GUSRC CLASS REPRESENTATIVE SURVEY 2021

Key Findings Report – Final: 24th Sept 2021

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Executive Summary

Background

The Class Representative (Class Rep) system plays a crucial role in Glasgow University's Quality Enhancement activity and forms an essential element of the Student Representative Council's (SRC) Representative and Consultative activities.

The system allows students to air their views to the academic and support staff that run their department on issues such as course content, teaching and resources. The Class Rep is also the first point of contact for students who have a problem or a suggestion about a class or course.

Any student at the University can become a Class Rep. They are elected in class, during the first few weeks of each semester, with the class lecturer or course convenor organising a brief election amongst those who are interested. If only one person is interested, they are automatically selected. If no one is interested the class lecturer or course convenor may ask a student to take the position.

In spring 2016 it was agreed that an end of year Class Representative survey be developed and piloted to establish baseline figures and identify future benchmarks for assessing the effectiveness of the system and its impacts. The survey has been further conducted in 2017, 2018, 2019 and 2020.

The following report details the results of the 2021 Class Rep Survey.

Research Objectives

Specific research objectives were to:
- Understand the level to which their Class Rep training impacted on their capacity to fulfil their role
- Measure the overall impact of Class Reps on the student experience
- Examine the range of personal development skills acquired by Class Reps during their tenure.

This year, the SRC also wished to examine the impact of the pandemic and the resulting move to online learning had on both the Class Rep process and the overall experience for them.

Research Methodology

As previous years the questionnaire was developed by the SRC and the researcher, and an online research methodology adopted. The survey tool itself was developed using Glasgow University's software and the IT support team. It appeared on the My Class Rep website in addition to being sent out via a link embedded within an email to the 1,399 Class Representatives.

A final total of 735 valid responses were received – a response rate of 53% (54% in 2020).   This is the lowest response since 2016. Although respondents were informed that completing the survey was a condition of having their role as Class Rep certified on their Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR) given the move to online learning, some Class Reps would have little involvement in the system and hence may have decided not to complete the survey. In addition, many would have already completed the training and the survey in a previous year.

Profile of Respondents

A similar gender, residence and age profile have been recorded across the lifetime of the survey, with just over two-thirds of respondents in the survey being female (67%). In terms of age half (50%) were aged 17-21yrs with a further third (31%) being within the 22-24-year-old age band. Most students were from Scotland (48%) with a further 22% being from the EU and a further 18% classified as International Students. There was a relatively even response across all Colleges.

Recruitment and Training

In 2020, 80% of respondents were selected by their tutor / lecturer or were the only volunteer. This dropped to 74% this year with the remaining 25% elected to their position.

The College of Arts was again most likely to have only one volunteer for the role of Class Rep - 60% compared to the overall average of 25%. The College of MVLS delivered the most elected Class Reps with 34%.

This year Class Rep training was delivered through a mix of self-study via Moodle and an online Zoom session. Most Class Reps – 79% - who completed the survey thought that this training from the SRC had prepared them very well/well for their role (89% in 2020), indicating that the training was still held in high regard when delivery was moved online.

There has been a large jump in those who did not undertake the Class Reps training this year from 4% in 2020 to 17% this year. For most of these non-attenders this was because they had undergone training in a previous year (86%) and 6% stated they had not been informed that training was taking place.

SSLC & Class Rep Impact

The majority of Class Representatives in the survey (81%) reported that action had been agreed and / or taken on issues they had raised within the SSLC meetings - a positive result for the format – given that all SSLC meetings were conducted virtually. In addition, nearly half of Class Reps stated that action had already been taken by the time of the survey. This is an increase of 13% on last year's figure.

Similar barriers to last year were identified around why some Class Reps found it difficult to raise issues:

- Perception staff can be dismissive or unreceptive to the issue(s) and so feel they are not taken seriously;
- A lack of time during meetings due to large number of Class Reps / myriad of issues to discuss / limited meeting time;
- Feeling uncomfortable about raising specific issue regarding a member of staff if they are in the meeting.

Interestingly there was a large increase in those stating that the SSLC was an effective committee process for getting student issues actioned. From 68% in 2020 to 76% this year. This appears to indicate that online SSLC meetings have been even more effective than the traditional face to face meetings. Only 2% thought the system Not Very Effective/Not at all Effective.

When asked about changes due to their input, respondents recorded a range of changes resulting from their input into SSLC meetings, but as previous years the most common was Improved Access to Course Materials/Resources (51%) followed by Changes to Lecture/Tutorial Arrangements (42%).

In addition, it was great news to note that – again given the pandemic restrictions - nearly two-thirds (63%) of Class Reps reported that they were able to contact relevant university staff out with SSLC meetings to discuss issues.

Across the past five years the main reason for non-attendance at the SSLC meetings is that the meeting clashed with their timetable (48%).

Skills Development

Respondents reported that they had developed several soft skills during their time as a Class Rep. Four-fifths (80%) reported that they had developed Communication/Listening skills, followed by 69% who gained a Greater Understanding of University Structures. These skills were highly valued and appreciated by the Class Reps both for increasing their effectiveness in their role and their future employability.

Changes to Class Rep System Due to COVID-19 Restrictions

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting disruption to university life consequently impacted on the Class Rep system in a variety of ways. With the lack of face-to-face contact, Facebook, WhatsApp and email were the most common methods used by Class Reps Facebook was perceived as the most effective way to communicating (44%) followed by email (17%):

Online SSLC meetings were a success story. Nearly two-thirds of Class Reps stated that they would like online SSLC meetings to continue in the future and over half (56%) requested that online class rep training also continue.

The majority were extremely positive and praised the support they received from the SRC and University during the pandemic. There were some suggestions however around additional support that would have been appreciated such as:

- Additional online mixers / activities with classmates at beginning of terms
- More support for those studying in different time zones
- Direct line of communication to Class Rep
- Additional SRC support to raise awareness of Class Reps
- Clearer communication around meetings
- Access to documents around issues already raised in previous years

The Class Rep Experience

Every year of this survey there is a broad range of different experiences noted at the end of the survey. The majority are always extremely positive in tone and consistently mention that they found the role both rewarding and effective, with many of their issues heard by staff in a respectful manner and addressed appropriately. Many of the comments this year highlighted the additional challenges of remote learning due to COVID-19 restrictions, however for most it was still a rewarding experience and most comments recorded were extremely positive in tone with increases shown across most areas.

So – despite the move to online learning and meetings – this year's Class Reps have still overwhelmingly had mostly positive comments to make about their experience

Some negative comments were also recorded this year but to a much lower level and it would appear that Class Reps – on the whole – had less issues about their experience – even during a pandemic. The numbers concerned about the lack of notice of meetings, or the number of meetings has dropped considerably as has the previous demands for more training sessions. The only area that recorded an increase was around difficulty gathering feedback from students across the year.

Conclusions

Although this year has brought several challenges to Class Reps the impact of COVID-19 did not diminish what was a positive experience for most in the survey.

Class Reps who have previously completed training and / or completed the survey in a previous year see no requirement to repeat the survey. It is recommended that communications emphasise the importance of completing the survey every year to ensure a complete picture across the whole Class Rep cohort.

Across the last six years, the reputation of the SRC Class Rep training has gone from strength to strength. Despite the move to online training, most still reported that training had prepared them well and - in addition - many wished the online training option to continue. As the majority felt that online training and self-study was more convenient for them it is recommended going forward that online training continue.

Although SSLC meetings were also moved online - the majority still found it easy to raise issues and this year action was taken on more issues raised. Where the minority found some of these meetings challenging this could be assisted with additional advice around gathering data from students and the benefit of one-to-one meetings (online) with staff where necessary. It was clear University staff were happy to communicate with Class reps outwith SSLC meetings this year.

With the lack of face-to-face contact, Facebook, WhatsApp and email became much more important methods during the pandemic to communicate with their classmates. However, there was challenges for some in obtaining email addresses of their cohort. The SRC should take the lead here to find a way round the data protection issue to ensure a smoother method of communication between Class Reps and their classmates.

The pandemic also allowed Class Rep online groups and networks to flourish and indeed many also found online SSLC meetings and training to be a positive way forward with many requesting that these continue in some form when face-to-face teaching resumes. Considering suggestions made by respondents around their new online role the SRC should explore how they can include such virtual elements into their training in the future.

Finally – as mentioned in previous years - it is again recommended that the SRC provide clear and continuing communications to ensure all Class Reps are aware of their ongoing support to assist those who may find any aspect of their role difficult as there are still a large number who have no other contact with the SRC even though they have found aspects of their role challenging.

This year the survey strongly indicates that Class Representative amended virtual model at Glasgow University worked extremely well and most Class Reps – although finding the whole year more challenging – still cited the experience worthwhile and rewarding.

1 Background & Introduction

1.1 Background

The Class Representative (Class Rep) system plays a crucial role in Glasgow University's Quality Enhancement activity and forms an essential element of the Student Representative Council (SRC) Representative and Consultative activities.

The system allows students to air their views to the academic and support staff that run their department on issues such as course content, teaching and resources. The Class Rep is also the first point of contact for students who have a problem or a suggestion about a class or course.

Any student at the University can become a Class Rep. They are elected in class, during the first few weeks of each semester, with the class lecturer or course convenor organising a brief election amongst those who are interested. If only one person is interested, they are automatically selected. If no one is interested the class lecturer or course convenor may ask a student to take the position.

The SRC coordinates the delivery of the two-hour Class Rep training every year, in both Semesters 1 and 2. The training includes group activities to:

- Help Class Reps understand how they can have an impact
- Illustrate how to discuss issues and develop negotiations skills
- Explain the support structures at their disposal for help and advice

A short evaluation questionnaire is completed at the end of the training session. This provides demographic information and brief immediate feedback about the training just undertaken. Although useful, and always highly positive, this short evaluation does not provide an opportunity for reflective insight as to how the training contributed to the Class Reps' effectiveness over the year and what their impact had been.

This year, due to restrictions imposed by the pandemic, training took the form of an element of self-study via Moodle and online Zoom training.

1.2 Fit with Strategy

GUSRC's strategy document includes the following stated objective:

"We will ensure our democratic, representative structures are valid and accessible for all students"

Priority actions include:

- Working with the University to develop the class representative system to ensure it remains fit for purpose and responsive to the growing diversification of University Learning and Teaching delivery methods
- Working together to develop and implement a system for evaluating the impact of class representatives on the student experience

Given the above strategic aims and priority actions, in spring 2016 it was agreed that an end of year Class Representative survey be developed and piloted to establish some baseline figures and identify future benchmarks for assessing the effectiveness of the system and its impacts.

Thus, the SRC wished to use the pilot in 2016 to measure three clear research objectives which were to:

- Understand the level to which their Class Rep training impacted on their capacity to fulfil their role
- Measure the overall impact of Class Reps on the student experience
- Examine the range of personal development skills acquired by Class Reps during their tenure
- This year (2021) the survey also wished to investigate the impact of COVID-19 restrictions had on both the Class Rep process and experience.

1.3   The Pilot Survey

The first survey was conducted in March 2016 with the intention to treat it as a pilot study. This would enable an exploration and understanding of issues that would assist the SRC in developing the class representative system in the future. In addition, it allowed the SRC to test the effectiveness of the survey method in fulfilling the purpose of the study and whether the results were reliable (i.e. that gave a large enough response rate to make statistically reliable assumptions). It would also give an indication of whether the questions areas they were interested in were understood by respondents and if they were able to follow the directions of the questionnaire.

The survey was carried out in-house in March-April 2016 and a key findings report submitted along with recommendations for questionnaire development and content.

1.4   Class Rep Survey 2017 - 2021

In 2017 and 2018 the Class Rep online survey was repeated, considering the recommendations of the 2016 pilot report, and amending the questionnaire content accordingly when necessary.

The survey has been repeated for 2019 and now 2020, adopting the same questionnaire to allow clear comparisons to be made with previous years. The survey was sent out on 26th March 2021 with a reminder email dispatched on 19th April 2020. The survey closed on 30th April 2021.

1.5   Introduction to Report

The questionnaire was loosely structured into five themes as detailed below, and hence forms the main structure of the remainder of this report:

Section 2 – Research Methodology

Section 3 – Profile of Respondents

Section 4 – **Recruitment & Training**

Section 5 – **SSLC & Class rep Impact**

Section 6 – **Support & Skills Development**

Section 7 – **Changes to Class Rep System due to COVID-19**

Section 8 – **The Class Representative Experience**

Section 9 - Conclusions and Recommendations

2   Research Methodology

As in previous years the questionnaire was developed by the SRC and the researcher and an online research methodology adopted. This is the most efficient and effective approach to reaching Class Representatives due to the availability of a sample list. In addition, it is more convenient for respondents: they can fill in the survey in their own time; at their own pace; and can formulate more considered answers.

The survey tool itself was developed using Glasgow University's software and the IT support team. It appeared on the My Class Rep website in addition to being sent out via a link embedded within an email to the 1,399 Class Representatives.

A final total of 735 valid responses were received – a response rate of 53%. Compared to *54%* in 2020: *69% in* 2019; *65% in 2018*; *66% in 2017*; *51% in 2016*) Respondents were informed that completing the survey was a condition of having their role as Class Rep certified on their Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR). However the role of the pandemic and subsequent move to online learning may have helped to reduce the response rate this year.

Please note that not all responses will add to 100% because of rounding and multiple response questions. Due to routing, which enabled respondents to skip some questions, base numbers may also differ in some cases.
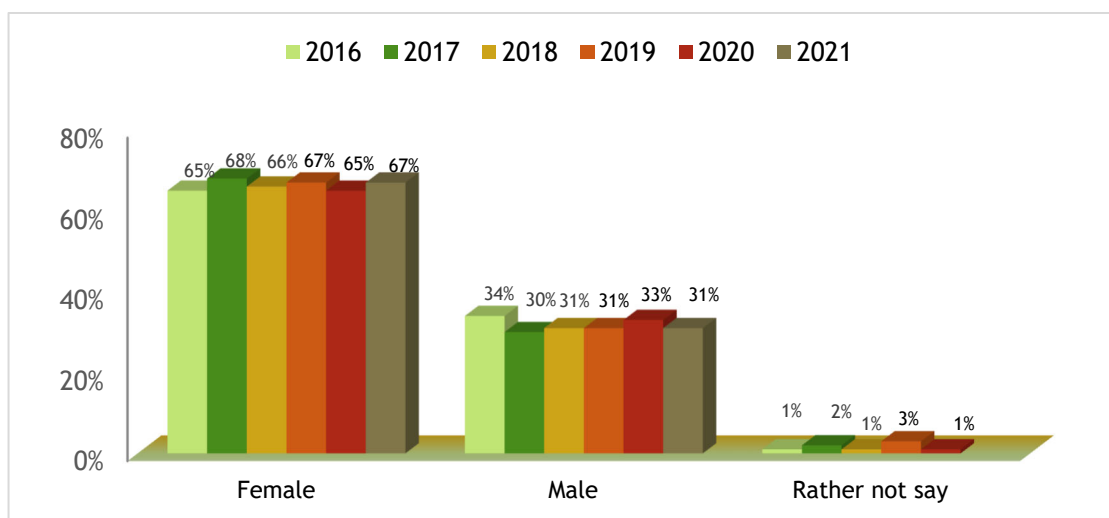
Data has been analysed using Microsoft Excel and the questionnaire, complete data tables, and a full listing of open-ended response data is also included as a separate appendix.

3   Profile of Respondents

A similar gender and age profile as previous years was recorded with just over two-thirds of respondents in the survey being female *(Figure 3-1)* and 1% preferring not to state their gender. In terms of age 50% of respondents were aged 17-21yrs *(Figure 3-2)* with a further 31% being within the 22-24-year-old age band.
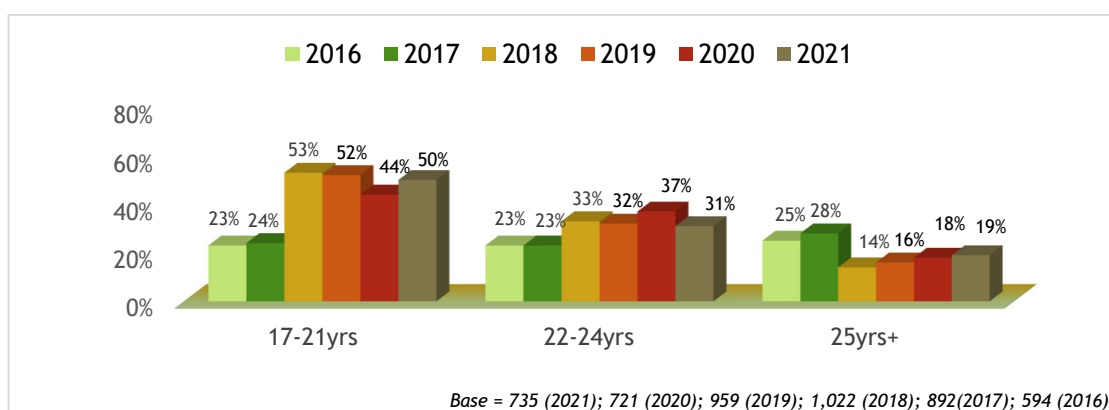
The majority of students were from Scotland (48%) with a further 22% being from the EU and another 18% classified as International Students. This data however could not be compared with the 2016 survey due to differences in classifying students in the pilot survey:

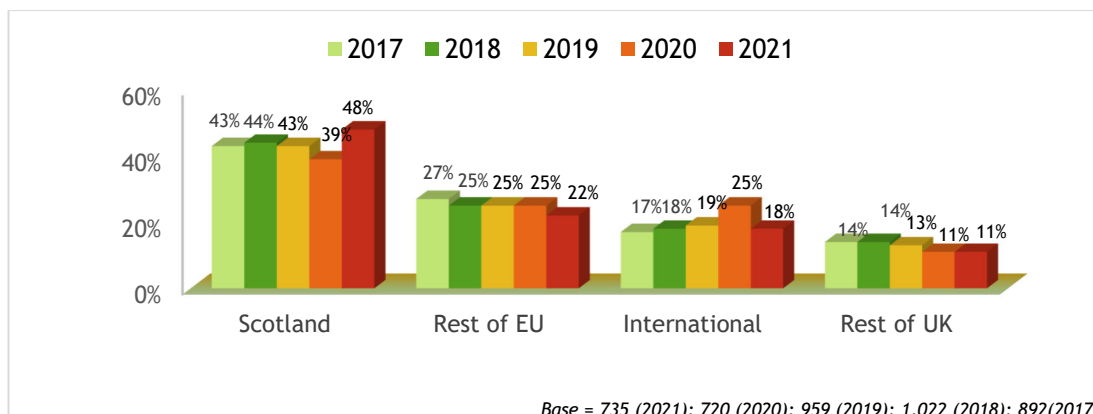**Figure 3-1: Gender of Respondents**

Base = 735 (2021); 721 (2020); 959 (2019); 1,022 (2018); 892(2017); 594 (2016)
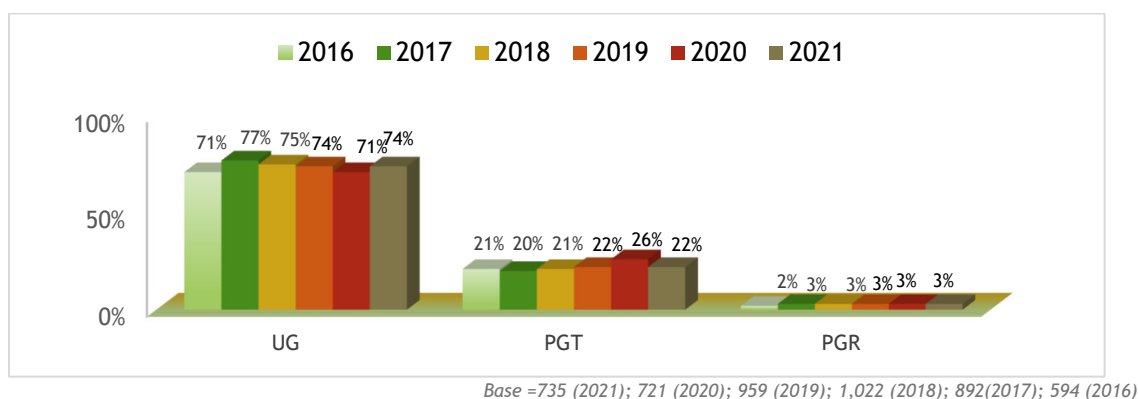
Figure 3-2: Age of Respondents

Base = 735 (2021); 721 (2020); 959 (2019); 1,022 (2018); 892(2017); 594 (2016)

Figure 3-3: Student Type

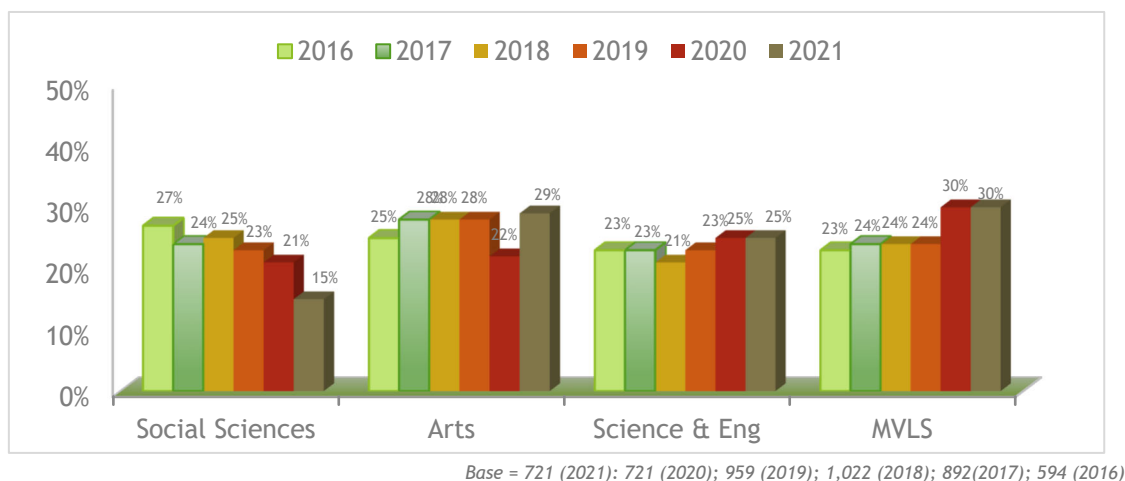*Base = 735 (2021); 720 (2020); 959 (2019); 1,022 (2018); 892(2017)*

An increase in the number of students from Scotland this year within the Class rep sample – with a corresponding drop in Class Reps from overseas.

Figure 3-4: Course Level

Base =735 (2021); 721 (2020); 959 (2019); 1,022 (2018); 892(2017); 594 (2016)

Figure 3-5: College

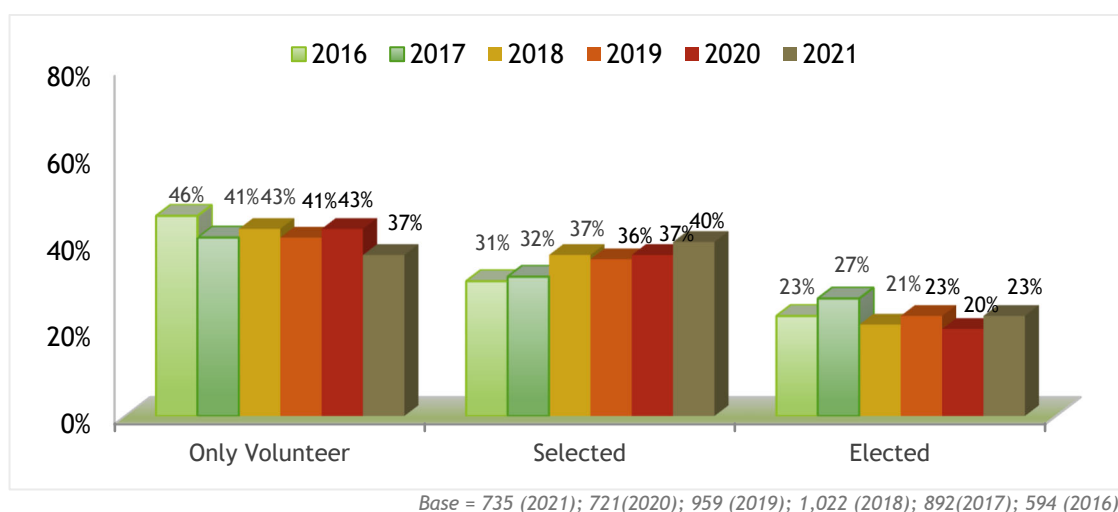*Base = 721 (2021): 721 (2020); 959 (2019); 1,022 (2018); 892(2017); 594 (2016)*

4   Recruitment & Training

This section of the report considers how respondents became Class Representatives and the value of their training.

4.1   Class Representatives Elections

The questionnaire began by asking respondents how they became Class Reps. In 2020, 80% of respondents were selected by their tutor / lecturer or were the only volunteer and this has dropped slightly to 77% this year with a corresponding slight lift amongst those being specifically elected to the post from 20% to one in five (23%):

Figure 4-1: Selection / Election of Class Representative

Base = 735 (2021); 721(2020); 959 (2019); 1,022 (2018); 892(2017); 594 (2016)

As with previous years there was no correlation found between Student Type, Age or Gender and method of obtaining the position of Class Rep. As with last year however clear College differences emerged.

The College of Arts – similar to last year - was again most likely to have only one volunteer for the role of Class Rep with 60% of Reps (same as 2020) the only volunteer compared to the overall average of 37%.

With regards to elected posts, the College of Science & Engineering and College of MVLS delivered the most elected Class Reps with 31% and 34% respectively each (compared to the average of 23%).

4.2   SRC Class Rep Training

The SRC provides training for Class Reps near the beginning of each semester. This training is an important part of preparation for the role and gives students the tools to tackle any issue that may arise.
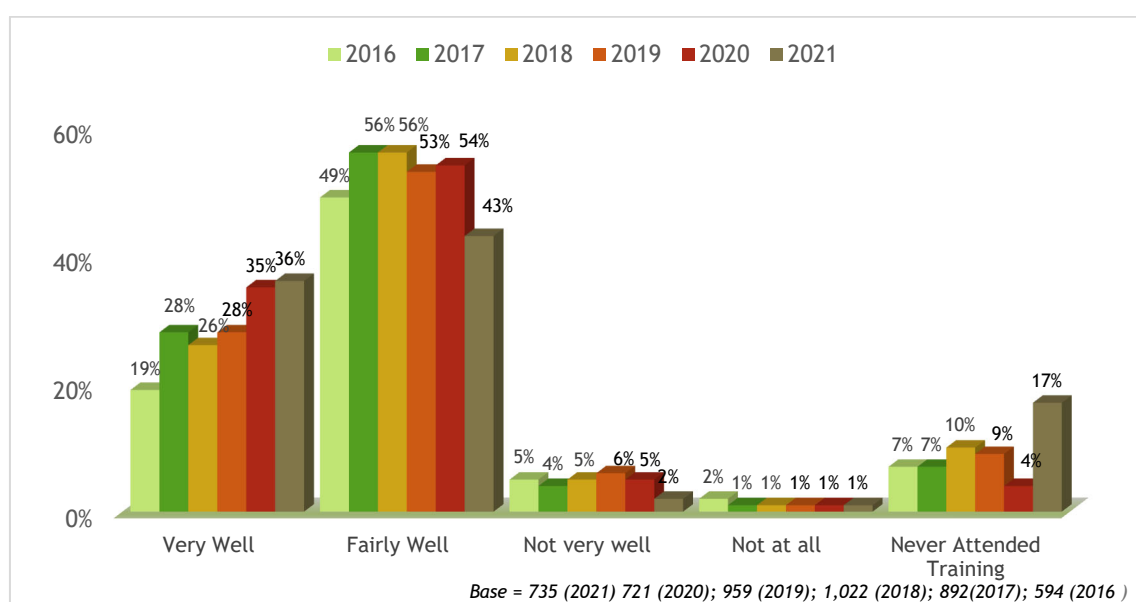
This year training was undertaken online through a self-study Moodle course and a subsequent Zoom training session.

Consequently, respondents were asked how well the training they received had prepared them for the role. Encouragingly, the majority – 79% - who completed the survey thought that their initial training from the SRC had prepared them very well/well for their role (89% in 2020), indicating that the training is still held in high regard– despite the move to online.

This year there has been a large jump in those who did not undertake the Class Reps training from 4% in 2020 to 17% this year. For most non-attenders this was because they had previously undergone training (86%) and 6% stated they had not been informed that training was taking place.

There was little variation when analysed by the various demographics with all student types stating that the SRC training prepared them Very Well / Fairly Well.

Figure 4-2: SRC Training

Base = 735 (2021) 721 (2020); 959 (2019); 1,022 (2018); 892(2017); 594 (2016)

please note this year's training was conducted online

"The online training was great… more flexible and I could do part of it on my own when I wanted to…"

"As a first year student representative I appreciated the training being on Zoom. However, I would've liked an accompanying booklet…

"The online part was very thorough and I felt the SRC were very supportive to me all year…"
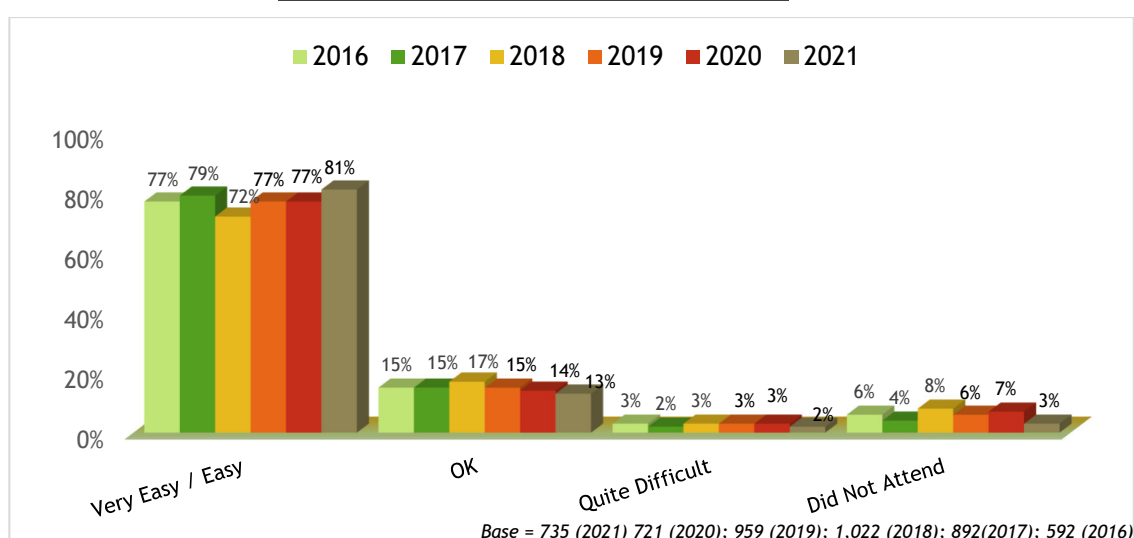
5   SSLC & Class Rep Impact

5.1   Ease of Raising Issues at SSLC

This next section looks at Class Reps' ease at raising issues at Student Staff Liaison Committee (SSLC) meetings. All meetings in the academic year 2021-2021 were conducted online.

As previous years, most of the Class Reps have little difficulty in raising issues, with 81% of survey respondents overall believing it was Very Easy/Easy. Only 2% of respondents found it Quite Difficult (17 respondents).

There were no statistically significant variations in terms of demographics and perceptions around ease of raising issues with figures similar across the board:

Figure 5-1: Ease of Raising Issues at SSLC

Base = 735 (2021) 721 (2020); 959 (2019); 1,022 (2018); 892(2017); 592 (2016)

Some - a minority (3%) - had yet to attend a meeting due to scheduling conflicts or cancellations.

Those who found it hard to raise issues at the SSLC meetings were asked to explain why via an additional comments box. All 18 respondents in this group entered a comment. A selection of these comments is reproduced verbatim overleaf, and the full list is attached as part of the data file in a separate appendix.

As in previous years, the rest of the comments reported regarding difficulty raising issues centred around:

- **Lack of time** during meetings due to large number of Class Reps and courses covered in one meeting
- A sense that their issue(s) was **not taken seriously** / not valued or perception that staff were dismissive and / or unreceptive.
- **Difficulty raising concerns** regarding a specific member of staff or course when staff member was present. Also, awkwardness due to large number of outspoken reps in meeting and senior staff:

"It was difficult because some of the comments and suggestions felt shut down by staff

"More often than not the school simply gets defensive and makes excuses, even though legitimate issues are raised by many students, which we then find out are problems that recur annually….."

"Sometimes it felt like bringing up issues that the class relayed to us were not taken very seriously by the moderator of the meeting, not allowing us to be able to directly communicate with the course coordinators. Additionally, the tone we were met with was often condescending (not from the course coordinators themselves)…"

"The staff were not always receptive to our ideas and did not always acknowledge the issues brought up by students as particularly relevant or of importance. In addition, most criticisms were aimed at very specific courses run by the same members of staff which put a lot of pressure on the class reps making it difficult to provide constructive feedback without it being seemingly overwhelming.…"

"There were too many class reps in the one Zoom meeting. Time ran on and it was difficult to express concerns…..."

5.2   Reason for Non-Attendance at SSLC Meetings

Only 3% of respondents stated that they did not attend the SSLC meetings (23 respondents). Those that did not attend were fairly split across all demographic groups.
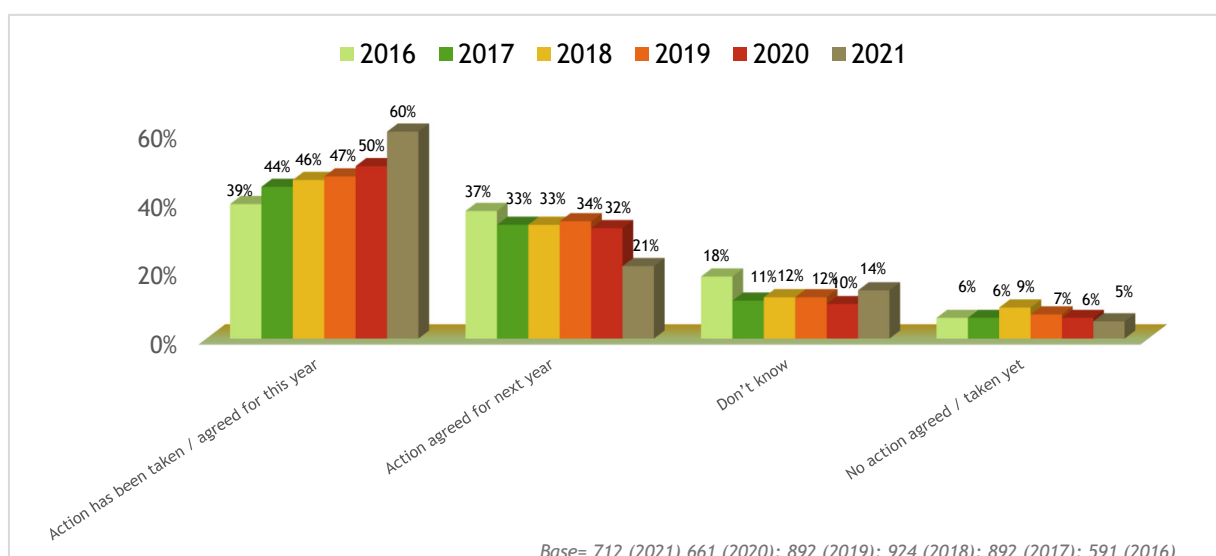
Non-attenders were given the opportunity to explain their absence. As previous years, the main reason for not attending SSLC meetings was when the meeting clashed with their timetable or other commitments or when another Class Rep attended on their behalf.

Last year nearly one-third of Class Reps (31%) claimed they had no notification of SSLC meetings. This figure has dropped substantially this year and only 9% claimed they did not know about the online SSLC meetings.

5.3   Action Taken on Issues Raised

The majority of Class Representatives in the survey (81%) reported that action had been agreed and / or taken on issues they had raised within the SSLC meetings - a positive result for the format. In addition, nearly half of Class Reps stated that action had already been taken by the time of the survey. This is an increase 13% on last year's figure. Only 5% of Class Reps stated that no action had been agreed / taken:

Figure 5-2: Action Taken on Issues Raised

Base= 712 (2021) 661 (2020); 892 (2019); 924 (2018); 892 (2017); 591 (2016)

When analysed by College – as previous years the College of Medical, Veterinary and Life Sciences was most likely to have actions agreed on issues raised (87%) compared to the overall figure of 81%.

Where no action was taken, students were further questioned about any escalation procedures they followed around having issues actioned. A third of respondents (33%) did not raise the issue with anyone else. 15% raised the issue and were happy with the response. A further 21% raised the issue with the School or College and were not happy with the resolution. Please note that there was only 33 responses to this question.

5.4   Impact of Class Representative

This next section looks at the Staff Student Liaison Committee (SSLC) and the Class Reps' perception of their own impact within these meetings.
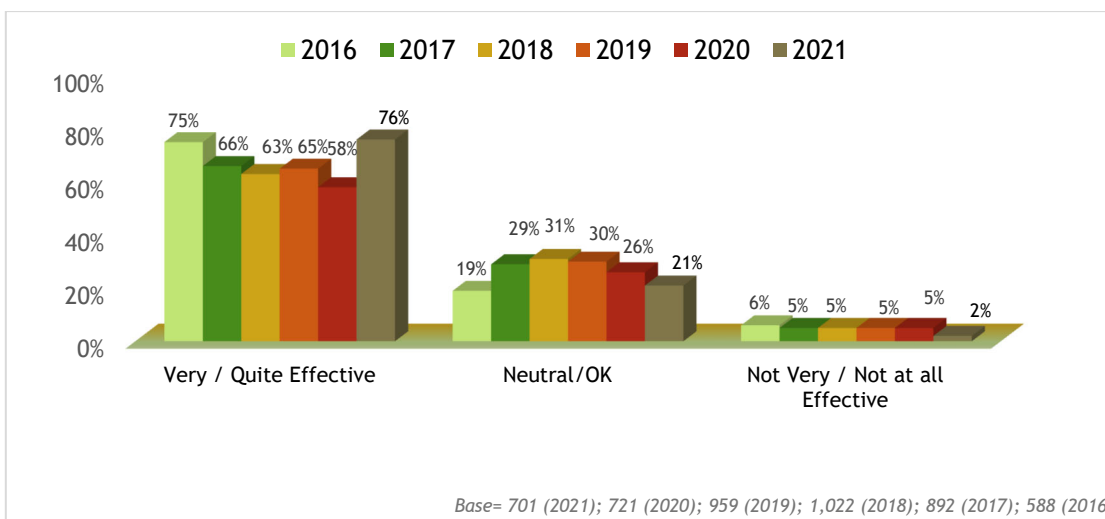
Respondents were asked if they felt that the SSLC was an effective committee for getting student issues actioned. As can be seen in Figure 5-3 year on year Class Reps have increasingly believed in the SSLC structure with over three-quarters (76%) stating that it was Very Effective/Effective .An increase of 8% on last years' figure of 68%.

There were no significant differences between demographic groups in their perception of effectiveness of the SSLC.

Just over a quarter (21%) recorded the committee as an 'ok' mechanism (down from 26% in 2020), but only 2% thought the system Not Very Effective/Not at all Effective.

Again, the very small number of people perceiving the SSLC as ineffective is understandable given that 81% of issues had been actioned to some degree already during their term:
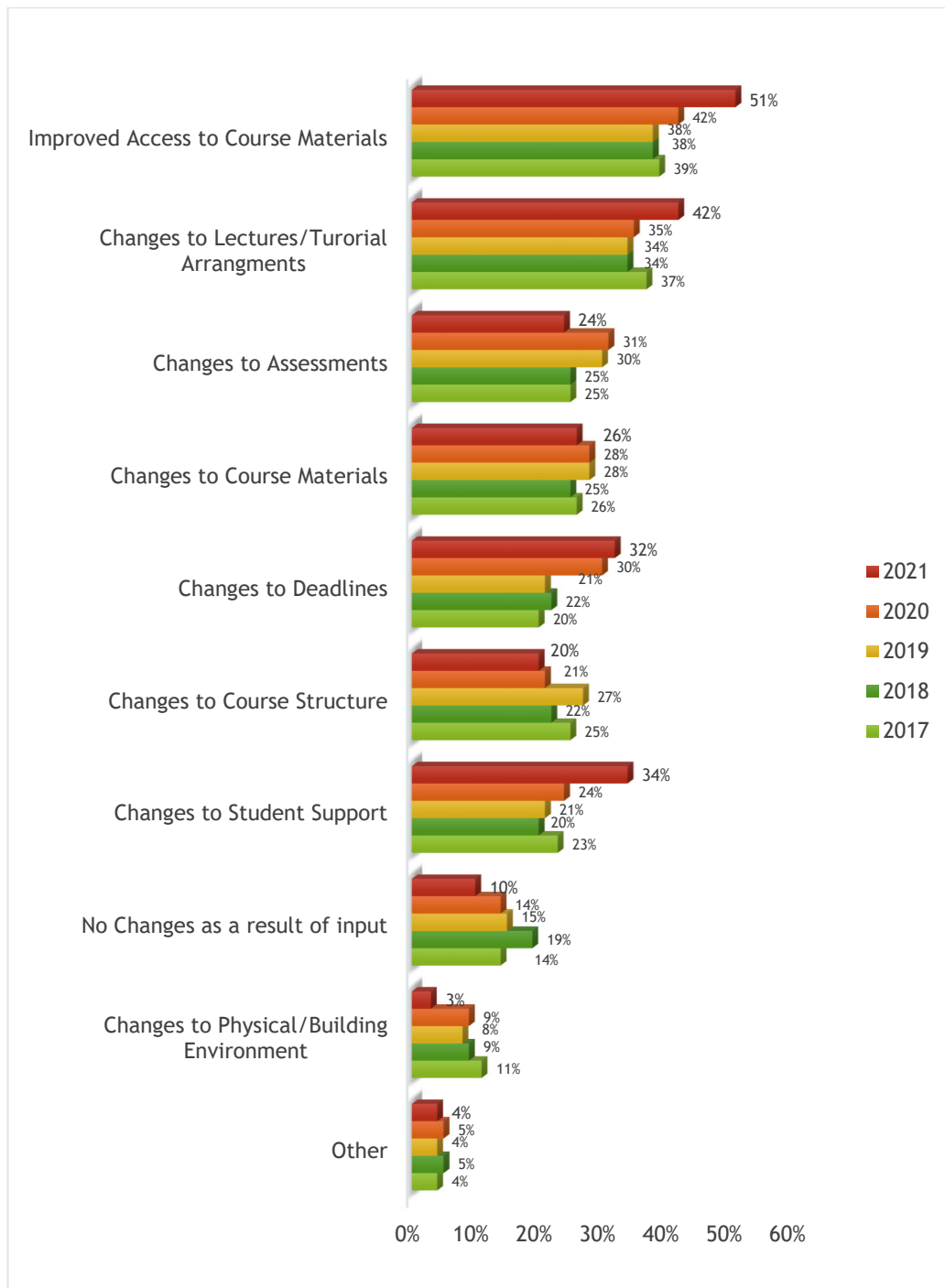
Figure 5-3: SSLC as an Effective Vehicle

Class Reps were then asked what types of changes had resulted from their input at SSLC meetings and in most cases multiple changes were recorded as a result of their time as a Class Rep and attending SSLC meetings.

The data overleaf has followed a similar pattern across the past five years: Improved Access to Course Materials/Resources was again the most recorded change (42%), followed by Changes to Lecture/Tutorial Arrangements (35%) with both these figures at a similar percentage as last year. Positively there has been a decrease in those who state that there had been No Changes as a result of their input dropping from 19% in 2018 to 15% last year and now 14% in 2020.

Figure 5-4: Changes Resulting from Class Rep Input

Improved Access to Course Materials
- 51%
- 42%
- 38%
- 38%
- 39%

Changes to Lectures/Turorial Arrangments
- 42%
- 35%
- 34%
- 34%
- 37%

Changes to Assessments
- 24%
- 31%
- 30%
- 25%
- 25%

Changes to Course Materials
- 26%
- 28%
- 28%
- 25%
- 26%

Changes to Deadlines
- 32%
- 30%
- 21%
- 22%
- 20%

Changes to Course Structure
- 20%
- 21%
- 27%
- 22%
- 25%

Changes to Student Support
- 34%
- 24%
- 21%
- 20%
- 23%

No Changes as a result of input
- 10%
- 14%
- 15%
- 19%
- 14%

Changes to Physical/Building Environment
- 3%
- 9%
- 8%
- 9%
- 11%

Other
- 4%
- 5%
- 4%
- 5%
- 4%

Legend: ■ 2021 ■ 2020 ■ 2019 ■ 2018 ■ 2017

Base= 718 (2020); 956 (2019); 1,021(2018); 888(2017)
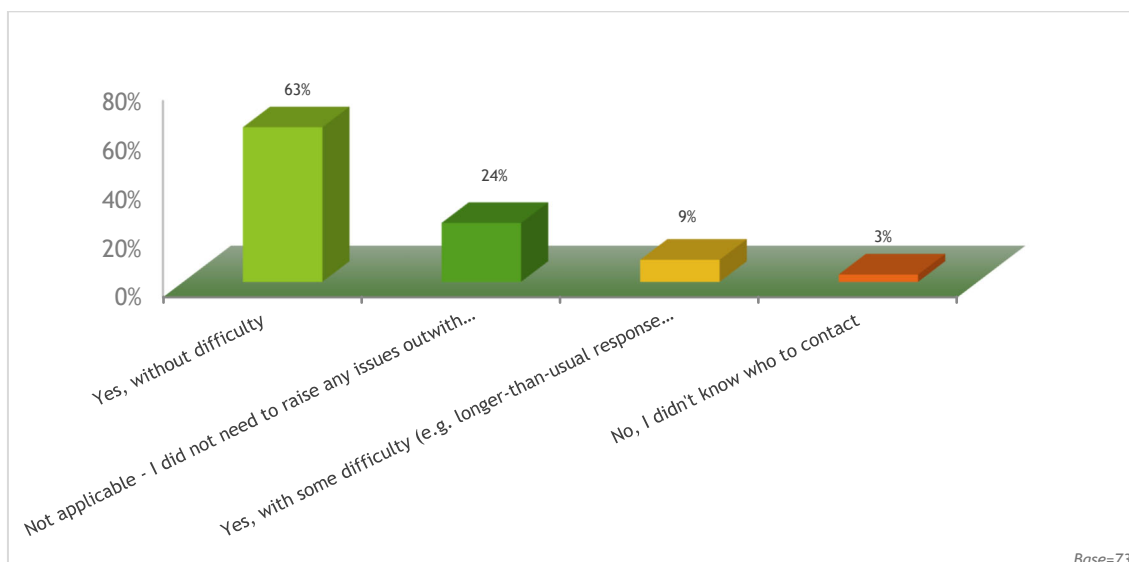*percentages do not add up to 100% due to multiple recording*

There was a small number of Class Reps that reported 'Other' changes (4% - 33 respondents) not applicable to the available codes. The general theme of these other issues was around:

- Course changes – more feedback, amends to grades, subtitles on lecture recordings
- Improved communication between staff and students due to COVID-19 restrictions

6   Support & Skills Development

6.1   Ongoing Support from SRC

The SRC provide all training for Class Reps and can also provide ongoing support for those who need it. The survey therefore asked Class Reps about the support they had from the SRC - apart from this initial training – over the year.
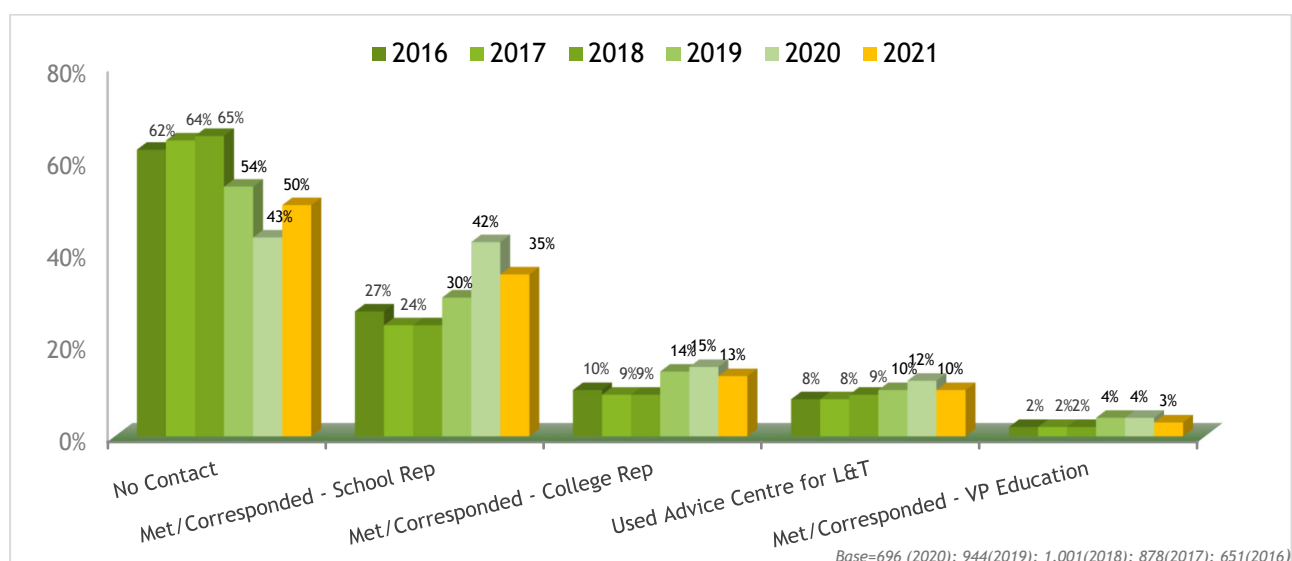
As last year there was no contact with the SRC for half of the Class Reps (50%) after their initial training session compared to 43% last year. Those most likely to have had no further contact with the SRC were those from the College of Arts (66%).

The number also contacting the Advice Centre has dropped to 10% this year (from 12%).

A few respondents had mentioned 'Other' support from the SRC (13 respondents). The additional support most often mentioned included the following:
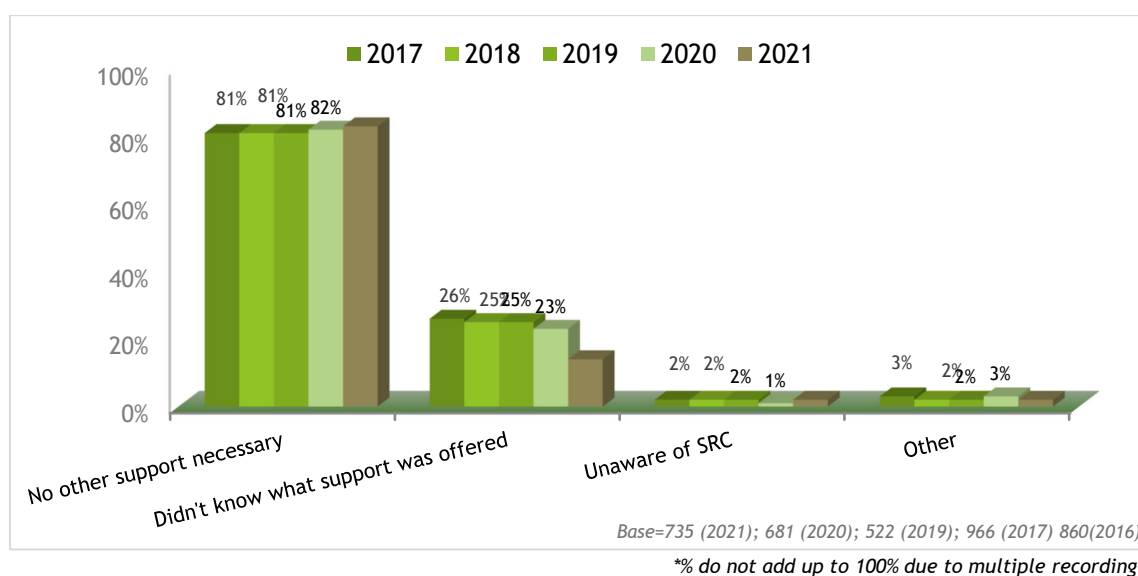
- Regular communication with Course Convener / lecturer
- Swift replies to general queries from SRC (eg VP Support Services and Volunteer team)

Figure 6-1: SRC Support

Base=696 (2020); 944(2019); 1,001(2018); 878(2017); 651(2016)

As can be seen in Figure 6-1, half of the Class Reps in the survey (50%) had no further contact with the SRC. A supplementary question asked why this was the case.

As in previous years, over four-fifths of those Class Reps who had no other contact (83%) simply felt that no other support was necessary. A further 14% stated that they were unaware what other support the SRC offered:

Figure 6-2: Reason for No Other Contact with SRC

Base=735 (2021); 681 (2020); 522 (2019); 966 (2017) 860(2016)

% do not add up to 100% due to multiple recording

Amongst the 'Other' reasons given for not having any other contact with the SRC from the 8 respondents, no clear themes emerged with Class Reps claiming a diverse range of reasons such as their course being online; Dumfries Campus student; no response from SRC; unhelpful previous contact:

"

"Found it more useful/quicker to get things communicated through staff connections instead of SRC rep…"

"Generally hasn't felt very welcoming, particularly this year…"

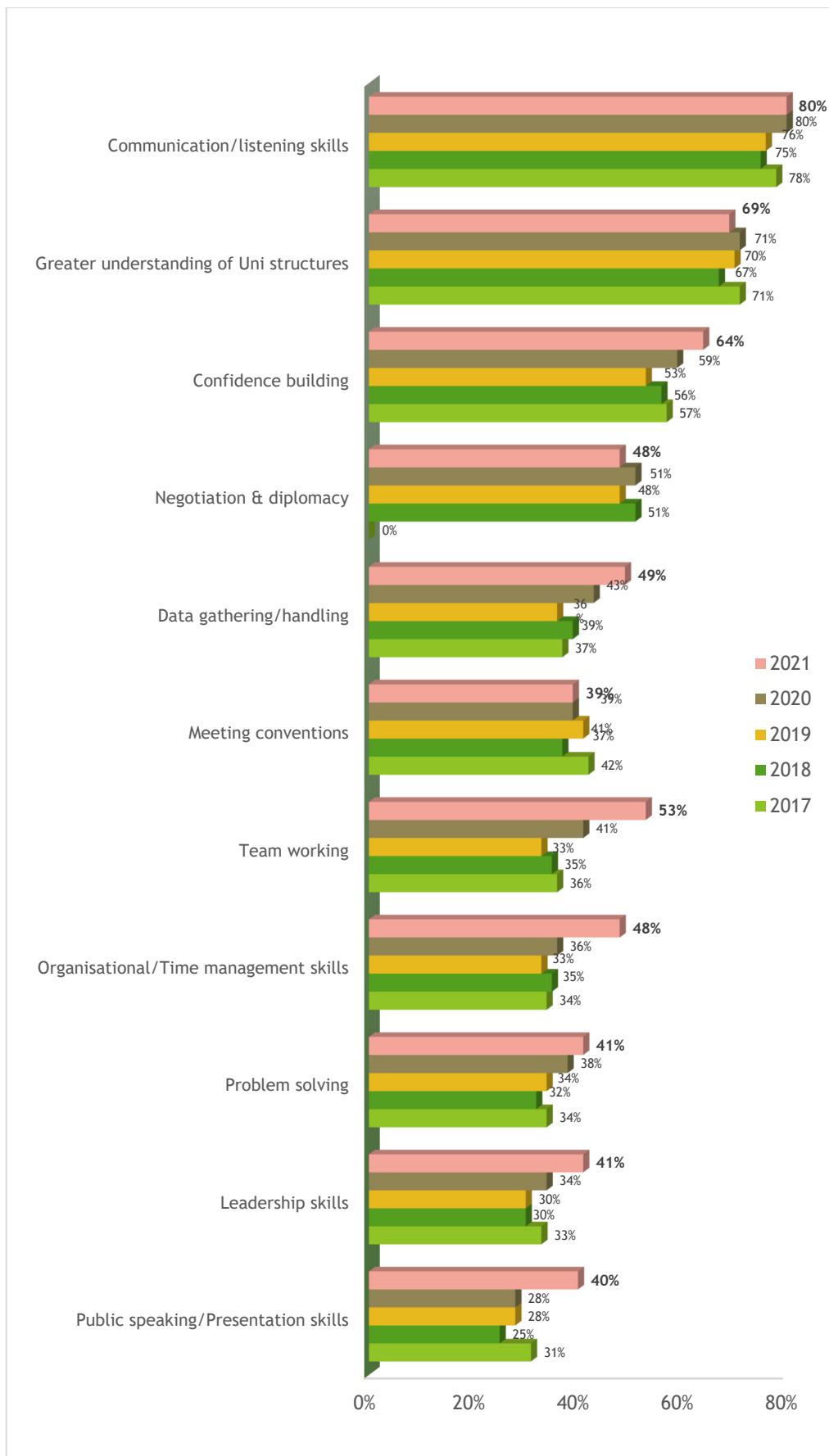*"I'm a member on the SRC council so was able to communicate with people as and when needed"*

"It was hard to know who would actually be responsible, and thus ACTUALLY be able to help with issues…"

"We had the virtual trainings and conference but no offers of direct help etc from SRC …"

6.2 Skills Development

One of the benefits of becoming a Class Rep has always been the personal development that can result and therefore, respondents were asked within the survey if they thought they had developed any skills through their role. Several skills are recorded year on year. This year, again, the top skill recorded was communication and listening with over three-quarters of respondents (80%) reported that they had developed Communication/Listening skills through being a Class Rep, followed by 69% who gained a Greater Understanding of University Structures. This is particularly good news given the online environment of most communications. Figure 6-3 below shows the full list of skills that were developed through being a Class Rep:

Figure 6-3: Skills Development

Communication/listening skills — 2021: 80%, 2020: 80%, 2019: 76%, 2018: 75%, 2017: 78%

Greater understanding of Uni structures — 2021: 69%, 2020: 71%, 2019: 70%, 2018: 67%, 2017: 71%

Confidence building — 2021: 64%, 2020: 59%, 2019: 53%, 2018: 56%, 2017: 57%

Negotiation & diplomacy — 2021: 48%, 2020: 51%, 2019: 48%, 2018: 51%, 2017: 0%

Data gathering/handling — 2021: 49%, 2020: 43%, 2019: 36%, 2018: 39%, 2017: 37%

Meeting conventions — 2021: 39%, 2020: 39%, 2019: 41%, 2018: 37%, 2017: 42%

Team working — 2021: 53%, 2020: 41%, 2019: 33%, 2018: 35%, 2017: 36%

Organisational/Time management skills — 2021: 48%, 2020: 36%, 2019: 33%, 2018: 35%, 2017: 34%

Problem solving — 2021: 41%, 2020: 38%, 2019: 34%, 2018: 32%, 2017: 34%

Leadership skills — 2021: 41%, 2020: 34%, 2019: 30%, 2018: 30%, 2017: 33%

Public speaking/Presentation skills — 2021: 40%, 2020: 28%, 2019: 28%, 2018: 25%, 2017: 31%

Base=735 (2021); 721 (2020); 959 (2019); 1,021 (2018); 892(2017)
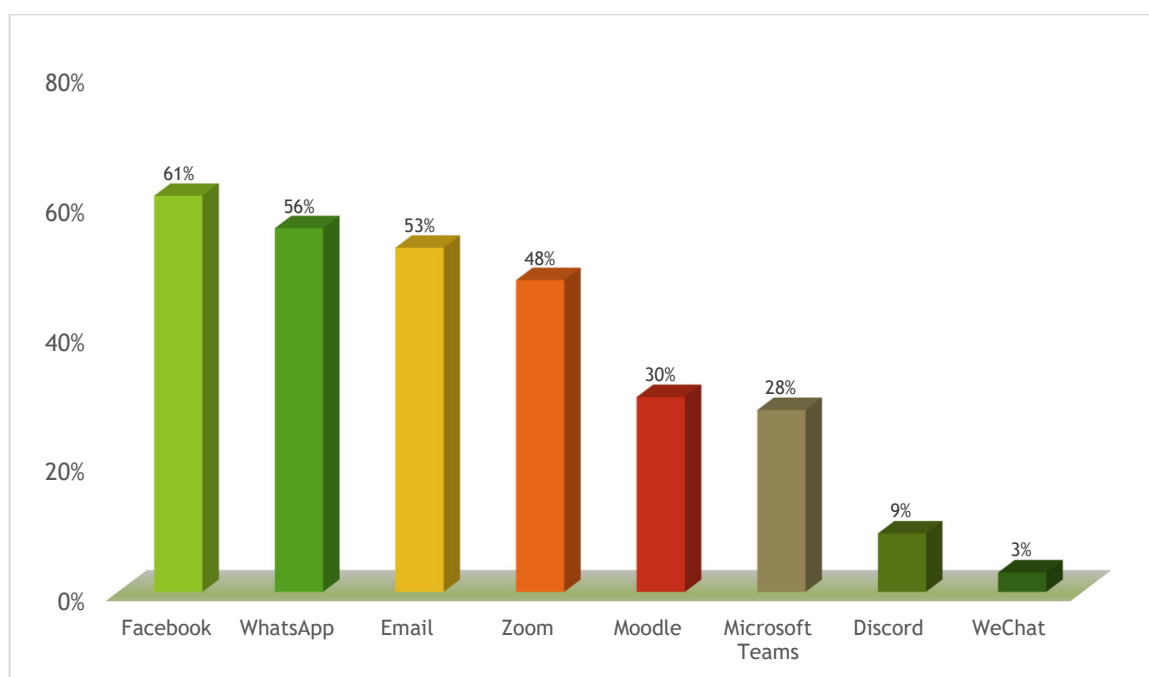
7   Changes to Class Rep System Due to Covid-19

The COVID-19 pandemic and resulting disruption to university life consequently impacted on the Class Rep system in a variety of ways. The survey this year therefore asked a number of questions to understand how this affected Class Reps.

7.1   Communication with Classmates & Reps

With the lack of face-to-face contact, Facebook, WhatsApp and email were the most common methods used by Class Reps during the pandemic to communicate with their classmates and gather information around any issues they may have. Facebook was perceived as the most effective way to communicate (44%) followed by email (17%):

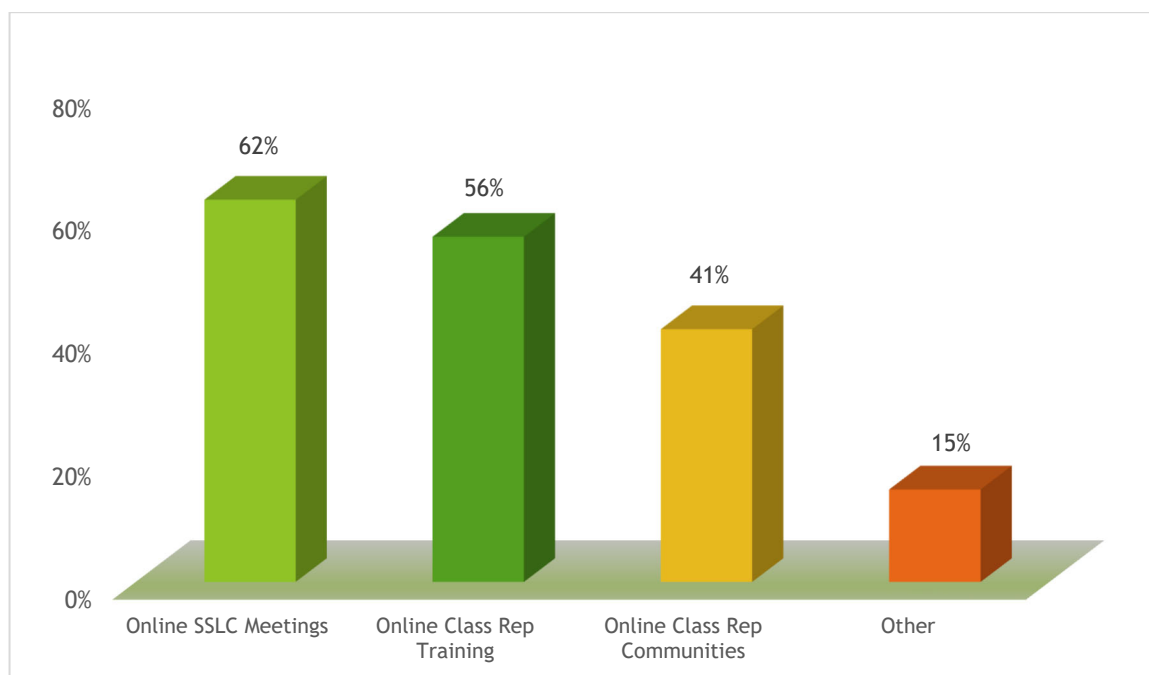**Figure 7-1: Digital Communication with Classmates**

Base=735

In addition, 56% of respondents also participated in online Class Reps groups / networks and over two-thirds (67%) found such groups useful / very useful.

7.2   Sustainability of Changes to the Class Rep System

As there has been several changes across 2020-2021 due to Covid 19, Class Reps were asked which changes they would like to see continue once face-to-face teaching resumed.

Nearly two-thirds of Class Reps would like online SSLC meetings to continue and over half (56%) requested that online class rep training continued.

arranged in the beginning with their classmates. This would have also helped introduce the concept of a Class Rep and made for easier communication throughout the year.

- **More Support for Those Studying In Different Time Zones**

  Students and Class Reps residing outside the UK of course had the additional issue of time zones to deal with. Respondents were keen to highlight the impact of such isolation on mental health and – for some – little additional support was available.

- **A Direct Line of Communication to Class Rep**

  For some Class Reps – the ability to set up a social media platform just for their Class and issues would have helped them in their role however they found it difficult to obtain a full email list of their classmates.

- **Additional SRC support to Raise Awareness of Class Reps**

  A great number of the online comments referred to difficulties gathering information from classmates around any issue they may be having without the face-to-face contact and informal discussion which would otherwise happen. In addition – in many cases – their course peers had no knowledge of the Class Rep and their role.

- **Clearer Communication Regarding Meetings**

  In some cases Class Reps had limited time to prepare for an SSLC meeting due to lack of advanced timetabling. At other times Class Reps were unsure if they were to attend such meetings or whether it should fall to another Rep.

- **Access to Previous Issues / Areas of Concern**

  For some Class Reps the lack of knowledge around what issues had been raised / actioned /taken forward previously led to some awkward discussions in meetings. Having access to a 'bank' of areas that had been looked at by other reps in previous years would have been helpful.

Below is a selection of comments around additional support during the pandemic:

"Being a class rep in first year, I had no opportunity to meet my classmates and so getting them to reach out to us was really difficult, it would have been nice if we could have been introduced a little more in the beginning, and had some more support"

"…better communication at all times not use the pandemic as an excuse for things eg coursework being returned late…"

"Class rep meetings could have been in smaller sub groups to give more time for an individual years concerns to be raised…"

Class reps were kept very well informed of all support provided, which was plenty, so in my opinion no other support was necessary.

"Clearer communication - I had not known about this survey until the reminder email. Also, there was quite a bit of confusion with emails regarding some meetings or conferences that many class reps were unsure if they were required to attend…"

"Communication was often reliant on email and few reps I spoke with had knowledge of the Microsoft teams group. Mass communication from school reps needs to be more targeted in this regard…"

"Confirm the role as a class representative for the second semester through email. Assuring that the class rep is aware they have been selected (I have volunteered as a class rep and was not aware I was successful for over a month)…"

"Continually make other students aware of who to go to for help, make email addresses known to other students so that they can get in touch easily…"

"Emails received about class rep things were sometimes far too long and it was unclear whether they were relevant at times or just for specific schools/groups. There was a very long thread about a moved meeting once which turned out to be just for one subject. There needs to be a clearer guidelines for sending/using mass emails…"

"Establish better networks online for us to reach students to ask for their feedback. Everyone was very isolated this year and it made it very difficult to find opportunities to talk to people and find out how they were feeling about courses…"

"First year student representatives like myself do not know/ have not met their classmates. It could have been useful to take this into account in the class-rep training, or to give some kind of advice on how to effectively reach out to students online…."

"Giving the difficult times, the SRC did the best that could do"

"I think that the University and the SRC did a great job supporting student reps!"
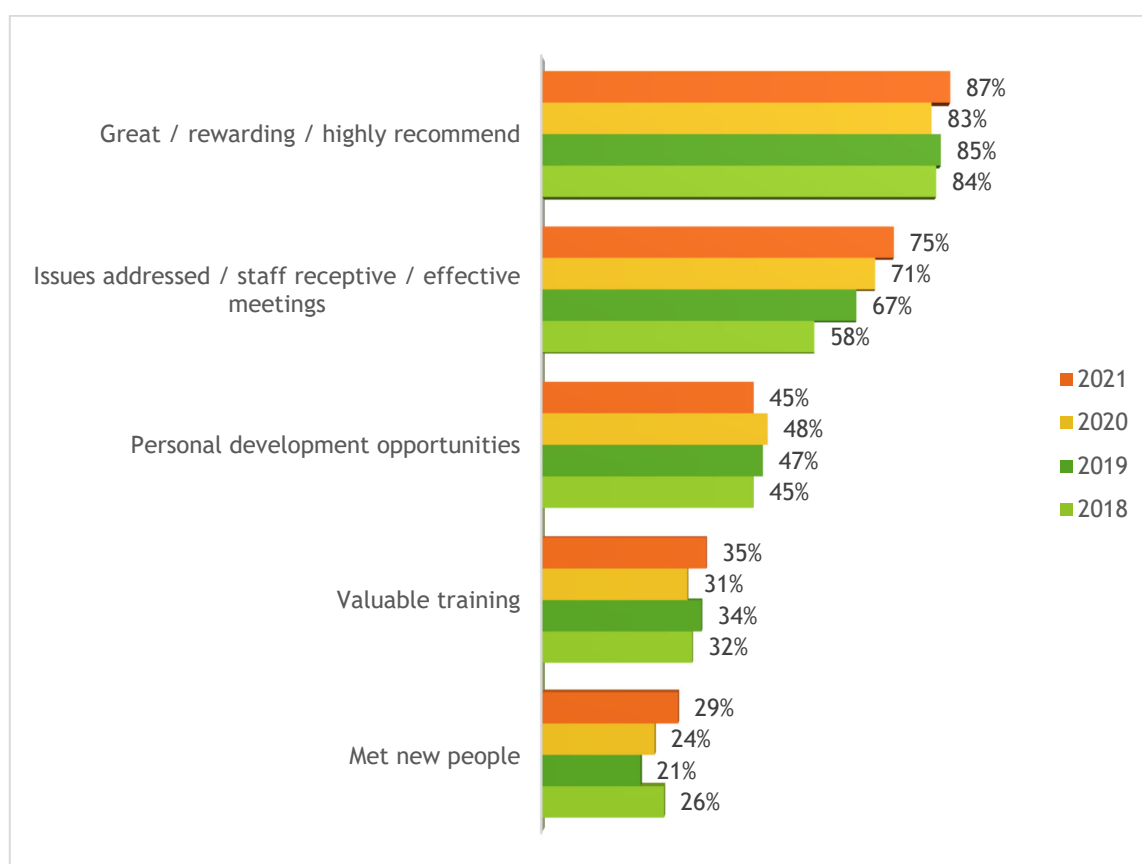
8   The Class Representative Experience

As previous years the respondents were asked to provide any further comments about their experience as a Class Rep. In total 682 Class Reps provided more verbatim detail about their experience in an open-ended text box. All comments were coded thematically to enable clearer analysis and the most popular responses calculated and two charts developed – one looking at the most recorded positive experiences and a separate chart looking at the more negative experiences that were mentioned most often.

Many of the comments this year highlighted the additional challenges of remote learning due to COVID-19 restrictions, however for most it was still a rewarding experience and most comments recorded were extremely positive in tone with increases shown across most areas.

So – despite the move to online learning and meetings – this year's Class Reps have still overwhelmingly had mostly positive comments to make about their experience:

Figure 8-1 Class Reps Positive Comments

Base (all comments)= 683(2021); 675 (2020); 920 (2019); 863 (2018)

Below some comments received have been replicated:

"As expected, there was a significantly lower input from peers in 5th year compared to other years as a lot of assessment/coursework structure was familiar and didn't need explaining…"

"Being a class rep allowed me to become involved in university life while studying online…"

"Being a Class Rep has been a wonderful experience. During the pandemic and the hard times that we all face, I still managed to meet more people virtually and most importantly to listen, help and discuss any issues with my fellow classmates. I had very good communication with my classmates and I was there for them, whenever needed. Any questions or concerns they had for the course I was there to solve them, as I raised the concerns to the meetings and emailed the lectures when needed…"

"Being a Class Rep has helped me develop a better understanding of the course structure and what lecturers expect from students. I have the feeling that I have contributed to the development of the course and the satisfaction of my classmates. It was challenging to live this experience during a pandemic, but I learnt a lot…"

"Being a class rep, it's felt great, as I managed to help other people via Facebook and Zoom, with their queries, and sometimes personal (non-serious) issues. It's given me the opportunity to understand some of the students within the course, simply by listening, and acting on their issues - whether or not I need to email the course convenor etc. It's been a good year, as I felt this role is a must within the current climate.…"
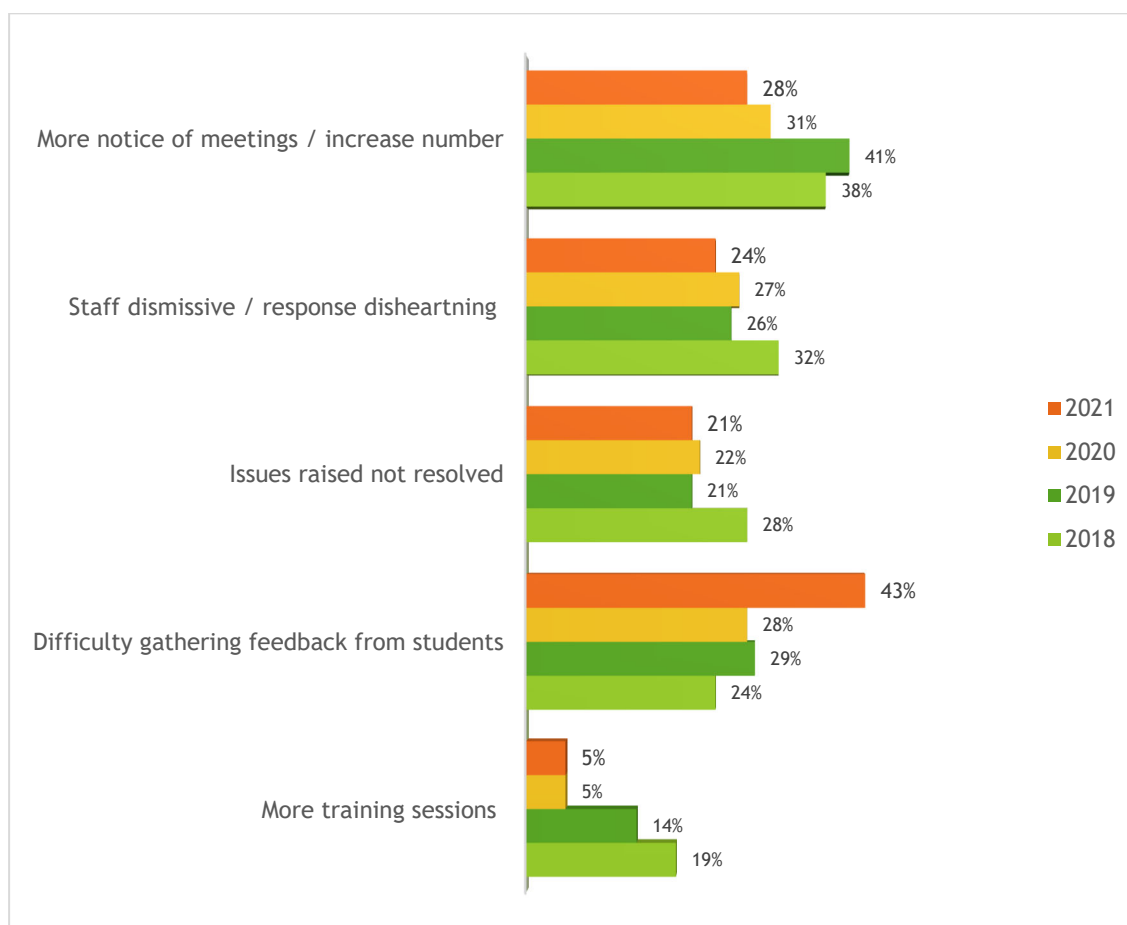
"Being a first year class rep was challenging in these circumstances, but I tried my best to help my fellow students. Help from staff was vital, I would not have managed to get student's voices heard without this help…"

"Being class rep enabled me to be well-trusted amongst my peers, and I was able to collate issues that they had. However, it would have been nice to discuss the matters face to face instead of online. Nonetheless, I had a good experience, and I could see how university staff worked hard to keep us in the loop re changes in the course structure due to the pandemic. Highly appreciated…"

"I appreciate the time and effort that was put in by professors and leaders within the school to accommodate to the needs and concerns of me and my course mates, especially during such a hectic year full of uncertainties…"

"I feel that we were able to bridge the communication gap between lecturers and students a lot better this year with access to Teams as students were able to voice their opinions en masse through Teams channels…"

Some negative comments were also recorded this year but a much lower level and it would appear that Class Reps – on the whole – had less issues about their experience – even during a pandemic. The numbers concerned about the lack of notice of meetings, or the number of meetings has dropped considerably as has the previous demands for more training sessions. The only area that recorded an increase was around difficulty gathering feedback from students across the year.

Figure 8-2 Class Reps Negative Comments

"Due to this year's online teaching, I found it harder to reach out to students to get feedback. The surveys we sent out were relatively successful, but it is not the same as talking to classmates face-to-face. I think this will be the biggest benefit for class reps when teaching goes back to normal….."

"Free sandwiches and chatting with staff is a big part of why I volunteer as a rep. I missed the informal nature of it this year over Zoom…....."

"Harder to interact with the course cohort and understand issues as people had to actively reach out etc. So had to make more effort to let people know we were there to help etc. But that was due to transfer online - should be better next year…"

"I felt quite useless as it was impossible for me to contact the students via email or Social Media. The only way of getting feedback was from my first course's group. I was told by other Class Reps that they had a way of contacting their peers through email (they had a list of emails from their course administrator). I asked my course administrator (the previous one) but she told me they were not allowed to share that info with me for confidentiality…"

I think it was difficult with the online format of teaching this year to be sure you were reaching as many students as possible when asking for feedback because different people engaged to various degrees with Moodle forums, Facebook chats, Surveys etc.

"It was a rather difficult year and most issues raised this year came from a direct result of the pandemic and lock down situation. The major changes to the course caused a lot of issues for both staff and students. Hopefully future years won't have to deal with this. Everyone was perfectly understanding and it was easy to gather and report the issues raised by our fellow students.."

It was harder to gather feedback via online sources, than it was last year, when we could do it in person.

A full list of these comments is included within the data file in a separate appendix.

9   Conclusions & Recommendations

This is the sixth year of the Glasgow University Class Rep Survey and many of the key trends are now clear. In addition, the impact of COVID-19 - albeit challenging for the Class Reps - did not dent what was a positive experience for most in the survey.

However, the response rate does continue to decline year on year and it is clear that Class Reps who have previously completed training and / or completed the survey in a previous year see no requirement to repeat the survey. It is recommended that communications emphasise the importance of completing the survey every year to ensure a complete picture across the whole Class Rep cohort.

The number of Class Reps being elected to the role has begun to increase in number with a corresponding drop in those being the only volunteer – indicating increased appeal in the role. Again, it will be important for the SRC to keep raising awareness of the posts and the transferable skills that come from being in the role.

Across the last five years, the reputation of the SRC Class Rep training has gone from strength to strength. In 2016 68% thought that the training had prepared them well for the role and this has risen to an astonishing 89% of Class Reps in 2020. Despite the move to online training, most of the Class Reps still reported that the training had prepared them well and - in addition - many wished the online training option to continue. Having an online option whilst face-to-face training is conducted is recommended going forward.

Over the years of the number of respondents who find it easy to raise issues at the SSLC has increased. This year – again although the meetings were online - the majority still found it easy to raise issues. Where the minority still found some of these meetings challenging this could be assisted with additional advice around gathering data from students and the benefit of one-to-one meetings (online) with staff where necessary. Indeed it is clear University staff were happy to communicate with Class reps outwith SSLC meetings this year.

As mentioned last year – and still holds relevant - the Class Rep training and subsequent role's most effective legacy is in the development of a plethora of soft skills which it is clear are highly valued by the respondents. Communication and listening skills, confidence building, and negotiation and diplomacy all greatly enhance employment prospects. Additional comments left by Class Reps in the survey indicate that these skills are something that the Class Reps appreciate and attaining such a level of accomplishment during their tenure they believe has brought an added value to the role. Again – this is the strongest message to send out when recruiting Class Reps.

With the lack of face-to-face contact, Facebook, WhatsApp and email became much more important methods during the pandemic to communicate with their classmates. However, there was challenges for some in obtaining email addresses of their cohort. Although many acknowledged this was due to data protection issues it was clear this resulted in frustration for many Class Reps. The SRC should take the lead here to find a way round this issue to ensure a smoother method of communication between Class Reps and their classmates.

The pandemic also allowed Class Rep online groups and networks to flourish and indeed many also found online SSLC meetings and training to be a positive way forward with many requesting that these continue in some form when face-to-face teaching resumes. Taking into account suggestions made by respondents around their new online role the SRC should explore how they can include such virtual elements into their training in the future.

Finally – as mentioned in previous years - it is again recommended that the SRC provide clear and continuing communications to ensure all Class Reps are aware of their ongoing support to assist those who may find any aspect of their role difficult as there are still a large number who have no other contact with the SRC even though they have found aspects of their role challenging.

This year the survey strongly indicates that Class Representative amended virtual model at Glasgow University still worked well and the majority of Class Reps – although finding the whole year more challenging – still cited the experience worthwhile and rewarding.