

CUSU Class-lists Publication Consultation

Summary of findings:

The survey proved popular with over 600 responses in total. Between 400 and 567 respondents specified either agreement or disagreement with each of the nine questions. The following conclusions, bearing in mind the caveats in the methods section below, are as follows:

1. Public class-lists do not motivate students to work harder.
2. Overall, students like the tradition of Senate House publication but would prefer to receive their results privately.
3. Students are very interested in how others have fared and even more interested in the proportions of students receiving particular classes.
4. Overwhelmingly, there is sympathy for those students who find public class-lists distressing.
5. Students should have the option, without providing a reason, to have their name omitted from a class-list.

Therefore, the following actions are recommended:

- 1. Exam results should be released on CamSIS before being posted at the Senate House.**
- 2. Any student should have the option to have their name omitted without specifying a reason.**

Ant Bagshaw

CUSU Education Officer

25/11/08



Survey methods:

Between 22/10/08 and 24/10/08, I solicited answers to the following questions from a network of student Faculty Representatives and College JCR/MCR Academic Officers (or equivalent):

1. Do you have an opinion on the current way that class-lists are published? Do you have particular experiences (positive or negative) of the current process?
2. An increasing number of students are asking for their names to be removed from class-lists. Do you feel that students should have the right to have their names removed from the public class-lists? Did you know that this procedure was available to students?
3. To minimise the distress to a minority of students, every student should receive their results via CamSIS (or other online method) and the University should stop publishing class-lists outside the Senate House. Do you agree with this statement?

I received thirty responses of great divergence; the respondents fell almost equally between those who were staunchly in favour of the current system and those who wanted a complete revision. From these qualitative answers, I constructed nine statements to form a survey for a wider audience.

The preface to the survey was:

How strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements? Please only complete this survey if you have completed a Tripos examination for which the results were published outside the Senate House.

These questions were:

1. Public class-lists motivate me to work harder.
2. I like the tradition of class-lists publication outside Senate House.
3. I would rather receive my results privately.
4. I am interested in how other named individuals have done.
5. I am interested in the proportion of people who have got a particular class.
6. I sympathise with people who find public class-lists distressing.
7. Every student should be able to have their name removed from a public class-list without specifying a reason.
8. Only students with a specific reason should be allowed to have their names removed.
9. It is ok to publish class-lists at a later date in the University Reporter as this doesn't distress anyone.

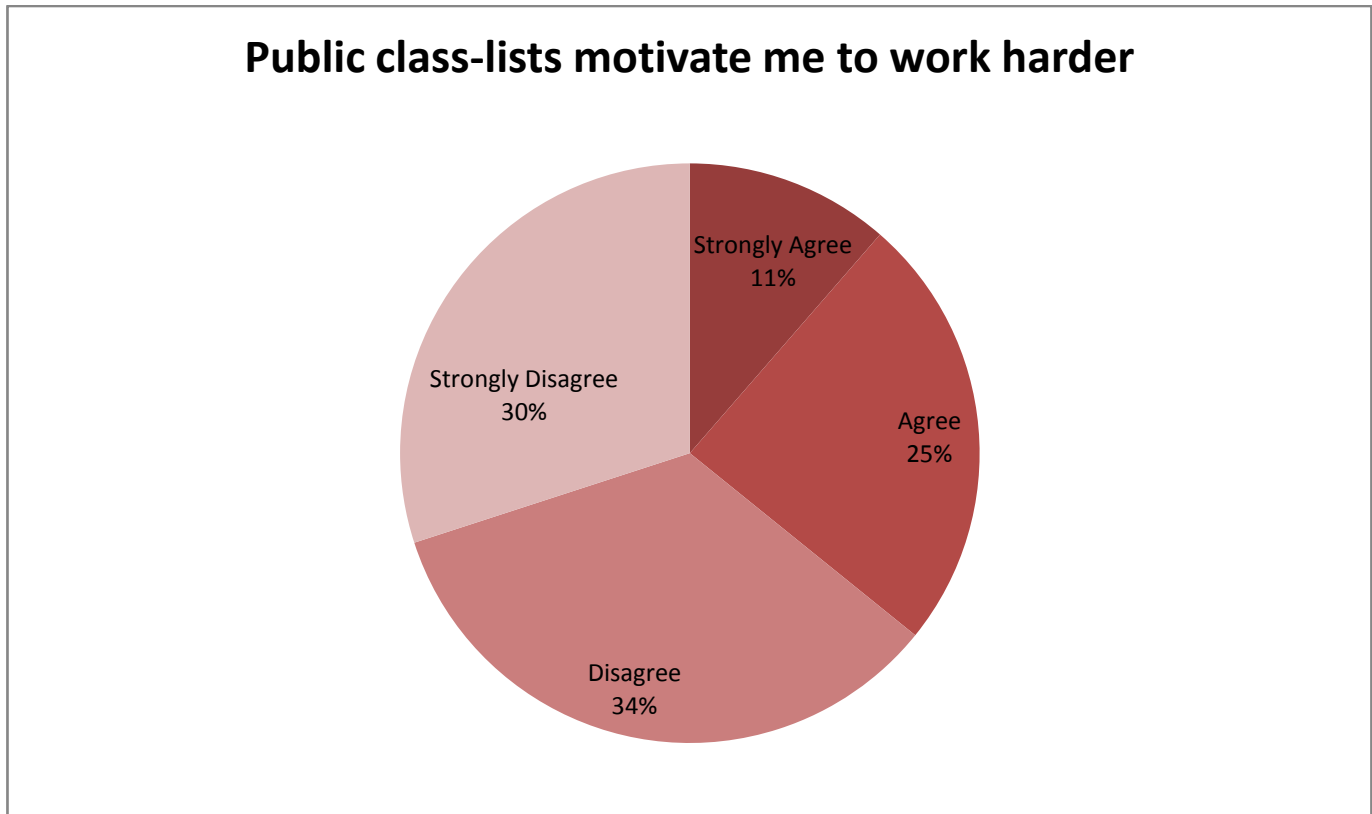
Respondents were also able to submit a free-text response with further comments; about 20% of respondents chose to do this.

Between 09:00 on 15/11/08 and 09:00 on 19/11/08, 606 responses to the survey were received. Responses were solicited by email sent to all students in the University.

Note of caution:

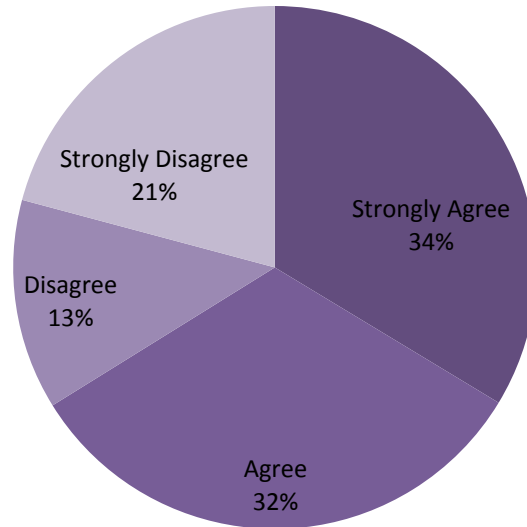
The survey was not Raven protected and there is no way to ensure that the responses are unique. However, I received a copy of each submission by email and did not notice patterns of repeated submission of the same answer set.

Presented below is a chart of the proportions agreeing/disagreeing with each statement followed by a selection of appropriate free-text responses – the text examples are not a representative sample but a selection for information.



- I think it contributes to an overly competitive attitude amongst students, rather than helping each other during exam term
- Class lists encourage a more competitive atmosphere. They place undue importance and significance on the results.
- I think it is unfair, pressurizing and completely out of order that our names and grades are published and stuck up outside Senate House. However interesting it is to know how your peers have done in the exams, it is humiliating for people who haven't done as well and adds to the pressure every Cambridge student feels his/herself under. We are highly-motivated and passionate enough about our academic work to want to do well without being intimidated into it.
- It's a social event - you go down with your friends to see how you've all done. If you can't make it down, your friends can let you know how you did. It encourages you to work harder, and it's a really nice tradition.

I like the tradition of class-lists publication outside Senate House

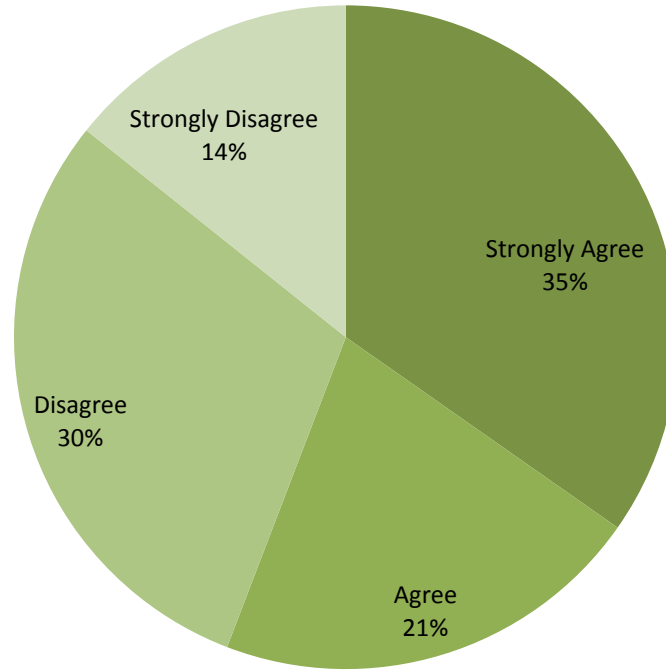


- I really feel the tradition should be kept. It's only fair that one has the opportunity to see how other individuals have done, allows for a benchmark to keep working, and the names should stay, rather than just anonymous results, since this allows for self comparison with someone who throughout the year seemed to be at the same level. Having been in schools in both a highly competitive environment, and then one which lacks significantly in motivation to do better and strive to achieve high results, but rather lays too much importance on those who are struggling, (or claim to), I can say for sure that the former is the sort of place I would much rather be in. It is a much more healthy and lively environment which is required for an institute which bases its foundations and reputation on academic excellence.
- It's an archaic and quite unnecessary ritual that needs to be done away with.
- Everything is fine, leave it alone. On a more practical note, people are quite busy having fun in the days after exams so it's helpful to be able to send a friend to find your result out. Those who wish to get low classes no doubt don't mind getting them: they chose how to spend their time throughout the year. I would be as proud to have my gentleman's third displayed outside the Senate House as to have a scholars first. If Admissions Tutors are admitting students incapable of doing well, the answer is not to mitigate the consequences of failure but to stop admitting those who are going to fail. If everyone is capable of doing well, then no-one should be ashamed if they choose not to.
- Everything is fine, stop fussing.
- The Senate House class-list is a tradition and to let people opt out is tantamount to making the whole thing pointless. It allows everyone the same privilege of know how well others have done, and the same disadvantage that everybody else knows how they did. There really is no reason to abandon this practice, as those who have done well should be proud of their efforts, and those who haven't should have worked harder in the first place. Granted some people may have had personal issues and not

achieved what they might have hoped, but that's just bad luck and part of life. They shouldn't be ashamed of their problem, and indeed the subsequent academic disappointment. There are far worse things than life than failing an exam, and if people are so embarrassed by the list then it's their problem not the list's.

- At the end of the day, class marks are entirely individual and so it doesn't help/encourage to compare yourself to other people in your year as you can't affect their degree mark, and they can't affect yours. Therefore, publication has more negative aspects to positive ones.
- Every student in Cambridge has had their results published in this way for the last however many years, and I think it would be unfair to those before us to change the system now. It's a fact of Cambridge life - deal with it.
- Keep the Part II and III Maths results being read out at Senate House!
- It's tradition - stop finding problems where there are none! It has worked for longer than you can probably remember, and will continue to work long after you have left!
- The way the third and fourth year maths results are given out is an absolute disgrace. I chose not to attend, but a colleague of mine went, expecting a first and had to wait through two sets of names before his name came up in the 2ii list. This is not a light issue: this student shut himself off and stopped looking after himself completely. The current system does not help Cambridge's problem of stress and depression in its undergraduates. The natural interest people have in their peers' results is unavoidable but should not be encouraged by publishing results. Post-exam competitiveness does not help the majority of students. CUSU needs to act to change this system. Thanks for giving us the opportunity to feedback here.
- The practice is an affront to privacy, and I would strongly question any constructive purpose arguments (could anyone really present one without sounding ridiculous?) served by a "right to know" the grades of other individuals. Those in favour are guilty of promoting a culture of distasteful nosiness. Tradition is also a poor excuse, as anybody who has read Hobsbawm will understand. A strong collective interest case can be justified for knowing the proportion of people receiving the respective degree classes, but do we really need to know identities?
- I think publishing class-lists is a tradition that has its pros and cons as many other things do. However, I do think that the system could be improved. Followings are some of my suggestions:
1) It could be continued but in order for not causing unnecessary stress to anyone and at the same time be able to motivate people doing well. People who do particularly well could be asked whether or not they want their results to be published i.e. top 5 or top 10 etc... 2) I agree that everyone should have the right to keep their results private. It's not to do with stress but it's more of a human right to be able to say yes or no to how their things being treated (especially after having worked very hard for them). Thanks for having this survey.

I would rather receive my results privately

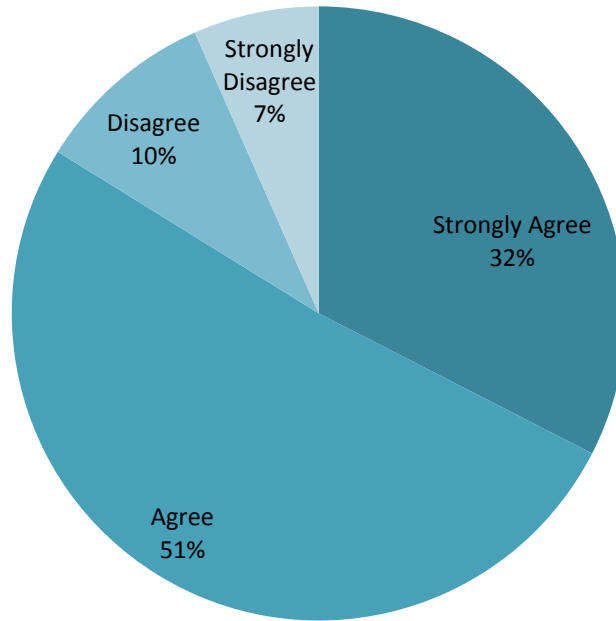


- How about anonymous class-lists using candidate numbers or other forms of identification?
- Why treat academic achievement differently to sport? No-one would object to the results of a race being published, yet academic work has the same elements of "talent + effort = achievement" as sport - so why treat it differently? People shouldn't be taking their work so seriously anyway.
- This isn't about what people like and don't like! Privacy is paramount to my eyes - thanks for the survey.
- I also find it inappropriate that class lists are often published in departments. I feel that the public class lists do create an environment in which competition between students overshadows collaboration and exploration, which is a pity.
- CamSIS is great for exam results as can see them in your room without other people seeing your reaction, but sometimes CamSIS results don't match those outside Senate House, which is very bad as if you've seen your results on CamSIS, you're unlikely to go to Senate House 'just to make sure'
- This is a matter I (and many others) feel strongly about. The class lists are an integral part of what studying at Cambridge is (and always has been) about. It is a privilege to study here; and our performance is necessarily a matter of 'public' responsibility to our University, our College, our teachers and our fellow students. Cambridge students should be able to cope with exam pressure: for they have already proved as much by gaining their place. For the small minority who unfortunately place too much emphasis on the importance of exam results, there are mechanisms in place to help them. Perhaps such mechanisms should be strengthened; perhaps we need a cultural shift away from the devastating work ethic that 'success' is what defines us in life; but these are not reasons to abolish the class lists.

The University and Colleges are corporate communities where the achievements of each person should matter to each other member. Our education is fundamentally a community activity. Abolishing the class lists would be a terrible step towards the privatisation and trivialisation of our studies.

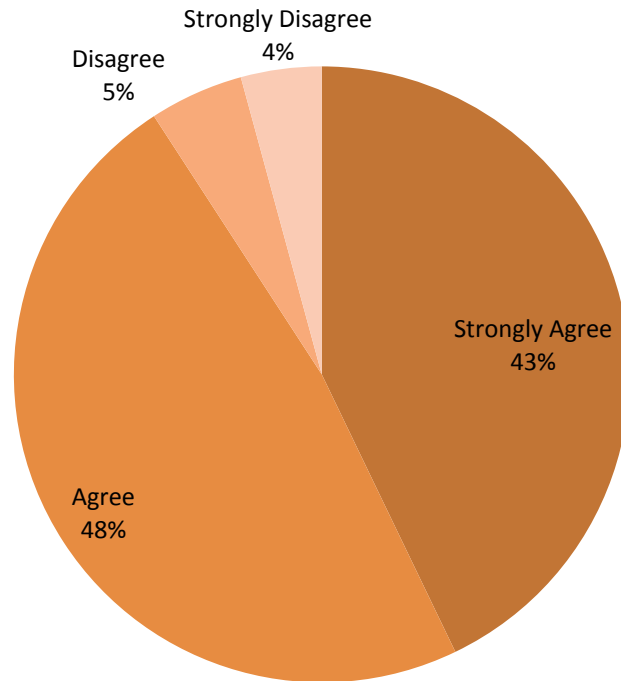
- It would nice to get an email notification of your results before the list. It can't be pleasant to be the last person of your cohort to know you got a third.
- I don't object to the class-lists. What I dislike is the inexact science of receiving results. Students are told a day when they are to receive results, often not even morning/afternoon. I would find it a much better system if every student was informed of their result by email - either a personal email, or an email informing students that results can be seen from a particular university website (hidden behind camtools/camcours/camsis?). Camsis results are not always released at the same time/reliable.
- The promulgation of exam results is anachronistic and unnecessary. How one does in exams is a personal matter and the decision should be left to students to whom, or whether, they publicise their results. As far as I'm aware no other universities in other English speaking countries publicise results. Why Cambridge should be different is beyond me.
- I do not agree with the public class listings, I do not think it is fair that everyone else is able to see your result, possibly before you even know yourself, if you wish to know what someone else achieved you can ask, it is not necessary for everyone to be able to see.

I am interested in how other named individuals have done



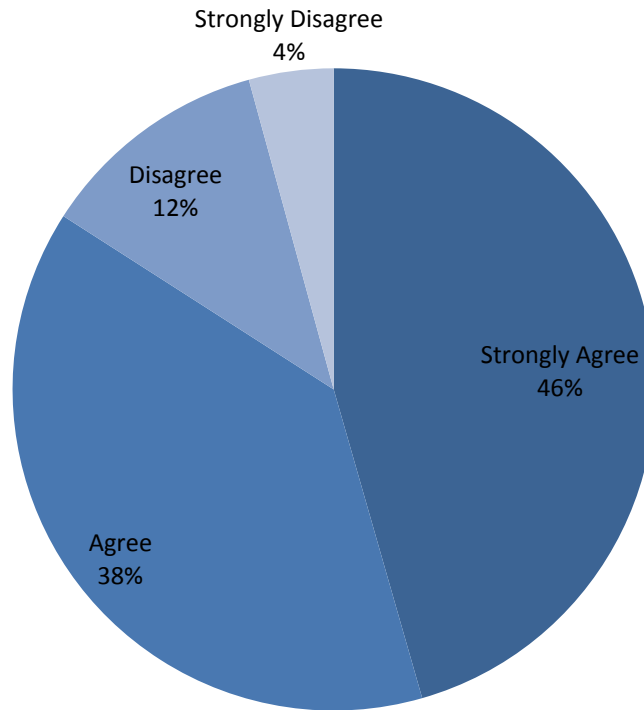
- The ranking of students according to their results should not occur if the group considered is particularly small. I have previously been ranked within a group of 7, where all those in the group knew each other. This can cause unnecessary stress for those who did well but came low down in the ranking as well as lead to unproductive competition in a group in which group discussion and working together helps to improve students' performance. Although a student's ranking is not published on the class-lists, and is therefore only brought to their attention through information received privately, this should be taken into consideration if CUSU is looking to reduce stress for those receiving results.
- Just publish the firsts.
- Although it is interesting to see how others have done, and how you yourself have done in comparison, this is purely from a 'nosey' point of view. It would be much fairer to ask others to share their results as is done at GCSE and A Levels, than force them to in public. Good luck on getting things changed.

I am interested in the proportion of people who have got a particular class



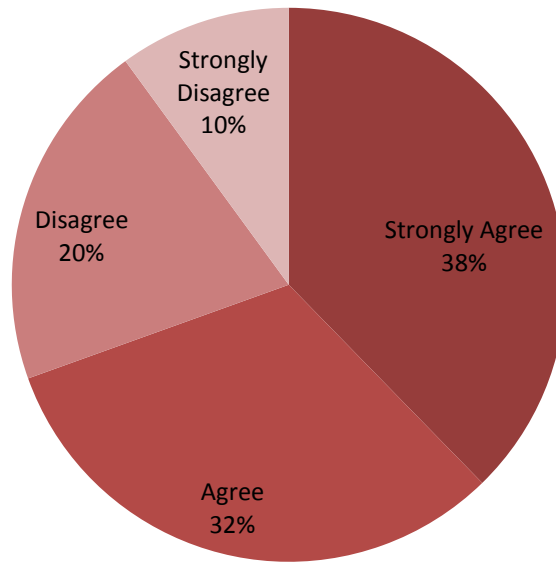
- Maybe one could publish the class lists by candidate number rather than name, so you can see how many people have got which mark, but not who they are.
- Names on senate house lists could be made optional whilst keeping candidate numbers.
- Would be good to be able to find out position within the year from your DOS - currently this information is not disclosed, although many DOSes bend the rules if asked.
- Stressful though they are, university examinations are not a private matter. Transparency in reporting results is an important facet of the examination process because it means that students are not simply given an uncontextualized mark but are able to assess their performance relative to their peers, including relative to the performance of other individuals or groups of. There is, unfortunately, no way to give this context without distressing some, but this is a price worth paying because a class mark shorn of the context of peer group performance is effectively meaningless.
- It would be good to still know how you had done in relation to others but without naming and shaming everyone.

I sympathise with people who find public class-lists distressing



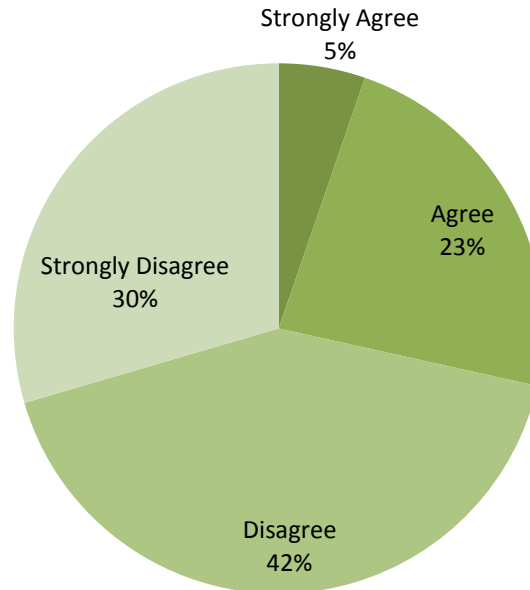
- Interested in other people, but distressing for those who have not done well. Rather than incentivising people, it has the potential to paralyse them.
- It is horrible if you have been very ill but still sit exams and pass them but get looked down upon by others when they see the list. There is a lot of talking behind backs especially when they are not aware that you sat and passed exams when told you were too ill to sit them. You are constantly asked why you did so badly and some people stop talking to you! Of course there are supportive friends but overall I strongly disagree with public class-lists and results should never be posted outside the Senate House
- Anyone who has not passed the year is not put on the class list, so those who stand to be the most embarrassed and upset by others knowing their results is not brought to the public's attention anyway.
- Why not publish only the names of the people who got firsts at the Senate House? i.e. everyone gets their results privately but only those who do really well have it presented to the world. Makes them feel special but equally doesn't cause distress for those who, for whatever reason, didn't do as well as they would have liked. Personally, I didn't much care that people saw my results, but I had friends who were really upset by everyone else knowing.
- I received a poor class in my Part I exam this year, and did not feel upset by it being published. The publishing of the list was so far removed from my mind during exams that it had no adverse effect whatsoever.
- Why change a system that has worked for hundreds of years because of some cry babies?

Every student should be able to have their name removed from a public class-list without specifying a reason



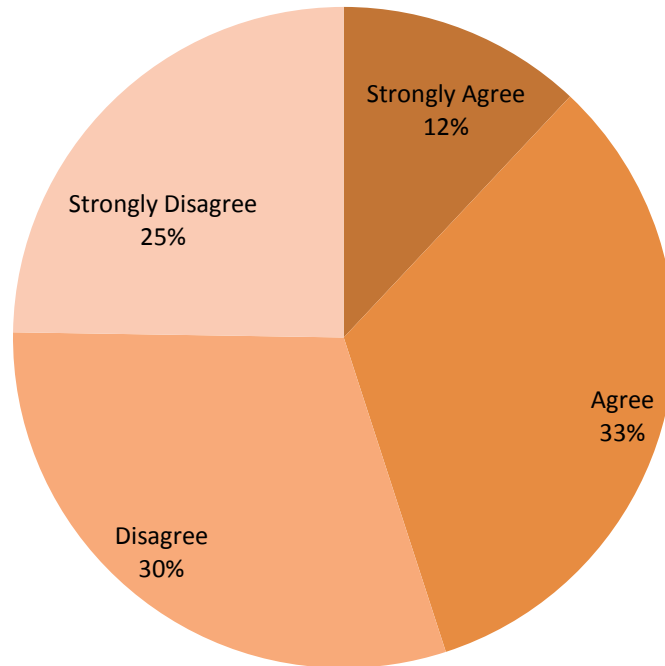
- I believe that people should be able to opt out.
- If students are able to remove their names from a class list those who don't do so may be seen as arrogant. There might well be a situation in which everyone removed their name because it was seen as safer than not doing so.
- I don't care if people know what I got and I don't really mind other people knowing. I do want to know how others did, my friends, and would find out easily by asking them if class lists were not published. I agree that people should be free to decide whether others should find out how they did.
- While I think that everyone would have a reason to want their name removed, I think probably 'I am terrified of the idea that other people would see how I did' is a reason.

Only students with a specific reason should be allowed to have their names removed



- I'm not sure how big a deal this is/should be. If people have to take these results further into their lives anyway, then discussion of embarrassment on the day is perhaps a relatively trivial issue? Perhaps there is also an argument that we shouldn't pander to the concerns of people who feel intimidated that others could see their results: notwithstanding exceptional cases where there is a reason for a mark not reflecting effort/academic performance, is learning to stand up to your achievements is an important stage in development? If five people are really strongly opposed to the traditional measures, should we change for not wanting to offend people or stick by the original value of having the results posted? That being said, there probably is no original value, but merely tradition (and no other means to display results): I'm not one to argue for the status quo just for the sake of it...
- I think people who feel strongly enough that they want their results removed should be allowed to do this without any reason. For everyone else, the system's fine. I quite like congregating at senate house to see how everyone's done.

It is ok to publish class-lists at a later date in the University Reporter as this doesn't distress anyone



- The last question is odd - surely people who are distressed by the lists at Senate House will find the University Reporter equally upsetting because it's a permanent record that anyone can buy?
- There is no point whatsoever in delaying class publication dates. Those people complaining about results going up at the senate house will equally complain about results going in the reporter.
- I don't particularly care about people seeing my results, and I like to be able to see other people's results. However I understand why others wouldn't want that public. As for publishing in the University Reporter if you allow someone to opt out of having their name on a class list, you should let them opt out of this too.
- Don't really understand why they need to be published at later dates seeing as each individual will have received their results and so the only purpose is for people to be nosy.
- Regarding the final question, part of the excitement of the Senate House class lists is that this is the first news that you receive of your results. Also, I don't see why publishing results in the Reporter is less distressing, given that that is also open for everyone to see.
- I strongly believe that people should have the personal choice as to whether their class is disclosed. If people are that interested in what other people have got then they can ask them themselves. Equally, if I want people to know what I got then I should have the right to tell people if and when I want to. Other universities do not have this system - it is out-dated and an unnecessary additional pressure in an already highly stressful environment. The University Reporter ought only to report on the proportion of



grades attained, possibly broken down by college but not individually. I don't think that class lists should be published at Senate House at all.

- There should be a better and more private way of finding out your results than going to the Senate House for those that wish results to be a private matter. Waiting for CamSIS to update, or an email from your DoS can take longer and increase anxiety. Even so, many of my friends decide to wait as they find the idea of walking up to the Senate House to find their names ranked alongside their peers too distressing. It seems to me that the class-lists should go up, if they are going to go up at all, after the individuals have found out their results privately. This way, those interested in looking at numbers or friends' results can find out but later - perhaps the Reporter would be the best place for this.
- Publishing class-lists at later date in university reporter is actually worse. Because a publication is easier to be 'stored' and the information can be more conveniently distributed to the others.