



FRESHERS FORTNIGHT
22J AND 23B EVALUATION

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

This report will evaluate the 10 – 23 October 2022 (hereafter 22J) and 23 January – 5 February 2023 (hereafter 23B) Freshers Fortnights, organised by the Association’s Student Community Team. The 22J dates were pushed back two weeks due to the death of the Queen.

This report consists of results from the following:

- October 2022 Feedback Survey: 109 respondents
- January-February 2023 Feedback Survey: 107 respondents
- October 2022 Host Feedback Survey: 16 respondents
- January-February 2023 Host Feedback Survey: 12 respondents
- Analytics from social media, oustudents.com, our monthly newsletter, and Freshers mailing list

Key findings

96.6% agreed with the statement 'I found the hosts and facilitators friendly and welcoming' (96.3% for 22J and 96.8% for 23B).

90.9% agreed with the statement 'I felt that the Freshers Fortnight reflected the Students Association's commitment to inclusivity and diversity' (90.8% for 22J and 90.9% for 23B).

73.5% of respondents would 'definitely' recommend Freshers to a fellow student (65% for 22J and 82% for 23B).

“This was my first University Freshers and I found it to be a rather **wonderful digital experience**. I got to meet fellow students from across the UK and around the world.”
- 23B survey respondent

Over a quarter of respondents were not engaged with the Students Association until Freshers Fortnight (32% of respondents for 22J and 25.2% of respondents for 23B).

“I got to know quite a few lovely people and **feel like I am a part of the community at OU now**”
- 22J survey respondent

- 100% of hosts:
- Were 'very likely' to get involved with Freshers again
 - Agreed they felt supported in setting up their session(s)
 - Found delivering their session(s) enjoyable

In January 2023, **7/10 of the Association's top ten Tweets and Facebook posts** were related to Freshers 23B.

Attendees and mailing list subscribers profile part 1

- **For most survey respondents it was their first time attending a Students Association event and their first time attending Freshers** (52.3% for the 22J survey and 52.3% for the former and 53.3% for the latter for the 23B survey).
- **Over a quarter of respondents were not engaged with the Students Association until Freshers Fortnight** (32% of respondents for 22J and 25.2% of respondents for 23B).

Demographic profile of subscribers

There were 4933 students who subscribed to the Freshers mailing list as of 28 February 2023, including 3672 from 18 August 2022 – 31 October 2022 (22J period) and 1261 from 1 November 2022 – 28 February 2023 (23B period). The following demographic profiles are from subscribers who provided their Personal Identifier (PI) numbers.

For both Freshers, **the age group most likely to subscribe to the mailing lists was 26-35** (33.9% for 22J and 35.2% for 23B). Those over 56 were the least likely to sign up.

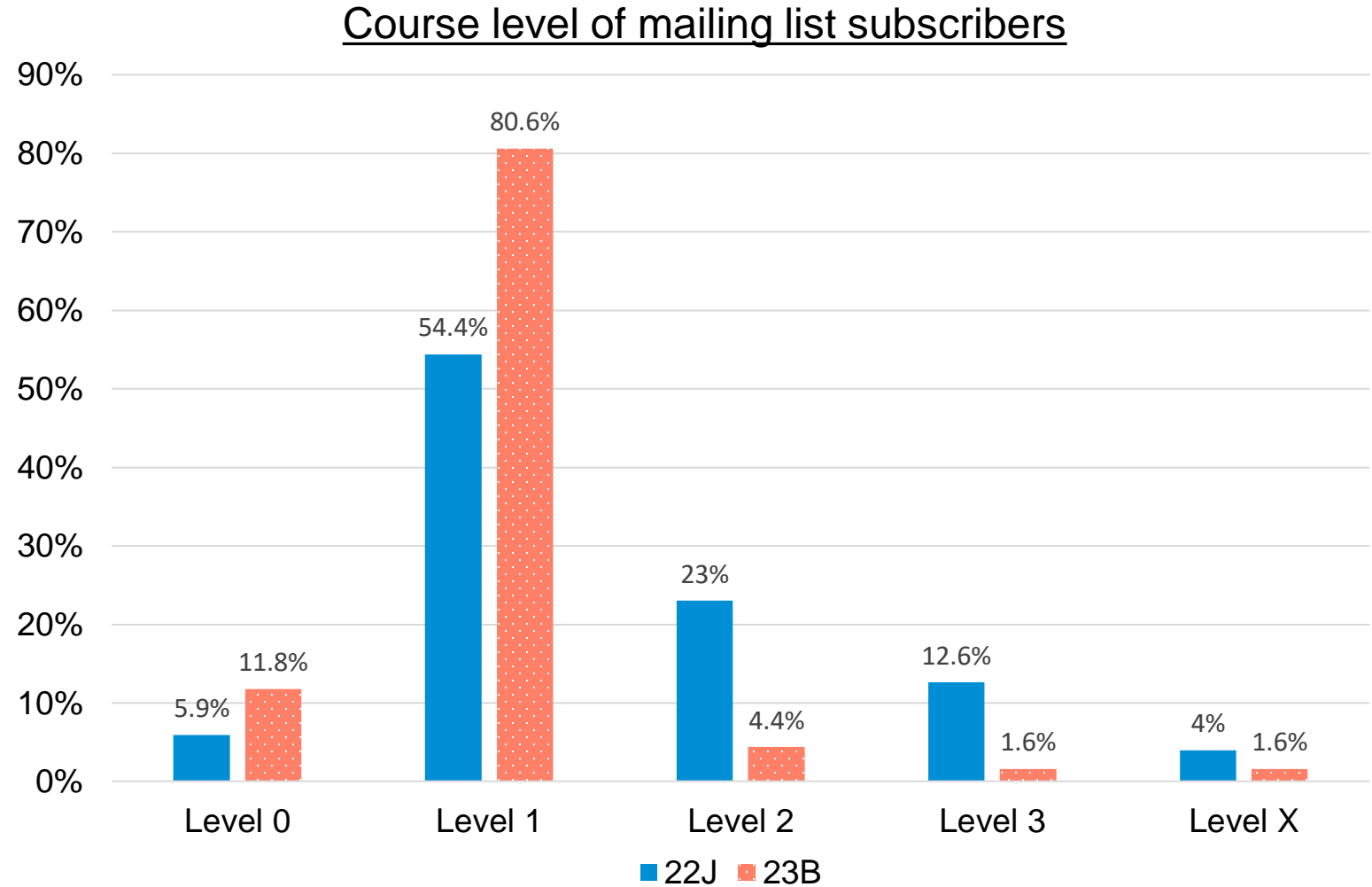
¾ of subscribers identified as female (76.5% for 22J and 73.4% for 23B), mirroring the 21J and 22B figures of 73.5% and 73.7% respectively.

Almost ¼ of subscribers had declared a disability (22.7% for 22J and 23.4% for 23B).

Attendees and mailing list subscribers profile part 2

For 22J, 88.5% of mailing list subscribers were White, 3.4% Asian, 3.3% Mixed, 2.4% Black, 1.7% Refused and 0.7% Other. For 23B, 85.3% of subscribers were White, 4.3% Black, 4% Asian, 3.7% Mixed, 1.6% Refused and 1% Other.

For both Freshers, the highest percentage of subscribers were in Scotland, at 12.3% for 22J and 13.2% for 23B.



Experience of attending Freshers Fortnight part 1

“I think every student would benefit from participating in Freshers which is why I always suggest it to students, including returning students. There's always something new to learn and new friends to be made.”
- 23B survey respondent

“Very informative, inclusive and fun!”
- 23B survey respondent

“It makes you feel more part of the OU”
- 22J survey respondent

“Loved seeing and hearing about everything that was going on! Thank you to everyone who organised such a great event!”
- 22J survey respondent

In response to the question ‘**How well did Freshers Fortnight meet your expectations?**’, **73.4% were satisfied for 22J and 84.1% for 23B** (including for 22J 34.9% of respondents selecting ‘very well, it met or exceeded all my expectations’ and 38.5% selecting ‘moderately well, it met most of my expectations’, and for 23B 52.3% selecting ‘very well, it met or exceeded all my expectations’ and 31.8% selecting ‘moderately well, it met most of my expectations’).

Experience of attending Freshers Fortnight part 2

96.6% agreed with the statement ‘I found the hosts and facilitators friendly and welcoming’ (96.3% for 22J and 96.8% for 23B).*

90.9% agreed with the statement ‘I felt that the Freshers Fortnight reflected the Students Association’s commitment to inclusivity and diversity’ (90.8% for 22J and 90.9% for 23B).*

84.5% agreed with the statement ‘I felt encouraged to participate in the Freshers sessions’ (84% for 22J and 84.9% for 23B).*

*not including those that selected ‘not applicable’

“Lowers feeling of isolation and gives boost to confidence when you may be feeling apprehensive”
- 23B survey respondent

“Helped me settle into student life after many years away.”
- 23B survey respondent

“I am a neurodiverse student who is also a lesbian, I found that **the freshers events gave me a sense of belonging**, there were a lot of students who have similar difficulties to me and that made it easier. I also made more friends and have become involved in some clubs and societies...”
- 22J survey respondent

“Events are engaging and informative”
- 22J survey respondent

There were 56 sessions in Freshers 22J, including two face-to-face events – the Freshers Fair and Tutor Awards held on the Milton Keynes campus and an OU Law Society event held in Manchester.

There were 38 sessions in Freshers 23B, including two face-to-face meet-ups – one in Cardiff and one in Edinburgh.

The three most popular types of sessions that respondents attended were:

- 1. Informative sessions** from students (e.g. Welcome, Societies and Clubs Fair)
 - 88.5% found enjoyable for 22J, 85.6% found enjoyable for 23B
- 2. Social sessions** (e.g. Bingo, Community Drop-In, Saturday Morning Coffee & Chat)
 - 85.3% found enjoyable for 22J, 83.5% found enjoyable for 23B
- 3. OU sessions** (e.g. Personal Learning Advice service, Library)
 - 77% found enjoyable for 22J, 87% found enjoyable for 23B

Weekday evenings were the most popular timeslot for respondents to engage with Freshers sessions and competitions (40% for 22J and 42% for 23B). Other timeslots were still popular which shows the **continued need for a variety of times for events.**

Most respondents attended between 0-5 sessions – 82.6% for 22J and 83.2% for 23B.

In response to the statement ‘How well the sessions met your expectations’, 81.3% were either very satisfied or satisfied for 22J, and 88% were either very satisfied or satisfied for 23B (not including those who selected ‘not applicable’).

Competitions, prize draws and freebies

Competitions and prize draws

- For 22J, the following were held: Passport Bingo Prize Draw, Student Achievements Prize Draw, Freshers Writing Competition, Young at Heart Social and Quiz, Bingo, Grandparents Club Drop-in and Quiz, OU Drag Fans Club Quiz, Scottish Students Quiz, Neurodiversity Club, Feedback Survey Prize Draw
- For 23B, the following were held: Passport Bingo Prize Draw, Academic Resolutions Prize Draw, Freshers Freebies Prize Draw, Bingo, Feedback Survey Prize Draw
- Survey respondents requested **more quizzes** for future Freshers

Freebies

- Digital freebies available to download from oustudents.com included a weekly planner, study session template, lecture notes template and an assignment tracker
 - Survey respondents requested **more study-related materials** such as a to-do list template and monthly or yearly planners
- Physical freebies packs were sent for 22J and 23B, for the first time since 20B Freshers
 - **250 packs** were sent to randomly selected students who took part in the prize draw for each Freshers
 - Packs consisted of a branded pencil, highlighter, post-it notes, 50th Anniversary pin badge, and an OU Students Association leaflet

Barriers to participation part 1

The survey asked if any applicants experienced barriers in participating and if they had any suggestions of how students' experience of Freshers could be enhanced. Below are the responses, followed by any actions to be taken or comments if applicable.

Some respondents mentioned that the **closed captioning** on online sessions either sometimes did not work or they were not sure how to use it.

Some respondents mentioned **technical difficulties** such as the chat function on MS Teams sometimes not working.

- Hosts to be asked to share how participants can use closed captions and general tech guidance for common problems encountered at the start of the event, please see the recommendations.

Some respondents said they did not know **how to join in** with Freshers.

Some respondents mentioned that they had **anxiety** about joining events, and a couple of respondents asked for more detailed information on what to expect in each event.

- The clarity of information on the Freshers site will be analysed to see if it can be improved, and hosts will be asked to share more detailed descriptions of their sessions, please see the recommendations.

Barriers to participation part 2

Some respondents said they forgot about events on the day, and suggested that an option to add events to their calendar or receive **reminders** would be beneficial.

Some respondents mentioned the **timings of sessions** did not suit them, and some requested recorded sessions or repeats of sessions.

One session in 23B was cancelled two days prior, and a couple of respondents asked if any event cancellations could be made more clear on the Freshers website.

- Student Community Team to assess options to more clearly share when an event is cancelled, please see recommendations.

“No it was easy to navigate”
- 23B respondent

“No, thank you, was
very useful!”
- 22J respondent

“No barriers, it was a good
digital experience”
- 23B respondent

Communications part 1

The most popular option for where respondents heard about Freshers Fortnight was **emails from the Students Association** (50.5% for 22J and 60.7% for 23B). Emails were sent to new and continuing students.

The second most popular was StudentHome (38.5% for 22J and 39.3% for 23B), and the third most popular was the Students Association website: oustudents.com (22.9% for 22J and 24.3% for 23B).

Association monthly newsletter

- Top link clicked in the September and October 2022 newsletters was the Freshers webpage
- Top link clicked in the January 2023 newsletter was the Freshers events webpage

Freshers mailing list

- 8 mailings were sent for 22J, which averaged at a 24.8% open rate and 8.2% click rate
- 7 mailings were sent for 23B, which averaged at a 44.2% open rate and 6.1% click rate
 - A different 'from' email address was used for 23B, which we expect has helped with reducing the number of emails going into spam and therefore increasing the number being opened

In response to the statements:

- **'There was clear information on how to join in with Freshers', 87.6% agreed** (82.6% for 22J and 92.6% for 23B).
- **'I found the Freshers website easy to navigate', 85.7% agreed** (81.6% for 22J and 89.7% for 23B).
- **'I was happy with the frequency of communications to me in the run-up to Freshers' 82.5% agreed** (77% for 22J and 87.9% for 23B).

Communications part 2

September 2022

- Our second most popular article on The Hoot for this month was 'All about... Freshers!'.
- Our second most popular Tweet and Facebook post was the 22J programme release, and the third most popular Tweet was the new dates announcement.
- Our top two most popular Instagram posts were the programme and new dates released for 22J.

January 2023

- **7/10 of the Association's top ten Tweets and Facebook posts** were related to Freshers 23B.
- The second and third top Instagram posts related to the Academic Resolutions Prize Draw and Mindapples webinar for 23B.
- The Freshers site was the most popular page on oustudents.com in January 2023 (with **over 10,700 views**), and the second most popular was the Freshers event page.

October 2022

- Our second, third, fourth and sixth most popular Facebook posts were all relating to Freshers 22J in October 2022.
- For Instagram, our second, third, sixth and eighth top posts were all Freshers related.

Host feedback

Results from the host feedback surveys are shown in the boxes on the right hand side. On the left hand side are quotes from the student surveys about Freshers hosts.

100% of hosts:

- Were 'very likely' to get involved with Freshers again
- Agreed they felt supported in setting up their session(s)
- Found delivering their session(s) enjoyable

Student participation:

96.9% of respondents felt student participation during their session(s) was successful (93.8% for 22J and 100% for 23B)

Positive outcomes:

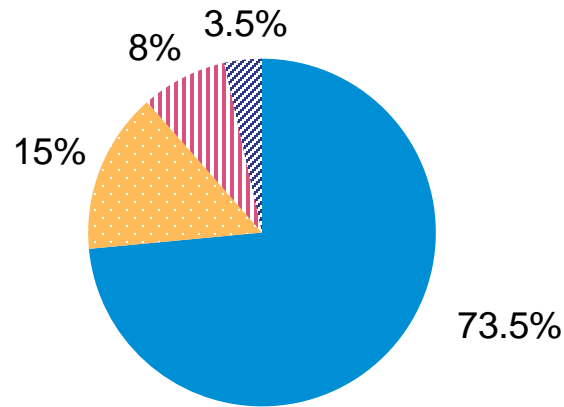
82.3% of respondents felt there were successful positive outcomes from their session(s) (81.3% for 22J and 83.3% for 23B).

“Really welcoming hosts, very relaxed atmosphere, very welcoming”
- 23B survey respondent

“It was nice to see the people running the events and gave me a sense of community.”
- 23B survey respondent

Final thoughts from students

Would respondents recommend Freshers to a fellow student?



■ Definitely ■ Maybe ■ Not sure ■ No

The above chart is the average of the 22J and 23B results. 65% of 22J and 82% of 23B respondents would 'definitely' recommend Freshers to a fellow student (22% of 22J and 8% of 23B selected 'maybe', 10% of 22J and 6% of 23B selected 'not sure' and 3% of 22J and 4% of 23B selected 'no').

“I was blown away by some of the sessions... **To be able to convey that sense of community online is brilliant** in my eyes when you are studying from home. So well done to you all.”

- 23B survey respondent

“Very fun events and very informative (even for third year students)”

- 22J survey respondent

“Good way to meet fellow students and feel part of the student community. Great to find out how to volunteer for the Association.”

- 23B survey respondent

“It made me feel like I was part of a university, not alone, and that other people have the same issues and challenges as myself...”

- 22J survey respondent

Recommendations

1.

Guidance for hosts: Hosts to be asked to share how participants can use closed captions and general tech guidance for common problems encountered at the start of events.

2.

Cancelled events: Student Community Team to assess options to more clearly share when an event is cancelled.

3.

Accessibility: Continue to improve accessibility of events, ensuring there is clear information on how to join sessions and what to expect.