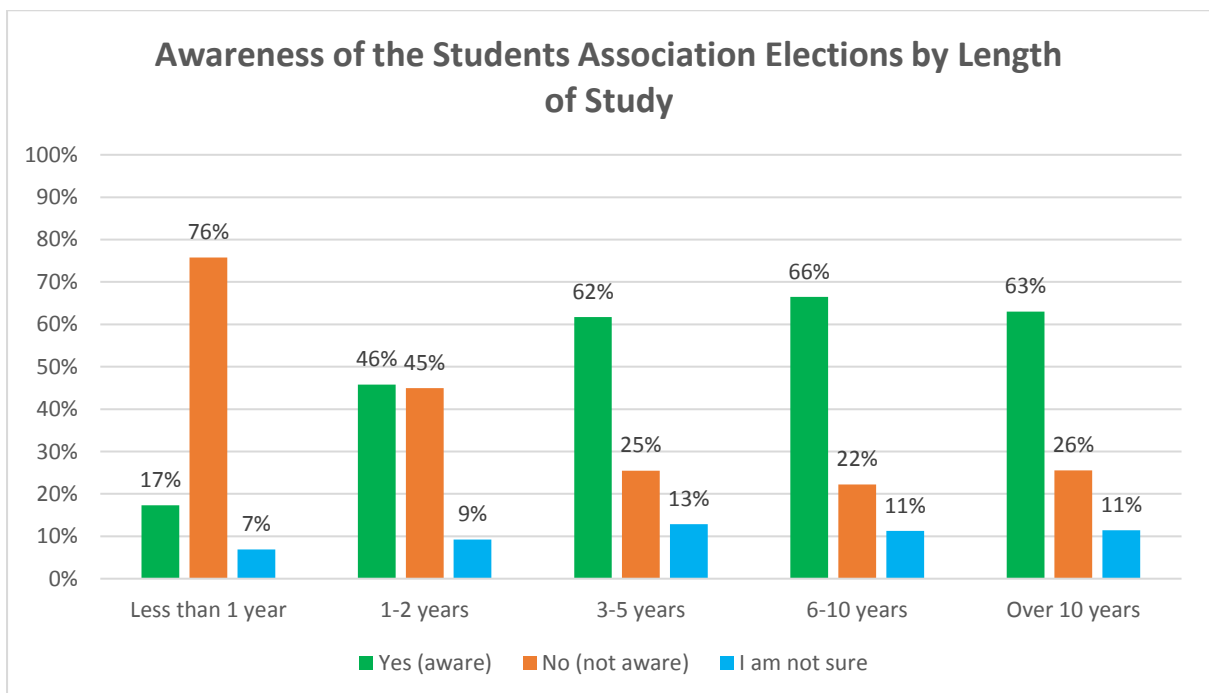


Figure 2. Awareness of the Students Association elections according to how long respondents had studied with the OU, based on the responses received for the Student Survey.

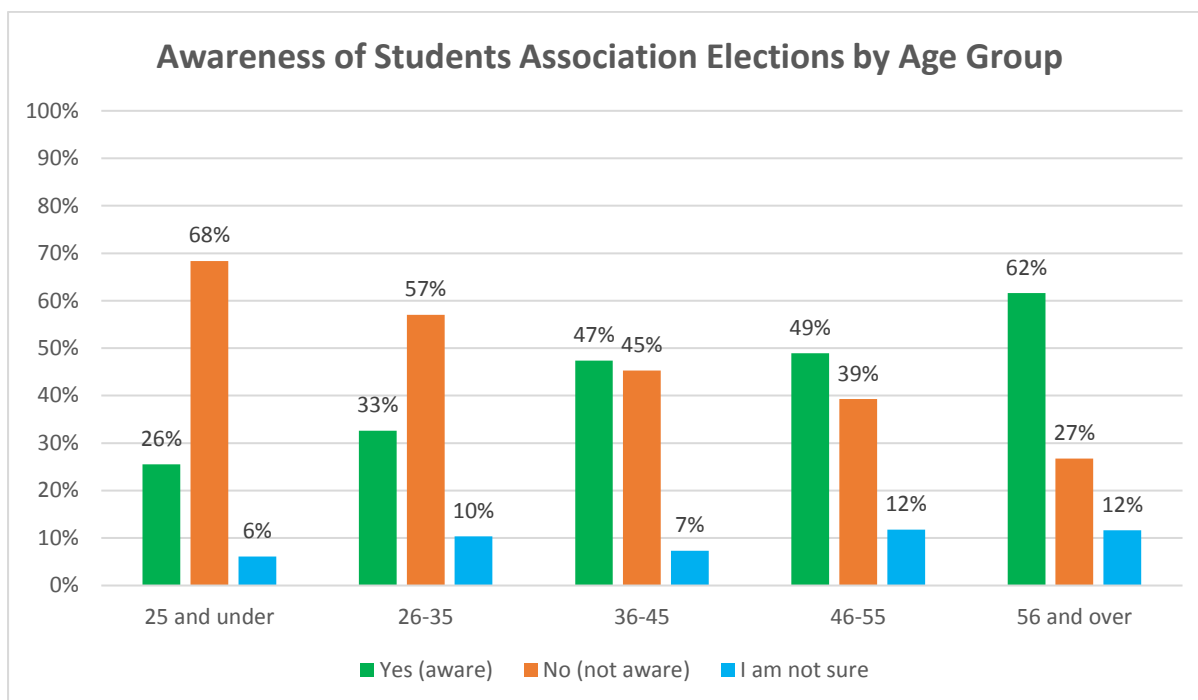


Figure 3. Awareness of the Students Association elections according to respondents' age group, based on the responses received for the Student Survey.

5. Key Documents for Elections 2016

The Candidate Survey asked the question: *How useful did you find the [key election] documents while standing as a candidate for elections 2016?*

- The Association provided some 'key documents' to students and candidates on the Elections Portal. These were – 'Key Information for Candidates' (available [here](#)), 'OU Students Association Structure' (available [here](#)), 'Description of Responsibilities for CEC members' (available [here](#)), 'Which role is best for me (flowchart)' (available [here](#)) and 'Election Rules 2016' (available [here](#)).
- Overall, respondents found the key documents to be 'very useful' or 'useful', with the breakdown for each document given in Table 1. The 'Key information for candidates' and the 'OU Students Association Structure' were chosen by 47% and 53% of the respondents as 'very useful', and 41% and 34% of the respondents as 'useful', respectively. 'Election Rules 2016' was selected as 'very useful' by 44% and 'useful' by 34% of respondents. For all the documents listed, between 41% (13 responses) and 53% (17 responses) of respondents chose 'very useful'.
- Compared to the others, 'Description of Responsibilities for CEC members' was found to be lacking in information; 25% (8 respondents, 3 of whom were elected in 2016) found the documents to be 'somewhat useful' while 16% (5 respondents, 4 of whom were elected in 2016) found it to be 'not at all useful'. Similarly, 'Which role is best for me' was chosen by 22% (7 respondents, 3 of whom were elected in 2016) of respondents to be 'somewhat useful'.

- Of candidates elected in 2016, 25% (4 respondents) found the 'description of responsibilities for CEC members' to be 'very useful' and 31% found it 'useful'. The open comments in subsequent sections suggest ways for improving the information provided by the Association during elections, particularly the description of the CEC roles.

Candidates who found the documents 'very useful'			
	Elected	Not elected	Overall
Key information for candidates	6	9	15 (47%)
OU Students Association Structure	7	10	17 (53%)
Description of Responsibilities for CEC Members	4	9	13 (41%)
Which role in best for me?' Flowchart	8	7	15 (47%)
Election Rules 2016	6	8	14 (44%)
Total number of respondents in this category	16	16	32 respondents answered this question

Candidates who found the document 'useful'			
	Elected	Not elected	Overall
Key information for candidates	6	7	13 (41%)
OU Students Association Structure	6	5	11 (34%)
Description of Responsibilities for CEC Members	5	1	6 (19%)
Which role in best for me?' Flowchart	3	5	8 (25%)
Election Rules 2016	5	6	11 (34%)
Total number of respondents in this category	16	16	32 respondents answered this question

Table 1. Candidates who found the key documents 'very useful' and 'useful' (Candidate Survey). Together with the overall numbers, also included are the number of candidates who were elected or not elected in 2016.

Thinking about the information provided before they filled their nominations, candidates raised the following concerns:

- Election Rules: Candidates commented on the need for greater clarity in the wording of the election rules, specifically around campaigning, and for such rules to be enforced better. Campaigning rules, according to one respondent, also need to clarify how candidates who are members of the CEC at the time of filling their nominations should proceed with campaigning.

"I felt the election rules needed to define what election campaigning was ethically sound."

"I consider that one candidate broke the rules but was not brought to task over that in any shape or form. I feel one person got away with spamming, suggesting that [they were] running Conference and did not answer questions that were put to [them] despite that being one of the rules of election."

- Time commitment: 9 out of 16 respondents to the Candidate Survey who offered further comments specifically mentioned the time investment required for CEC posts. They felt that time commitments had been underestimated in the 2016 role descriptions, such as how often CEC members are required to travel to Milton Keynes for CEC weekends and Officer Team meetings and more detail about the day-to-day responsibilities of the role.

"The "which role is best for me" flowchart - and other materials - dramatically under-stated the requirements for many of the roles. Had I not had some idea of the demands from acquaintance with previous post-holders, I would have been seriously misled and might have considered standing for a role for which I did not have the requisite time."

"Time commitment is not precise enough in the Key document. It needs specified that the OT and CEC Meetings are weekends in Milton Keynes... it needs to be clear that [some roles] need to have up to 4 additional times in MK for Senate and Senate Reference Group and Council for the President... Putting a more realistic time commitment in might deter some candidates but what is the point in having someone unable to do the role or having to defer or fail their modules part way through because they haven't time to do the roles?"

"I would have liked more information available about my role. Including the availability for CEC members to attend possible extra meetings and be on working groups."

"I knew what was involved but more information is needed - more realistic time needed and hidden parts of the role, such as ex officio meetings"

"Yes - more concrete information on the activities and how much time the role should realistically take."

- Amount of reading: Other comments from candidates suggested the possibility of providing key information in other formats, such as videos, to offer an alternative to lengthier documents such as the role descriptions. A broad 'at-a-glance' overview of the Association's democratic structure and the role responsibilities could also help more voters engage with the process. These suggestions were similar to those offered in the Student Survey, covered below in the 'Improving Engagement with the Students Association' section.

"The description of responsibilities manages to be both too long and give insufficient indication of what is actually expected once elected. I think there should be a generic summary for each type of role with drill downs providing more detail."

Feedback to consider

- Consider providing more details regarding the time commitments required for different roles, such as attending online and face-to-face meetings.

- Consider introducing more 'at-a-glance' formats for election documents, with links to more detailed versions.
- Consider clarifying aspects of the election rules, such as around campaigning.

6. Satisfaction with the Nominations Process

Candidates were asked the question: *How satisfied were you with the following aspects of nominating yourself as a candidate?*

- Overall, candidates were either 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with aspects of the nominations process such as 'ease of filling the nomination form', 'ease of uploading the profile on the Elections Portal' and 'navigability of the Elections Portal' (Figure 4). However, satisfaction was lower for 'guidance on writing your election manifesto', with 25% 'very satisfied', 41% 'satisfied' and 19% 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied'. 13% were 'dissatisfied' with the 'navigability of the Election Portal'.
- Suggestions for improving the nominations process included simplifying the process of comparing candidates' information, making it easier to upload photographs on the Elections Portal, and providing more guidance around campaigning and writing manifestos. When asked to comment on the possibility of 'introduction of a template for manifestos in the future', 14 out of 26 candidates responding to the Candidate Survey (54%) were in favour of the idea. Comments touched upon the need to offer more guidance to candidates for writing their manifestos, but cautioned that too rigid a template might lead to uniformity of answers.

"A possible workshop or video on how to write the manifesto."

"Let us be able to compare and contrast candidates easily."

"This could be helpful for students who struggled with this aspect and have no experience of standing for elections"

"Can be useful, but can also lead to everyone saying something similar"

- The introduction of a template for candidate manifestos also relates to comments received through the Student Survey, which emphasise the need for comparability of candidate profiles and answers. Comments received through the Student Survey also pointed to the need for balancing the principle of encouraging self-nominations with setting some criteria on which candidates (and voters) could ascertain their suitability for the role. Students also wished to see more information in the candidates' manifestos, such as the areas relating to the student experience that candidates hoped to work on.

“It would be useful to have a template, so we can compare candidates’ responses to specific issues/categories”

Feedback to consider

- Consider the benefits and disadvantages of introducing a template for candidates’ manifestos/profiles.

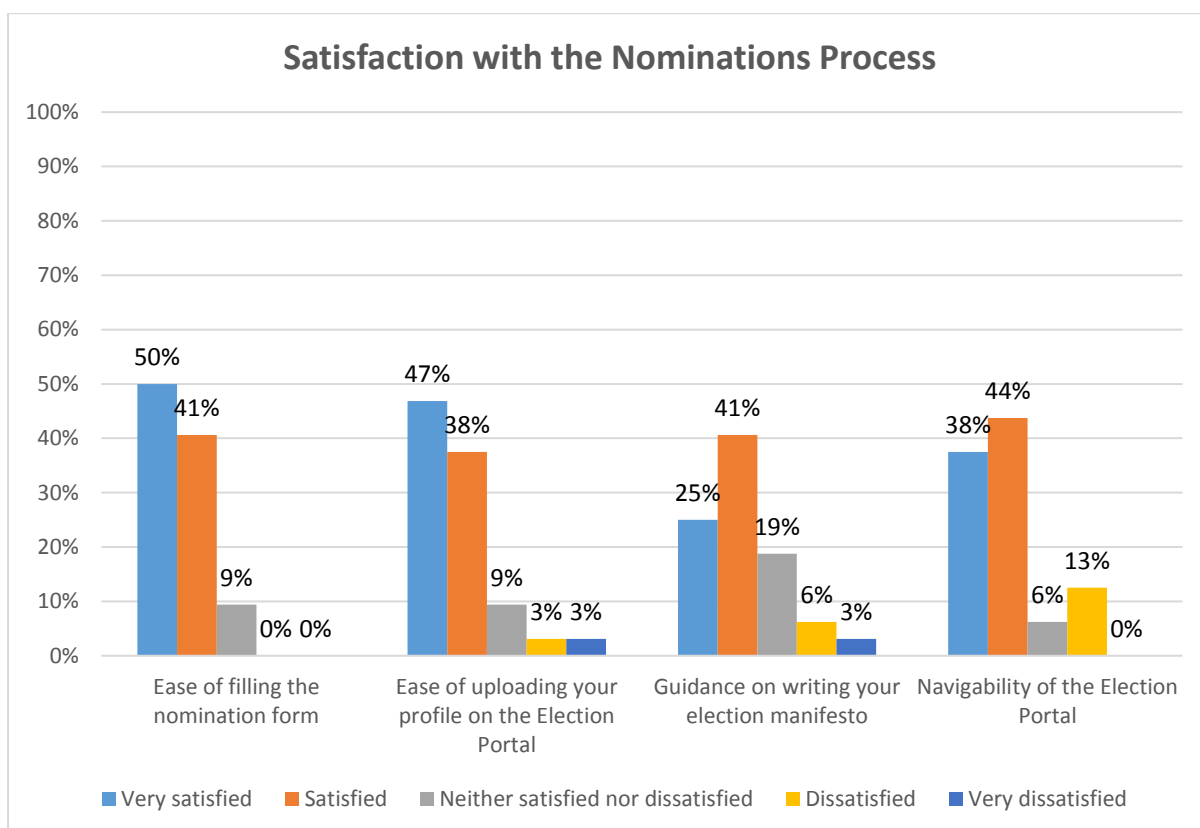


Figure 4. Candidates’ satisfaction with different aspects of the nominations process, based on responses to the Candidate Survey.

7. Eligibility

- Some candidates responding to the survey were open to the idea of providing ‘guidelines around eligibility, such as candidates standing for multiple roles’, with 14 out of 26 respondents (54%) giving a clear preference for introducing such guidelines. Candidates commented on the benefits of providing such guidelines, and more specifically on restricting the number of roles candidates could stand for.

“candidates should not be allowed to stand for multiple roles nor should ALs or OU members of staff be allowed to stand for office in the student association”

"I am not sure I'd restrict candidates to one role - for example, I'd regard standing for two closely associated roles, or one officer and one AAR/FAR role as appropriate. But there should be limits, and candidates should be obliged to state up front their reasons for this, and be expected to submit different manifestos."

- This was also echoed in comments received through the Student Survey, with some respondents suggesting that engaging with the hustings process should be a necessary requirement for a candidature to proceed to the ballot stage.

"The new election process was seriously flawed in that it allowed candidates who did not have the essential OU/OUUSA background knowledge and experience to stand. The argument that anything else would be undemocratic misses the point. ALL candidates should be able to satisfy the electorate of both their ability and their SUITABILITY in respect of being able to effectively fulfil the requirements of the post for which they seek election."

"In the 2016 Elections there were some people standing for posts and it was obvious that they did not know what the position entailed, this could have been due to them not researching the post properly. Also there should be a limit as to how many posts you can stand for one person applied for nearly all the main posts."

"Disqualify or flag up candidates who don't even attempt to answer the questions put to them. Prohibit candidates from standing for an excessive number of posts. Publicise a place for discussing the elections including direct engagement with the candidates."

"In some ways there was also too much information, as there were a lot of posts, and in some cases quite a few candidates for each - this overload could have been reduced if candidates who didn't engage with the process were removed from it."

Feedback to consider

- Consider clarifying guidance around candidates' eligibility.

8. Preparing for Elections

Candidates were asked the question: *What steps did you take to gain more understanding of the post that you were standing for?*

- Of the 30 candidates who responded to this question, 93% (28 candidates) had 'read the information provided for candidates on the Election Portal', 93% (28 candidates) had 'taken into consideration work/life (and study/life) balance before standing for the role', and 67% (20 candidates) had 'engaged in discussion with fellow students about their candidacy'. However, only 43% (13 candidates) had spoken to previous postholders about the day-to-day responsibilities of the role.
- It is difficult to determine whether these preparatory steps had a definite role in the successful election of candidates; however, Figure 5 breaks responses to this question along the lines of candidates who were elected (or not) to the post they had stood for. 'Elected' and 'not elected' candidates were similar in following steps such as reading information

provided and taking into consideration work/life balance. Fewer candidates spoke to other students about their candidacy, and 'elected' and 'not elected' candidates gave similar responses. However, the area where those elected differ markedly from those not elected is regarding 'speaking to previous postholders about the day-to-day responsibilities of the role'.

- Candidates mentioned barriers such as lack of time in taking these preparatory steps, but were positive about the need to highlight the value of such steps and offer more opportunities to future candidates in terms of speaking to previous postholders.

"Perhaps existing post holders could write brief notes about their experience for those too shy to ask directly?"

"It might be an idea to create a space on the election timetable for students who are interested in standing for an elected post to be able to ask those currently in the role about their experiences."

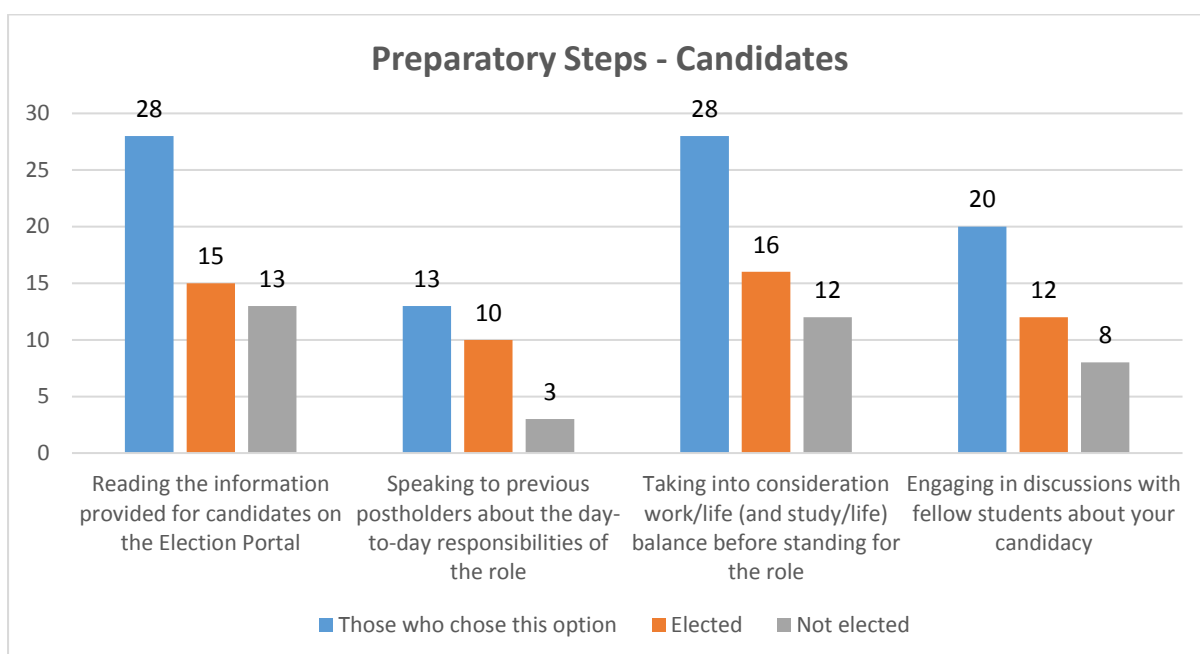


Figure 5. Preparatory steps taken by candidates during Elections 2016, based on responses received for the Candidate Survey.

Feedback to consider

- Consider ways that candidates could be encouraged to get a better understanding of what the role involves by getting in touch with previous postholders. These could include written documents such as Officer/FAR/AAR reports for CEC meetings, Facebook chats or OU Live sessions.

9. Satisfaction with Campaigning and Hustings

Candidates were asked the question: *How satisfied were you with the campaigning and hustings processes?*

- Overall, candidates were either 'very satisfied' (38%, 12 respondents) or 'satisfied' (41%, 13 respondents) with the 'time available to answer the hustings questions' (Figure 6). Satisfaction levels were split along 'very satisfied' to 'dissatisfied' (22% for each option) regarding the 'ease of engaging in discussion with voters'. It is notable that 59% of respondents chose the 'not applicable' option for 'ease of uploading a campaign video'. This is explained in the open comments where a candidate remarked on not having been aware of the opportunity to have a campaign video.
- The open comments suggest revisiting the duration of the hustings period, ensuring better moderation of the VLE discussion forums and providing clearer guidelines around campaigning. Some of the comments around social media campaigning raise further questions around moderating social media spaces, and whether this should be undertaken by the Association.

"The campaigning/hustings process was too drawn out and because the rules about who could stand for various roles were somewhat controversial the hustings forums were unpleasantly aggressive and confrontational."

"In future campaigns it would be much more useful if candidates had more advice around what could and couldn't be done on social media. While we were encouraged to use social media it was difficult to know the best way of doing this."

"I'd suggest that for 2018 we negotiate some ground rules with those admins about the frequency of posts specifically relating to election content. I don't know if Facebook would allow it but Association run groups for the election process might get round some of these issues and allow the Returning Officer some measure of control which is currently lacking on Social Media."

Feedback to consider

- Rules around campaigning, particularly on social media, were raised as a concern by both students and candidates. Consider providing clearer guidelines, signposting students to good practice and highlighting opportunities such as uploading a campaign video.
- Consider offering candidates a welcome pack that includes materials they can use in their campaigns (such as online logos and posters).
- With comparability of candidates' answers stressed in the survey feedback, consider potential formats in which candidates' answers could be made available, and improve the visibility of these documents on the Elections Portal.

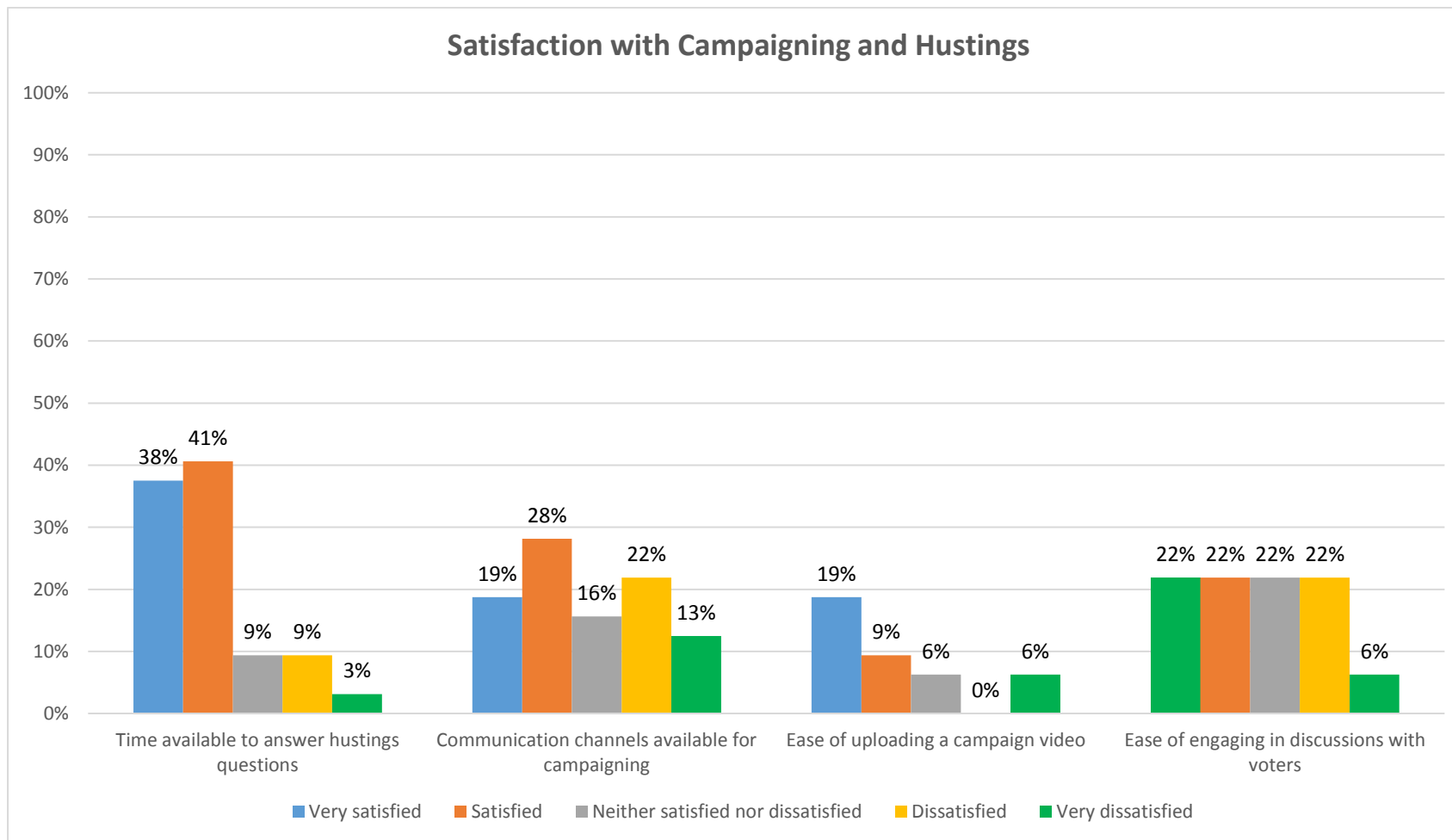


Figure 6. Candidates’ satisfaction with campaigning and hustings, based on responses received for the Candidate Survey.

10. Hustings

- Candidates not submitting answers to hustings questions was mentioned in the Student Survey as a reason for not feeling engaged with the election process. Students also suggested setting clear expectations around engaging with the hustings process, with a few comments suggesting it should be a requirement for candidates (as mentioned in the Eligibility section above).
- The feedback received through both surveys suggests that candidates and students would welcome the introduction of live debates and the use of platforms available to all OU students (such as OU Live). In the Candidate Survey, when asked their thoughts on the 'introduction of options similar to "live hustings", such as OU Live sessions', 16 out of 23 candidates who responded (70%) supported such an option being introduced. While some comments suggested that live hustings should be introduced for all roles, others recommended that participation should be voluntary rather than mandatory.

"In theory these could be useful especially if available for future listening."

"Would be awkward for those in full time jobs or with families"

"Would need expert moderation/chairing"

Feedback to consider

- Consider ways to encourage candidates to engage with the hustings process.
- There was interest from candidates for a synchronous session during the hustings, using platforms such as OU Live that can be accessed by all OU students.

11. VLE Discussion Forums

- The Candidate and Student survey feedback suggests that the purpose of the VLE Discussion Forums need to be defined more clearly. For instance, candidates were not required to answer questions submitted on the discussion forums, which created some confusion when voters did not receive answers to their posts.
- Both students and candidates stressed on the importance of showing mutual regard while participating in forum discussion, and suggested that such discussions need to be better moderated.

"Behaviour of some people towards candidates was appalling. It takes a great deal of courage for students to put themselves forward for positions particularly if they have not had previous experience of OUSA. Candidates should have been treated with respect, courtesy and equality. Instead there was outright antagonism towards those candidates who were new to OUSA which must have made them feel that they were unwelcome. Not exactly in the spirit of democracy."

"Hustings forum needed a strong moderation as some responses were too personal and aggressive; however this was not forthcoming and some candidates seemed to drop out of the process because of perceived lack of support and impartiality on the hustings forum."

“As an international student I’ve found the online forums to be a bit exclusive. I suppose building a better online community with more inclusion and positiveness would encourage students to participate in elections on a social level.”

Feedback to consider

- It was suggested that VLE forums were accessible to all OU students, especially those who were not on social media, and that well-moderated discussions should be encouraged on this platform.
- Feedback suggests that expectations around candidates engaging in forum discussions should be clarified.

12. Voting during Elections 2016

Students were asked the question: *Did you vote in the Students Association Elections in 2016? If you did not vote, or voted for only one or two posts, please tell us why this was so.*

- Overall, most of the respondents to the Student Survey had not voted during Elections 2016 (81%); 12% had voted for all the posts while 7% had voted for only some of the posts (Figure 7).
- A number of respondents mentioned that they had started their studies in October 2016, which goes towards explaining the high proportion of students with ‘less than 1 year’ of study experience who did not vote (Figure 8). Of the overall number of respondents, 29% had studied with the OU for ‘less than 1 year’ and 17% had studied for 1-2 years. Voting was higher for those students with 6-10 years’ study experience (20%) and over 10 years’ study experience (18%). Voting increased slightly with age (Figure 9).
- The reasons for not voting, as mentioned in respondents’ open comments, include not feeling well-informed about candidates, not having been able to read the information provided (including candidates’ manifestos and hustings answers), lack of interest in the elections process, time constraints, ill health, and forgetting to vote.
- One of the key reasons for students not participating in the elections in 2016 was the feeling of not being able to make an informed choice about who to vote for; 40% of respondents taking the Student Survey felt that they ‘did not know enough about the candidates’ (Figure 10). 37% of those responding to the Student Survey chose the option ‘I don’t feel the Students Association elections are relevant to me’ (Figure 10).
- Students indicated that they would appreciate more information throughout the term about the kind of work that elected student representatives do. This information was also

highlighted as important for helping students understand the Association's relevance to their own study experience and appreciate the value of their participation through voting.

- The following comments from students underscore the need for improving the way information relating to the elections, including candidates' manifestos and answers, are presented. Being able to compare candidates' profiles, manifestos and answers to hustings questions was especially important; not only would it offer students the opportunity to learn more about the candidates, but also offer a way for those with time constraints to participate in the elections.

"Because I had no real knowledge of the people standing, nor the positions being filled, and did not feel that it would particularly affect me anyway.."

"I didn't get chance to properly review all of the information in order to make an informed choice"

"I have no real understanding of the candidates so didn't feel able to select one over another"

"I voted for some but not all posts because I did not feel that enough information was available, also because so many posts were under application by the same names."

"It took too long to read through everything"

"There were pages and pages of very dry information to read through on each role and it was disparately laid out and not particularly well explained."

"Finding, and reading through all of the discussions, Q&As and candidate profiles would have taken far too long"

- Other comments touched on the relevance of the work of the Students Association, those students living outside the UK feeling that it is too remote while more mature students feeling that the elections are targeted at a younger demographic. These are perceptions that the Association needs to respond to in its communications around the elections and highlight the relevance of its work to all OU students. Similarly, the level of involvement needed to participate in the elections needs to be clarified; some students not actively engaged with the Association felt that they could not vote in the elections.

"I do not feel the association is relevant to me living outside the UK."

"Being out in the Far East, I feel that that the main function and activities of the students association is centred around the UK and that there is little contact and benefit."

"As a mature student I did not feel involved and thought it more for younger folk."

"I do not feel able to take an active part in the Association and therefore do not consider myself justified in taking part in the elections."

- Some students who were also members of staff with the OU or working as an Associate Lecturer felt that they should not participate in the Students Association elections, while one student thought the Students Association elections might have a political slant and therefore did not engage.

“As an AL as well as a student, I am represented elsewhere.”

“Although I was a student I was also a member of OU staff and felt that this was an election more for the main student body.”

“Information was a little vague and if the elements about the National Union of Students leadership I have read within areas of the media is accurate it does not reflect my values. I have no desire to being involved in politics during my studies.”

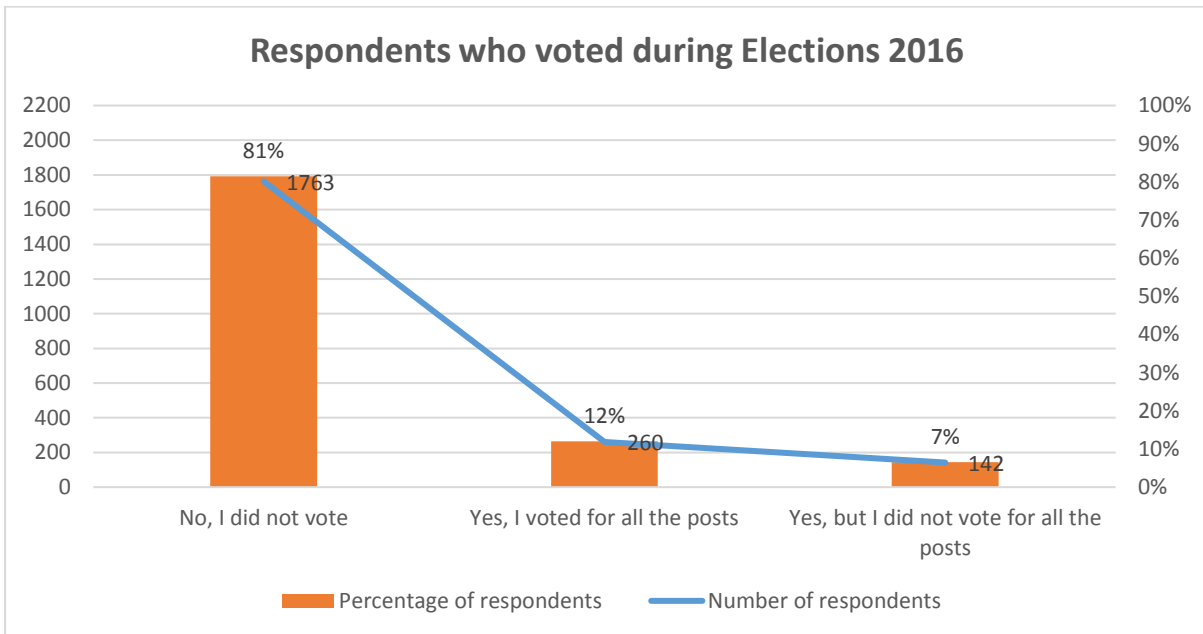


Figure 7. Respondents to the Student Survey who voted in Elections 2016.

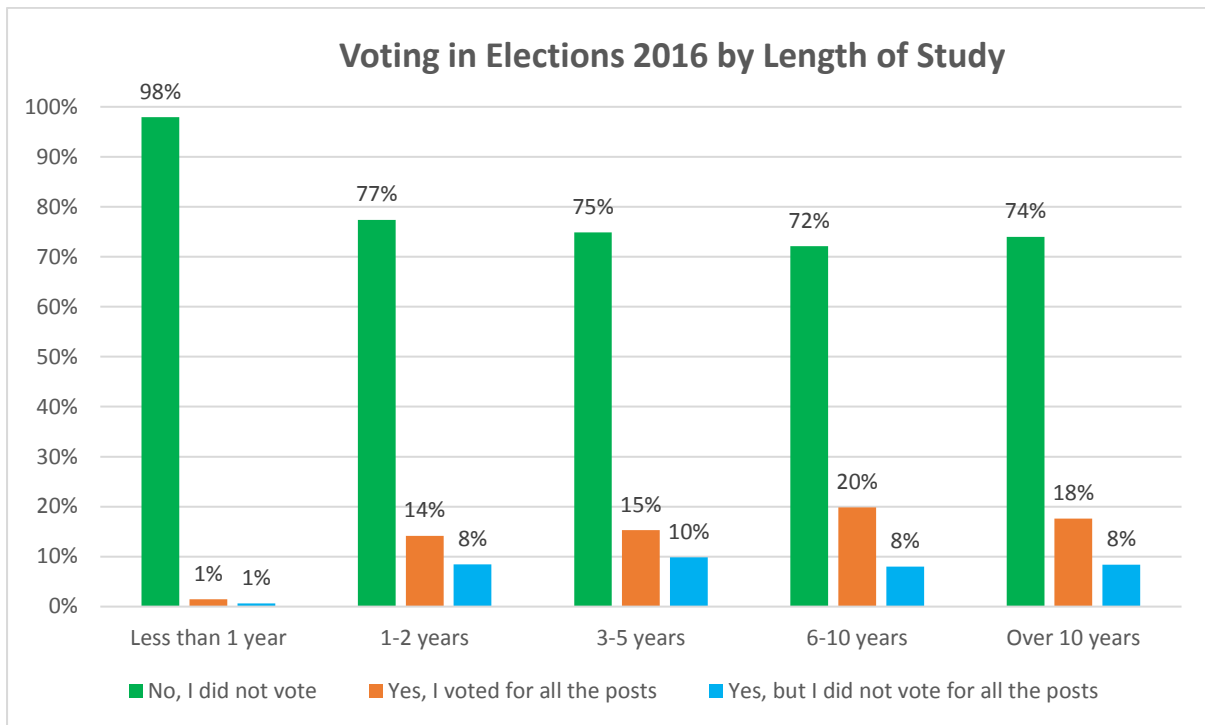


Figure 8. Voting in Elections 2016 according to how long respondents had studied with the OU, based on responses received for the Student Survey.

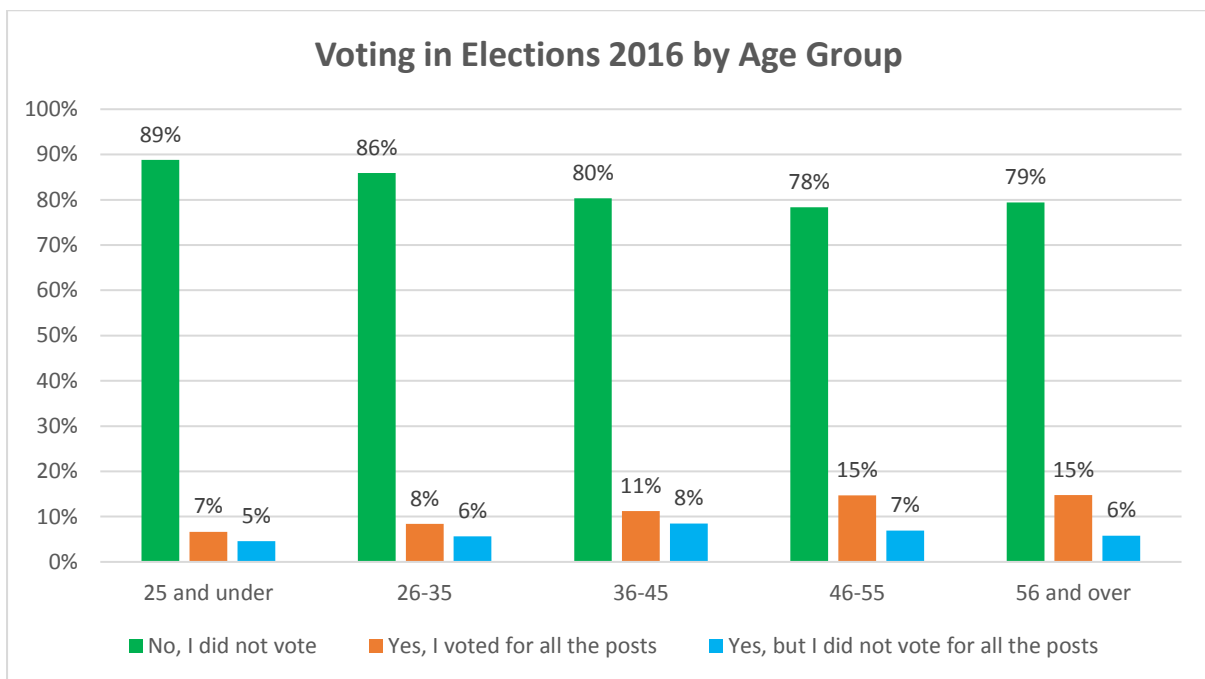


Figure 9. Voting in Elections 2016 according to respondents' age group, based on responses received for the Student Survey.

Feedback to consider

- It needs to be clarified that voting can be approached in stages as the ERS system logs the votes when they are cast. Also to specify that this should be done after voters have reached a clear decision, because ERS may not be able to offer the option of amending votes once they have been cast.

13. Barriers to Engagement

Students were asked the question: *What were some of the barriers to engaging with the Students Association Elections in 2016?*

- The barriers to engagement are listed in Figure 10. These barriers have been grouped below (amount of information, kinds of information, election processes), and Figure 11, Figure 12 and Figure 13 display them according to respondents' age group and length of study with the OU.
- Amount of information (Figure 11): Overall, 21% of respondents felt that 'there was too little information' and 4% felt 'there was too much information'. Breaking responses into age group and length of study, those in the '25 and under' and '26-35' age group, and those with 1-2 years' and 3-5 years' study experience were most likely to choose the 'too little information' option.
- Kinds of information (Figure 12): Younger students were more likely to feel that they did not know 'where to find information about the elections (overall, 21% of respondents chose this option). Between 13% and 22% of respondents across age groups and length of study chose the option 'I didn't know how to participate in discussions around the elections'. However, the option chosen by 40% of respondents overall was 'I didn't feel I knew enough about the candidates'. This was highest for those in the '56 and over' age group (40%), and consistent across length of study (with the exception of those with less than 1 year's study experience, who would have started their studies after Elections 2016). Interestingly, 43% of students who had voted in 2016 also chose not knowing enough about candidates as a barrier to participating in the elections (Figure 10).
- Awareness and Engagement (Figure 13): Overall, 30% of respondents 'didn't know Elections 2016 were taking place', and 37% chose the option 'I don't feel that Students Association elections are relevant to me'. Those in the '25 and under' age group and with less than 1 year of study experience were more likely to be unaware of Elections 2016. As age increased, fewer students chose being unaware as an option; however, more mature students felt that the elections were not relevant to them, especially those in the '56 and over' age group (40%).
- Election Processes: The majority of respondents taking the Student Survey had not voted in Elections 2016; overall, very few respondents chose options that can be categorised under election processes – 'the voting process was not friendly' (4%), 'the duration of Elections 2016 was too long' (2%) and 'The elections were held at an inconvenient time' (6%).

- The open comments offer further insights into the kinds of barriers that students face, such as the amount of information available or being unsure about the relevance of the Students Association's work to their own study experience.

"I felt slightly overwhelmed by the volume of information, and trying to get to grips with all the different roles."

"There were so many posts up for re-election, and so many candidates to read through, you kind of lose the will before you're halfway through. I persevered over a few days, but I could imagine a lot of people giving up or not starting to engage as its a lot to try and wade through all in one go."

"Too many to vote for at one time. The process was time consuming...and we are all busy."

"I don't know how much they can support me. No much information/stories on when they succeeded in helping people in the past"

"I have no idea what the student association does, what it has to do with me, or what I'm to do with the information it provides."

- Lack of engagement from candidates was one of the main reasons students cited for not wishing to participate in elections, and felt disengaged with the process when candidates had not answered questions during hustings.

"There was little or no visible engagement from some candidates with the hustings forums, and some candidates didn't seem to understand what role they were putting themselves forward for. I only voted for people where I felt the info was present so wonder on what basis some votes were gathered."

"Some candidates didn't answer the questions set out on which students could elect their preferred candidates."

"There were not enough opportunities to ask questions of candidates, particularly as not all candidates engaged with discussions or responded to student questions on the official OUSA election forums."

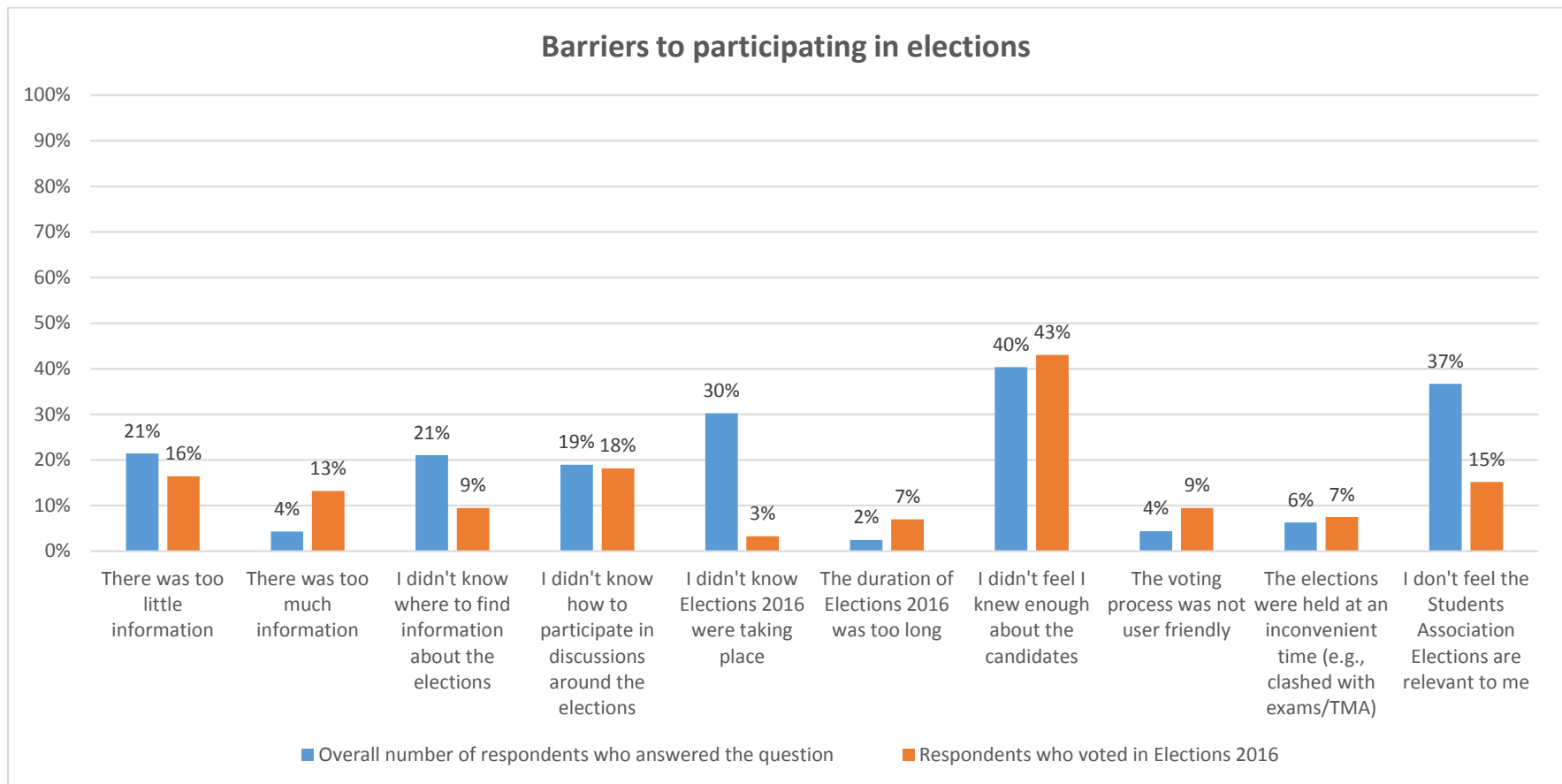


Figure 10. The barriers to participating in elections, based on the responses received for the Student Survey. Also included are the proportion of respondents who had voted during Elections 2016.

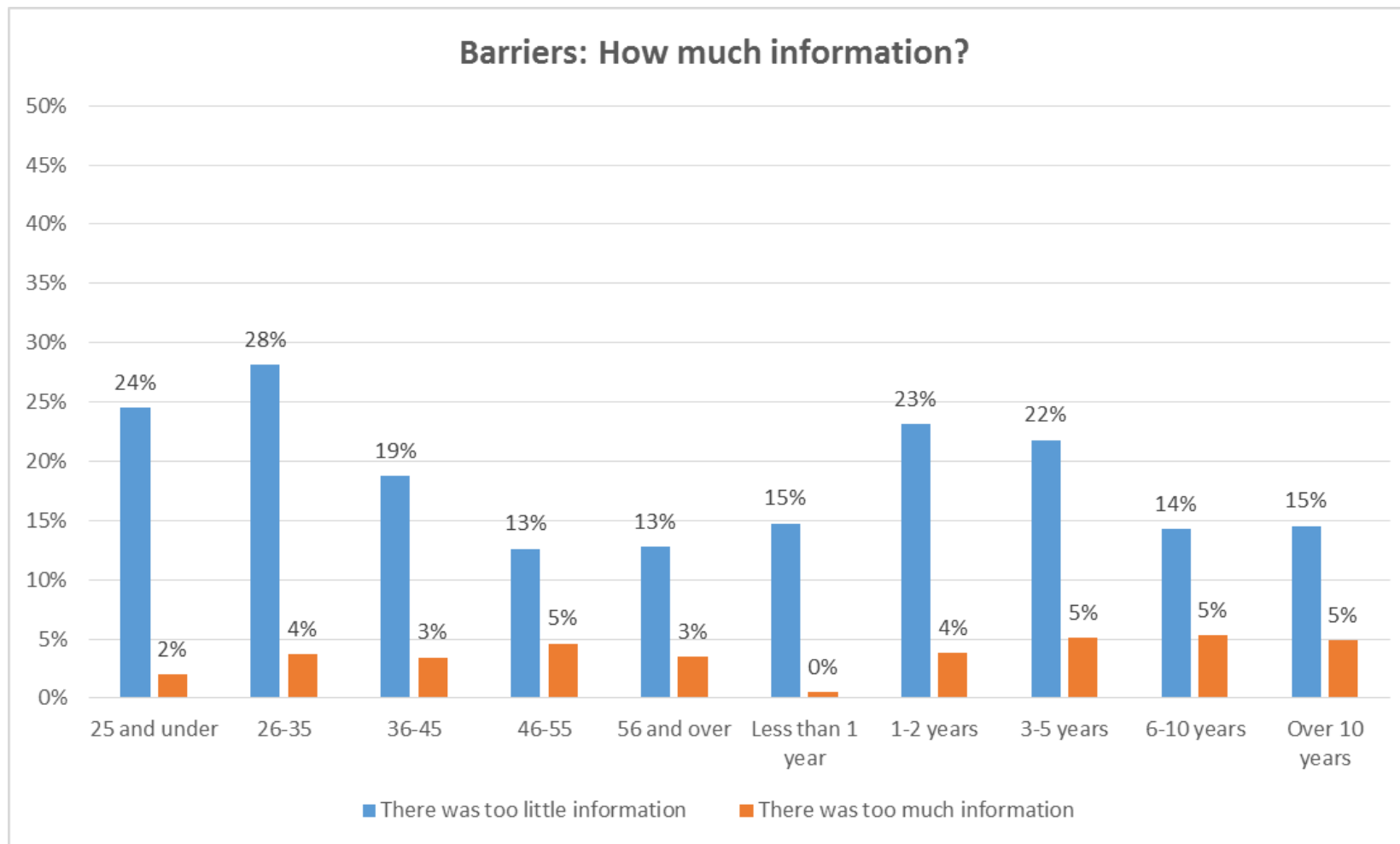


Figure 11. The options ‘there was too little information’ and ‘there was too much information’ are broken down according to respondents’ age group and length of study with the OU.

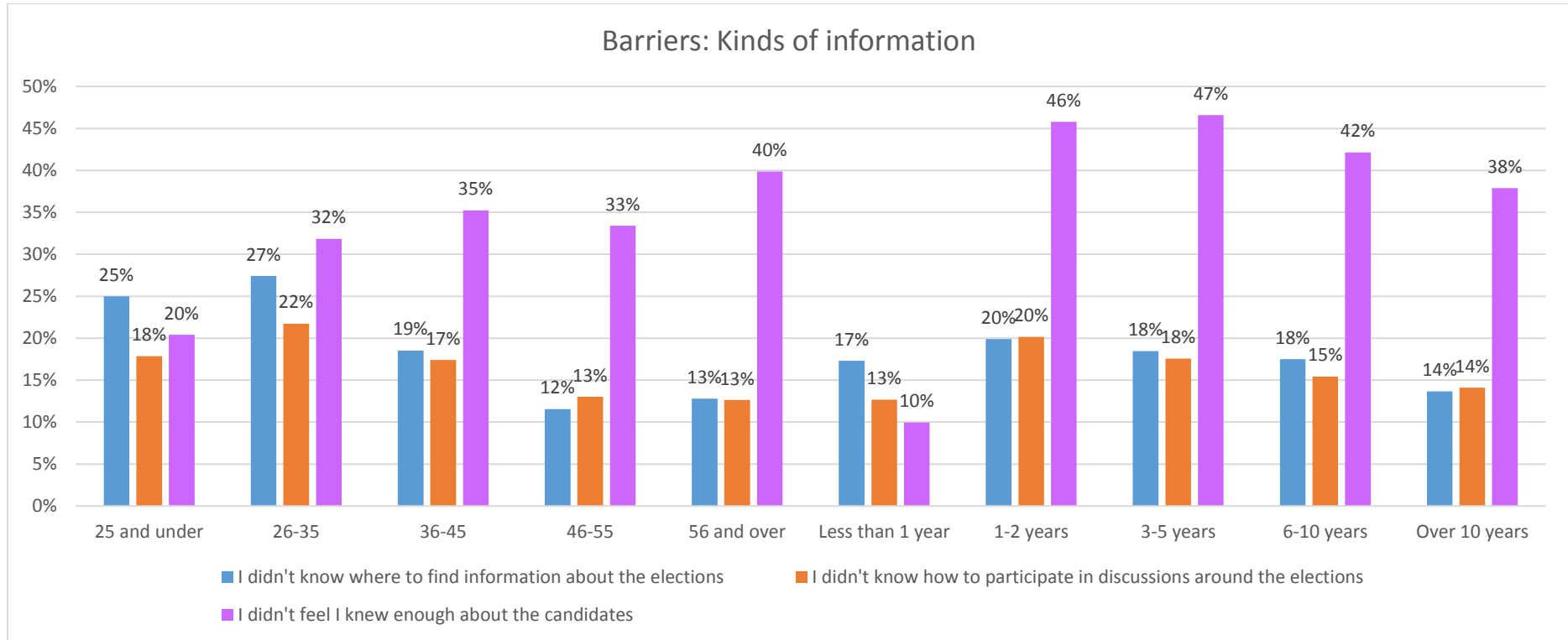


Figure 12. The options ‘I didn’t know where to find information about the elections’, ‘I didn’t know how to participate in discussions around the elections’ and ‘I didn’t feel I knew enough about the candidates’ are broken down according to respondents’ age group and length of study with the OU.

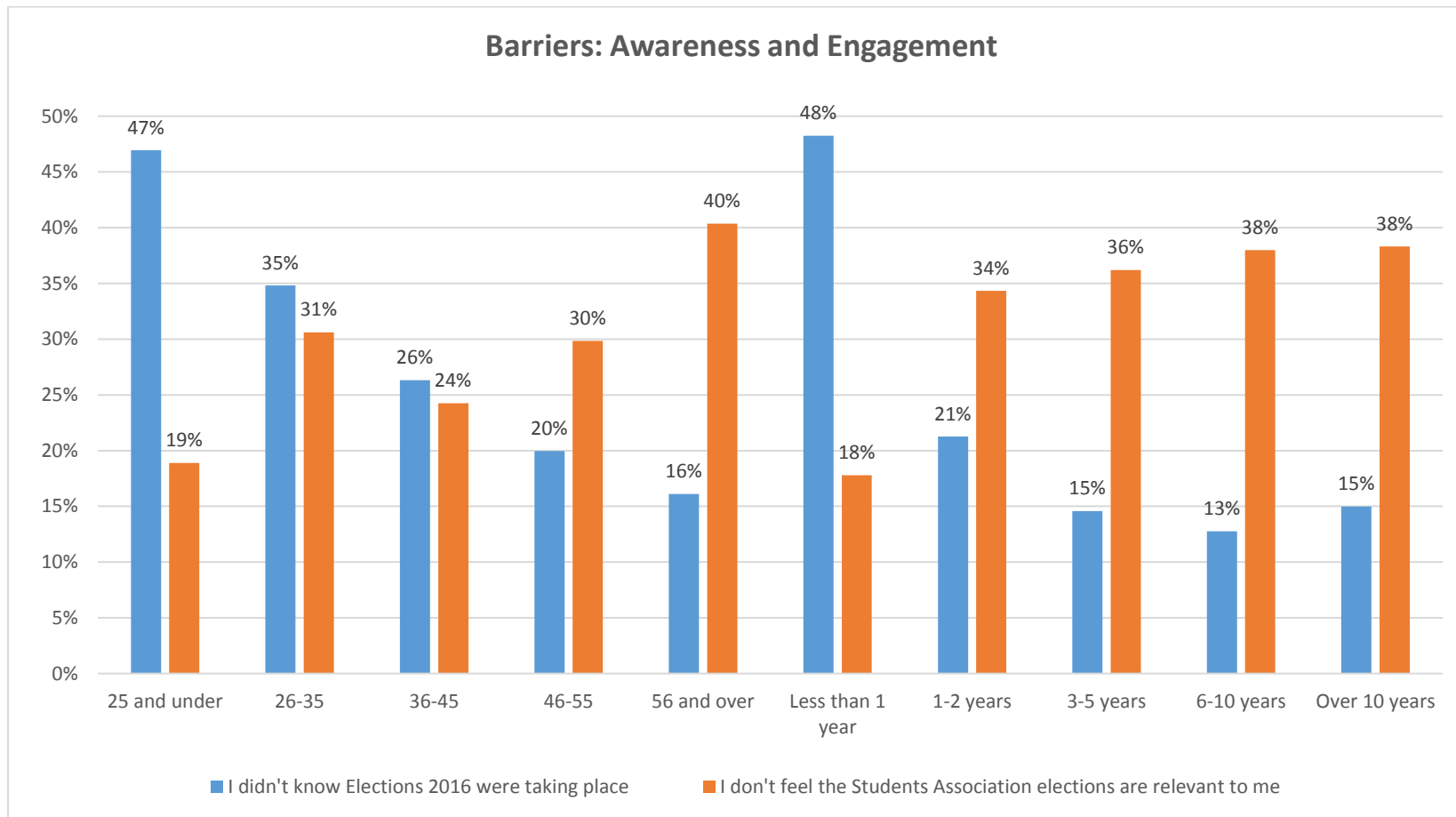


Figure 13. The options 'I didn't know Elections 2016 were taking place' and 'I don't feel the Students Association elections are relevant to me' are broken down according to respondents' age group and length of study with the OU.

14. Improving Engagement with the Students Association

- Respondents to the Student Survey offered suggestions for encouraging more students to get involved in Students Association activities, including volunteering activities. Students offered suggestions for engaging voters using different kinds of media such as videos, synchronous sessions online, and introducing debate and discussion between candidates using a format styled on the television show *Question Time*.

"What I would like to see, for the volunteering positions with the Association, the time needed for them and the information that all expenses will be paid. Might be an idea to do a flowchart like the one used on the Elections portal about volunteering, so people could choose what suits them. On the Association website, all roles are listed, but no timelines attached to them, so, for example, there is no mention about when the recruitment opens for resi reps, or degree ceremony volunteers, etc."

"I think that each candidate should record a short video presenting themselves and these should be available on the Students Association website, rather than in writing. You can see personalities in videos, which are hidden in writing."

"Maybe with online debates for the candidates that people can watch and comment on?"

"Maybe a You tube of a "Question Time" type of presentation so we get to know the different policies of the various candidates"

"Multi-media hustings - perhaps using OU live which most people access as part of their courses"

- Students also wished to see specific information on candidates' manifestos and/or answers, such as areas they wished to work on if elected. Regarding candidates' profiles and manifestos, feedback received through the survey suggests two improvements: an 'at-a-glance' format for presenting information, and the option of comparing candidate information for individual roles.

"Condense the information about the student representatives so people can read quickly and do not have to spend too much time researching each person."

"Make it more clear visually how one candidate differs from one other. When all appear the same at a glance, why should we care who's elected?"

"I found it cumbersome to have to go into each individual page to read about candidates. one page of information for each post would have been much easier to read"

"More info about the candidates: including what relevant stuff they've done in the past, how they plan to improve OUSA and the OU student experience during their tenure, etc."

- Furthermore, highlighting the work of elected student representatives, specifically its impact on the student experience, needs to be done throughout the term to raise awareness and encourage students to participate in the Students Association's elections.

“Regular information supplied not just when election is on...keep up to date forums stating what those who have won positions have been doing within their new positions/roles... otherwise it's like everyone has voted but not seen the reason as to why.”

“More feedback about what officers have achieved/ altered how they engage with university policy making and governing bodies.”

“More information on what the elected people actually go and do. A blog that was updated giving a summary of where they have influenced university decisions or represented student views would be good, which allowed input of ideas and opinion.”

“regular news letters explaining the issues that the union is engaging with giving balanced views so as to allow the reader to make informed decisions on the issues under consideration.”

“Simple, brief communications by email of what the SA is doing/has done/is planning to achieve. 3 or 4 times a year”

“Publish what you have achieved and how you have made a difference. It would be helpful to know what success looks like that makes a difference and that it is worthwhile to become involved in.”

Feedback to consider

- Students felt that a barrier to engaging with the elections was not feeling well-informed about the work that the Association does. Consider ways of raising awareness of the Association's work in the run up to elections, particularly the impact that elected representatives have on improving the student experience.

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