

Newcastle University Council Effectiveness Questionnaire 2014-15

Council agreed in December 2005 that it should conduct annual reviews of its effectiveness. The Leadership Foundation prepared an example effectiveness questionnaire which was used in 2010-11 and 2011-12. It was later decided, that a shorter version should be prepared for 2012-13 and to be used thereafter. It was also agreed that the longer version of the questionnaire should continue to be used to inform the wider review of the effectiveness of governance arrangements which takes place every five years (now every four years).

A governance review has taken place during the 2014-15 academic year and the Leadership Foundation effectiveness questionnaire has been reintroduced to inform this review. The responses to the effectiveness questionnaire, as detailed in this report, will be considered by the Working Group on Governance prior to the circulation of the final Governance Review Report.

The effectiveness questionnaire is divided into six parts:

Part A:	The Enablers of an Effective Council
Part B:	Working Relationships and Boardroom Behaviour
Part C:	The Outcomes Achieved by Council
Part D:	Reflection on Personal Contribution to Council
Part E:	Other Views
Part F:	Looking Forward

Part D was added to the questionnaire this year at the request of the Working Group on Governance and was not included in the original Leadership Foundation effectiveness questionnaire.

In **Question 1** respondents were asked to supply their name, however, all responses have been treated confidentially, and no information about individual returns has been made available to anyone other than Lizzie Taylor, Executive Officer (Governance), who has compiled the report. Neither the Chair of Council nor the Vice-Chancellor has seen the individual survey returns.

17 out of 21 members of Council completed the questionnaire in full compared with 16 out of 20 members in 2014.

Areas where significant changes in responses have been witnessed when the results are compared with those from 2011 and 2012, and also recurrent free text comments are noted below. The responses to the questionnaire are attached in full as an **Appendix**.

Part A – The Enablers of an Effective Council

Section 1: The Commitment to Effective Governance

The proportion of respondents in full agreement with the statement in Question 3 – The quality of interaction between the Chair of Council, the Vice-Chancellor, and the Registrar enables effective governance to occur – has declined from 83.3% in 2012 to 58.8% in 2015. The free text comments suggest there is scope for better definition of the roles of certain committees with Remuneration Committee being singled out in one case. It is suggested that Council should be reminded of the roles on a regular basis.

Section 2: Effective Governance Structures and Processes

70.6% of respondents fully agree that the arrangements for Council and sub-committee meetings are fit for purpose (Q10) an improvement from 50% in 2012. The free text comments suggest that there is scope for greater discussion at Council about the University's educational character and that Council members would benefit from a regular update on this subject. The need to provide Council with stronger academic justification for some investment decisions is raised.

Section 3: Effective Council Membership

There has been an improvement in the proportion of respondents who fully agree that the recruitment and succession planning of Council members is effectively undertaken (Q15) from 38.9% in 2012 to 52.9% in 2015. Free text comments suggest that the recruitment process could be more transparent. Knowledge of estates is identified as an area where expertise is lacking and the need to improve the ethnic diversity of Council is mentioned.

Question 16 – Effective support, induction and ongoing professional development exists for members, and is valued by them – is an area where improvements could be made with only 35.3% of respondents fully agreeing with this statement, a decline from 66.7% in 2012. The free text comments support the need to improve the arrangements for Council briefings.

A third of respondents do not know whether the contribution of all members (including the Chair) is regularly reviewed using processes agreed by Council (Q18). This response and the free text comments imply that this is an area which needs some attention and that more regular reviews of the contribution of individual members of Council should take place.

Section 4: Council commitment to organisational vision, culture and values

The majority of respondents (76.5%) agree that Council is effective in encouraging corporate social responsibility and the achievement of public benefit (Q23). Members of Council are less sure that there is trust and confidence in Council amongst those staff and students who come into contact with it (Q24) with only 29.4% agreeing with this statement and 47.1% saying that they do not know. Free text comments reflect this uncertainty and suggest that more opportunities should be provided for members of Council to interact with staff and students.

Section 5: Effective strategic development and performance measurement

A significant increase has been witnessed in the proportion of respondents who agree that Council actively measures and monitors institutional performance (Q27) with those in full agreement increasing from 33.3% in 2012 to 70.6% in 2015. 70.6% of respondents fully agree that Council ensures that regular performance reviews of the Vice-Chancellor are undertaken by Remuneration Committee (Q30) an increase from only 50% in 2012.

Section 6: Effective Council information and communication

Free text comments suggest that too much information is presented to Council and there is a recommendation that a review of best practice for board communications should take place. Responses to Q36 – that there is effective communication to and from Council both within the institution and also with key stakeholder bodies and the public at large – are varied which suggests that there is a lack of information in this area, a sentiment which is reflected in the free text comments.

Section 7: Future Governance

There is scope to improve the information provided to Council about likely changes in the external environment (Q39) since only 64.7% agree that they receive sufficient information about this, a reduction from 90.9% in 2011. The free text comments suggest that Council would also benefit from further information about the arrangements for academic governance.

Part B – Working Relationships and Boardroom Behaviour

The free text comments in this section are largely positive but the suggestion that the papers submitted to Council should be more focussed and succinct is repeated. It is also proposed that comments and questions should be invited from members of Council after each topic covered in the Vice-Chancellor's business paper.

Part C – The Outcomes Achieved by Council

There has been a significant reduction in the proportion of respondents agreeing that enhanced institutional reputation and competitiveness is being achieved (Q56), from 72.2% in 2012 to 41.2% in 2015. Free text comments on these questions suggest that there is scope to provide members of Council with further information about support for innovation, assurance on academic quality, reputation raising and external opinions.

Part D – Reflection on Personal Contribution to Council

The section invited Council members to reflect on their personal contribution to the work of Council. The majority of respondents feel that they are able to make an effective contribution to Council, although one respondent notes that they would welcome an independent opinion of this. The majority of members feel that their commitment of time to Council is reasonable.

Part E – Other Views

Re-circulation of the new CUC Code of Governance, visit to student residences and teaching spaces and streamlining the agenda are suggested as three methods of improving the effectiveness of Council.

Part F – Looking Forward

A number of respondents suggest that no radical change is necessary to the current governance arrangements but note that the 'Raising the Bar' agenda could present some challenges for the future.

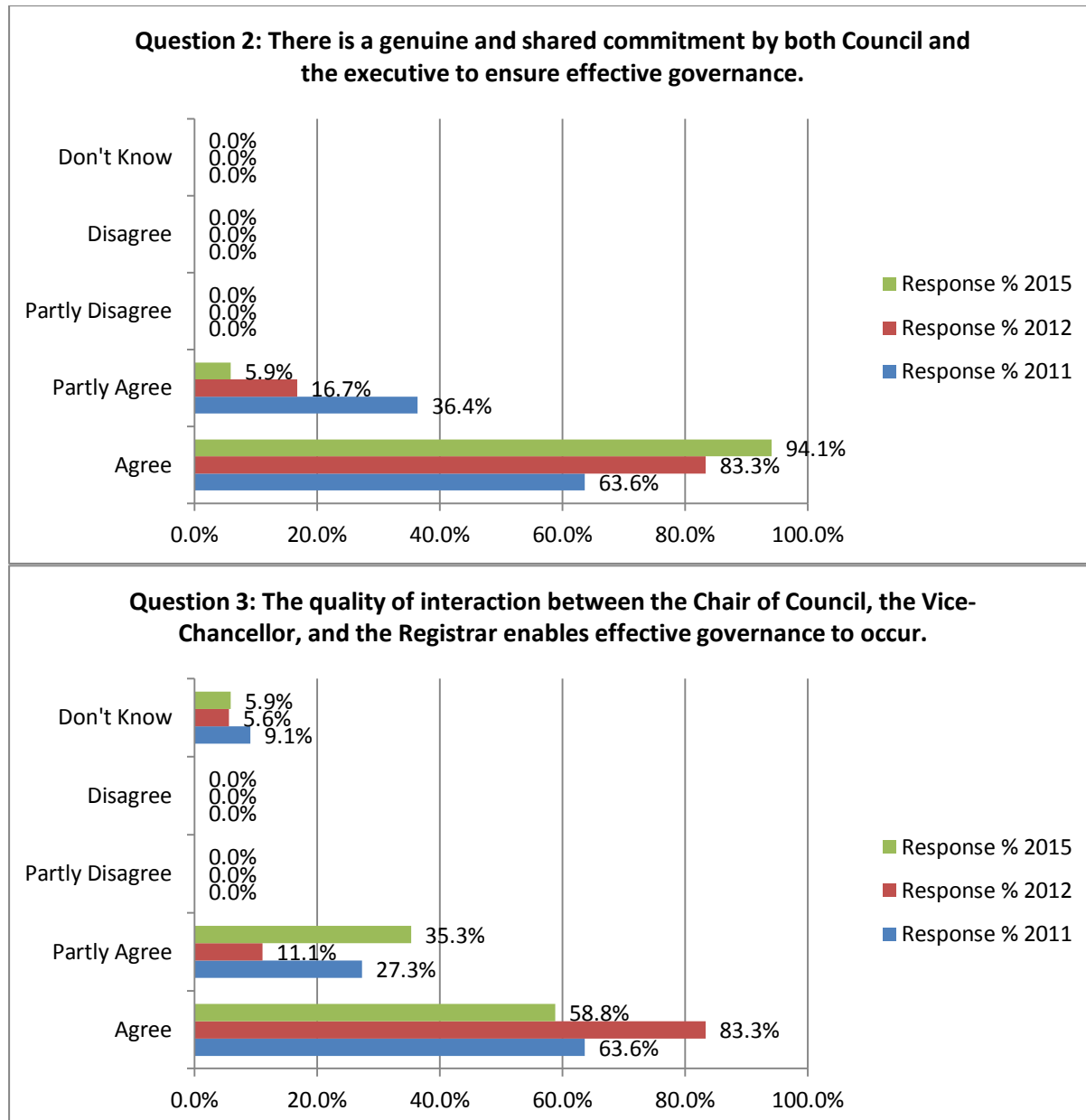
The suggestion that the presentation of information to Council should be reformulated is repeated. Reviewing the actions of competitor institutions and identifying improved methods of keeping Council members up to date with developments is recommended. Providing more opportunities to meet with 'ordinary' academics is a further suggestion.

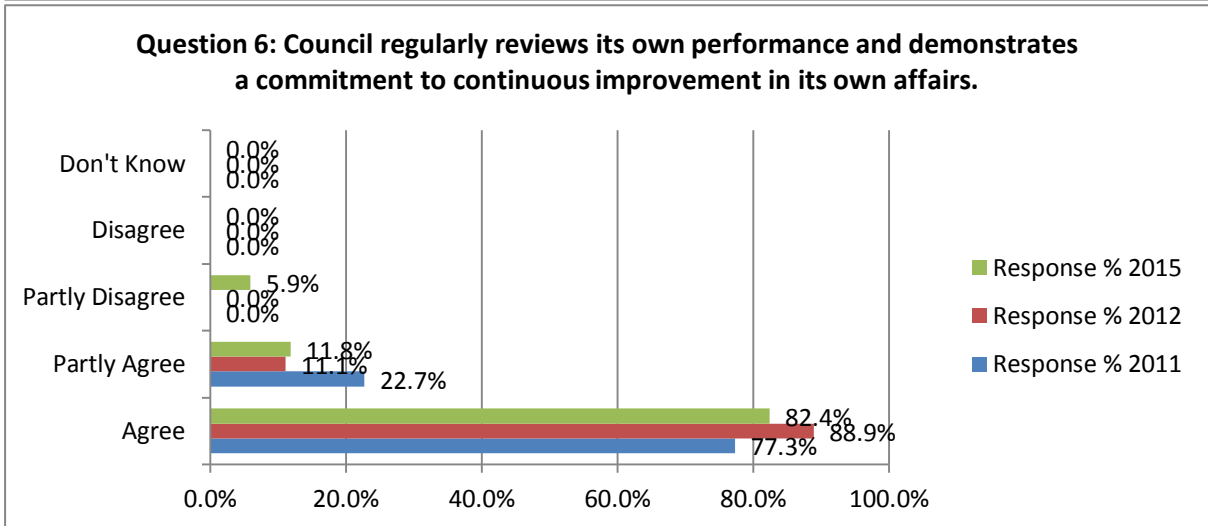
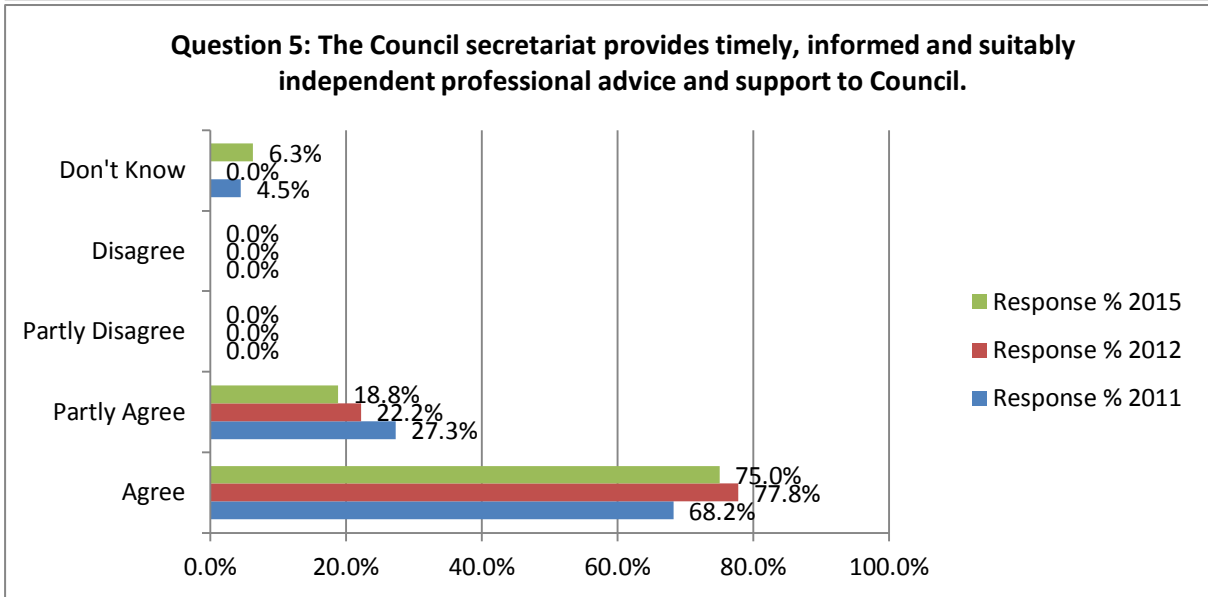
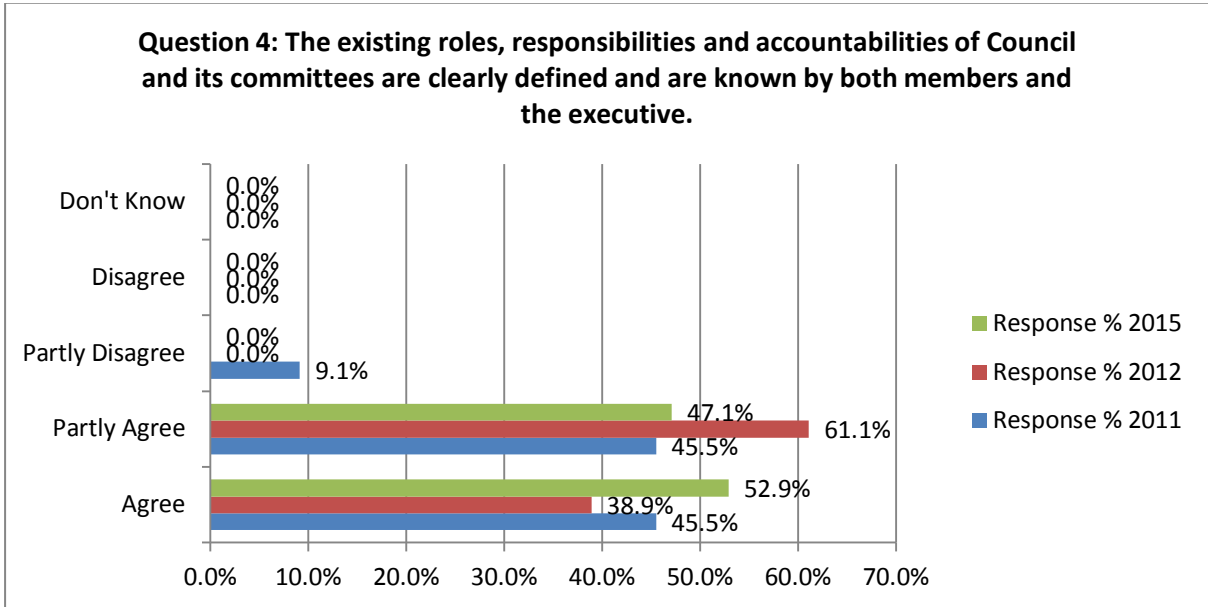
John Hogan
Registrar
19 August 2015

PART A: THE ENABLERS OF AN EFFECTIVE COUNCIL

The questions on the following pages are about the foundations on which Council works, and without these so-called 'enablers' being in place it is highly unlikely that it can be effective in practice.

Section 1: The Commitment to Effective Governance

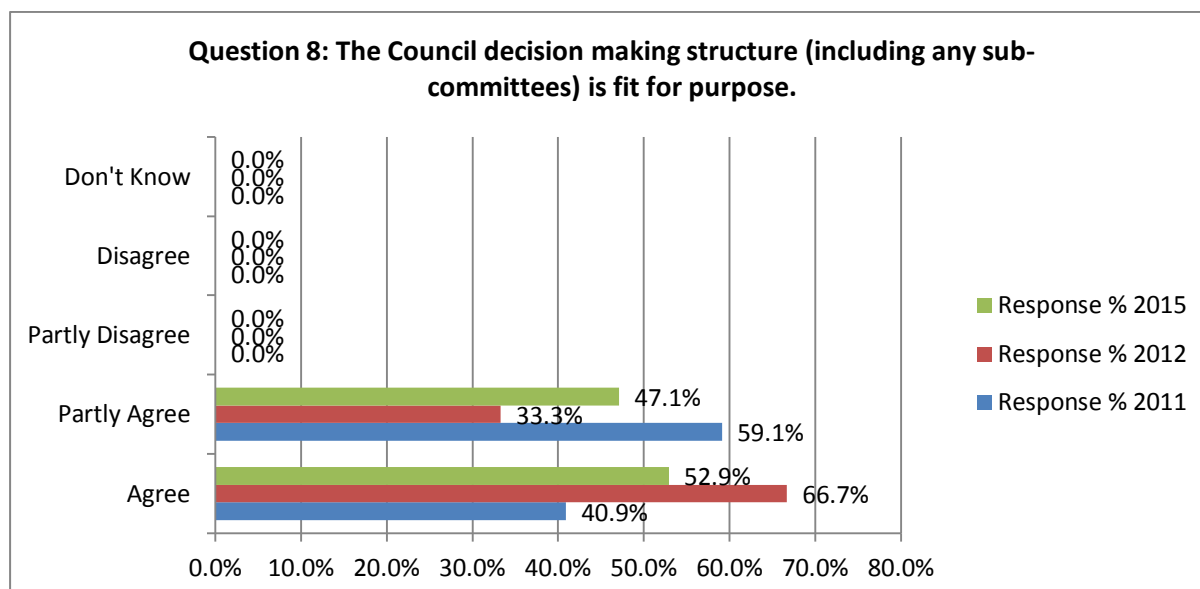




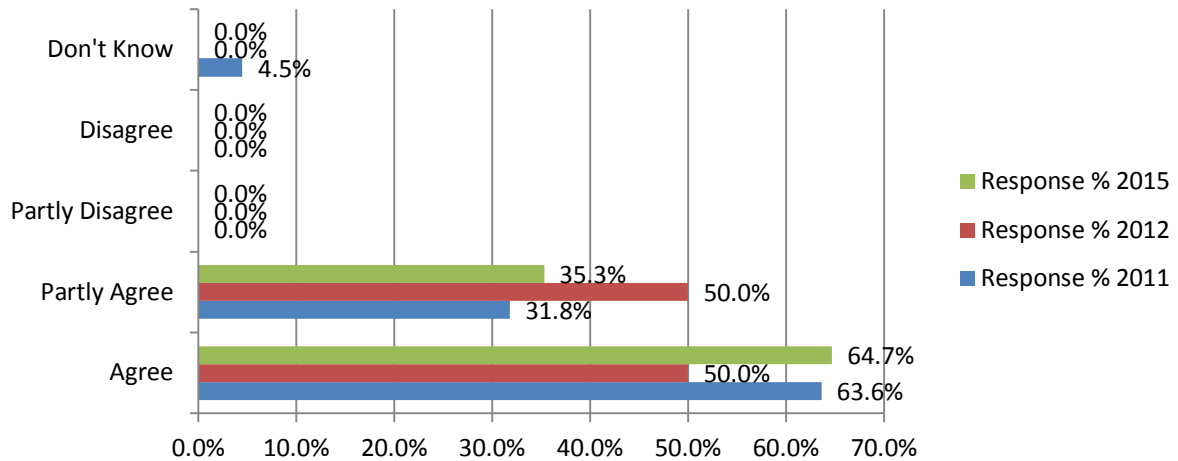
Question 7: Additional Comments on Questions 2-6

- Council also carries out a proper Governance Review every few years.
- I think the structure of the main standing committees is clear. We have a number of Special Interest Groups that work more informally and don't always report back to Council regularly. I was unsure what 'independent professional advice' was meant to mean in Q5.
- The Governance Committee review found certain areas where existing roles etc. were not clearly defined and known and hopefully the outcome of the Committee's recommendations will address this. There is the annual review of Council's performance but this is a self-assessment and it would be helpful to have some other views on how effective Council is.
- If effective governance means efficient decision-making procedures then the above questions ought to be answered in the affirmative. Often what is lacking is constructive debate on strategic issues.
- There has been a slight problem between the Remuneration Committee and the Council in the last few months re the T&Cs of the VC. This needs to be more clearly resolved than at present.
- I think roles are clearly defined but bringing these to the attention of Council members on a more regular basis would be helpful to remind everyone of them. The Governance Review now being undertaken will be helpful and a bi-annual review would be even more helpful in ensuring everything is as effective as it should be.
- Occasionally there are issues such as Chair's action on a major rental agreement where I am not entirely clear whether the legal position is fully informed and/or addressed. A recent example was to approve a partnership with Capita where we had little information about Capita's experience in running such an organisation.

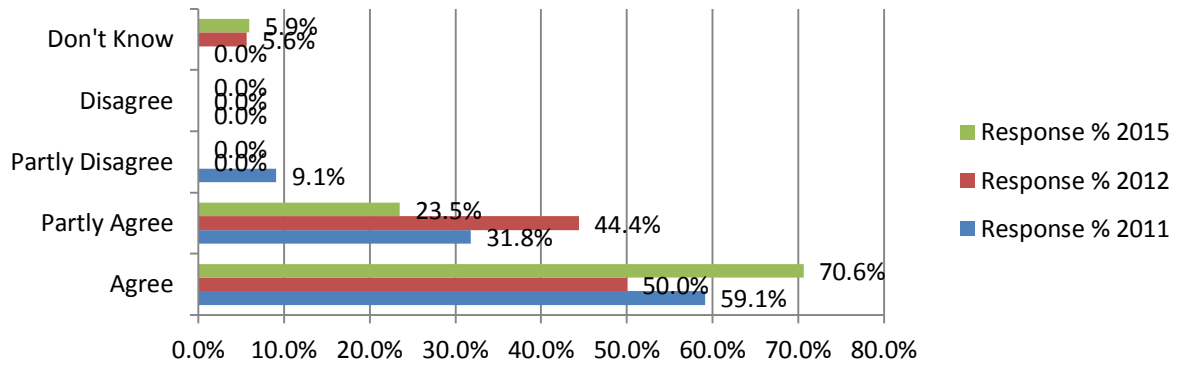
Section 2: Effective Governance Structures and Processes



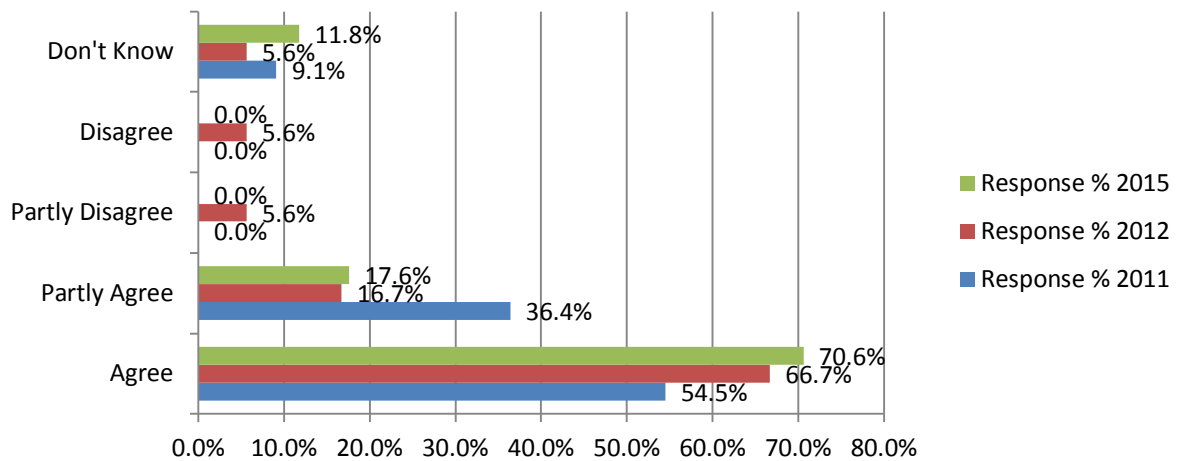
Question 9: There is a clear system of delegation from Council with appropriate reporting mechanisms.

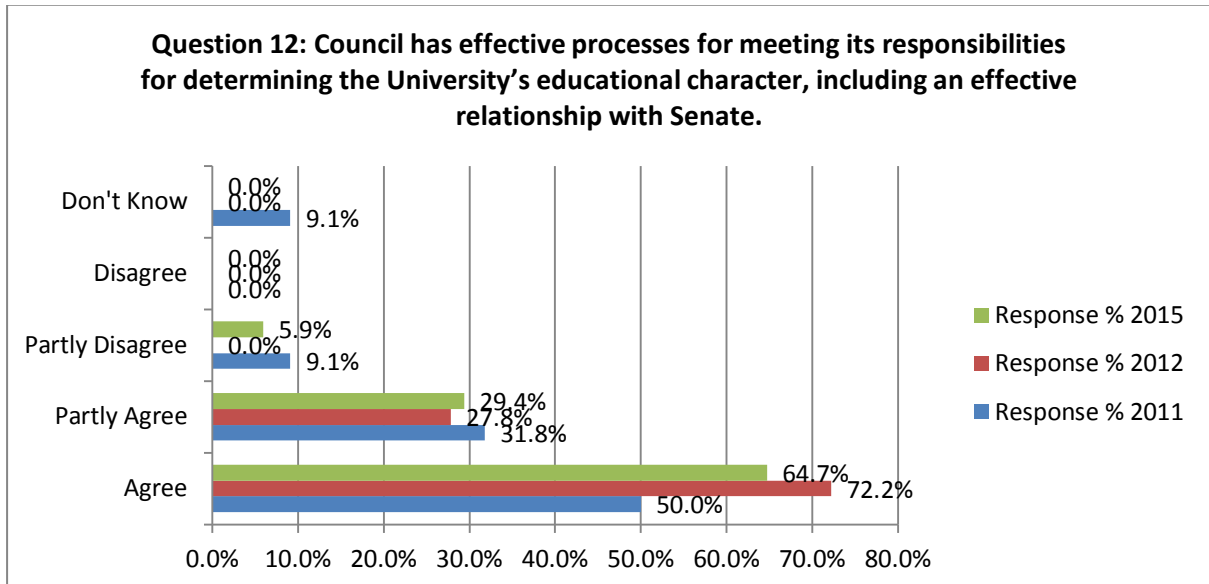


Question 10: The arrangements for Council and sub-committee meetings (number, timing, location, length of meetings, administration etc) are fit for purpose.



Question 11: Effective arrangements are in place for involving staff and students in Council and its sub-committees.

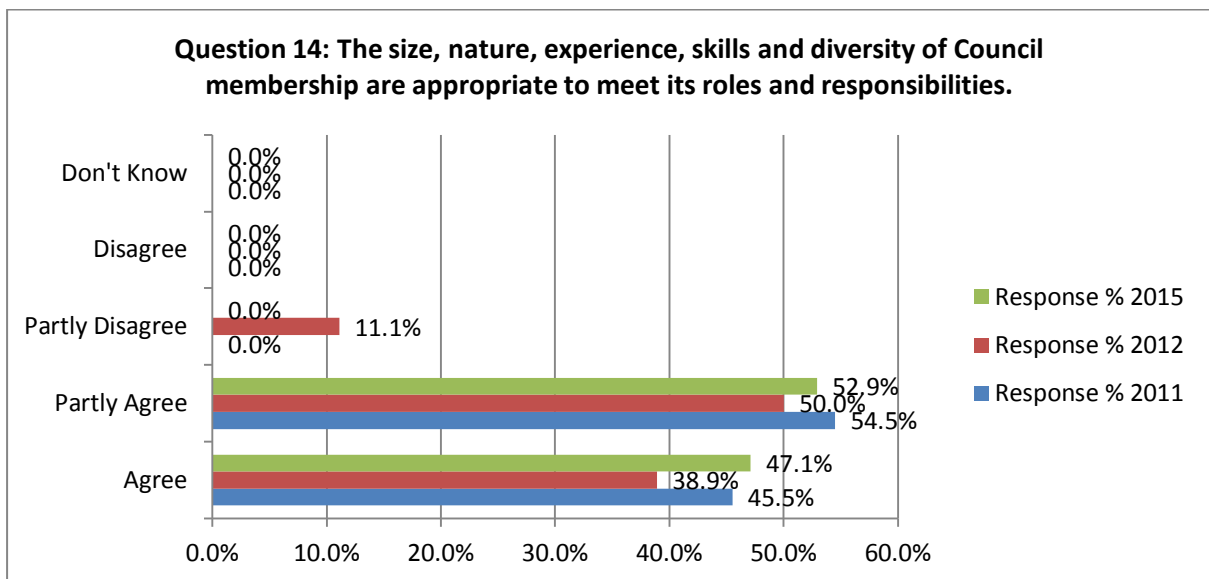


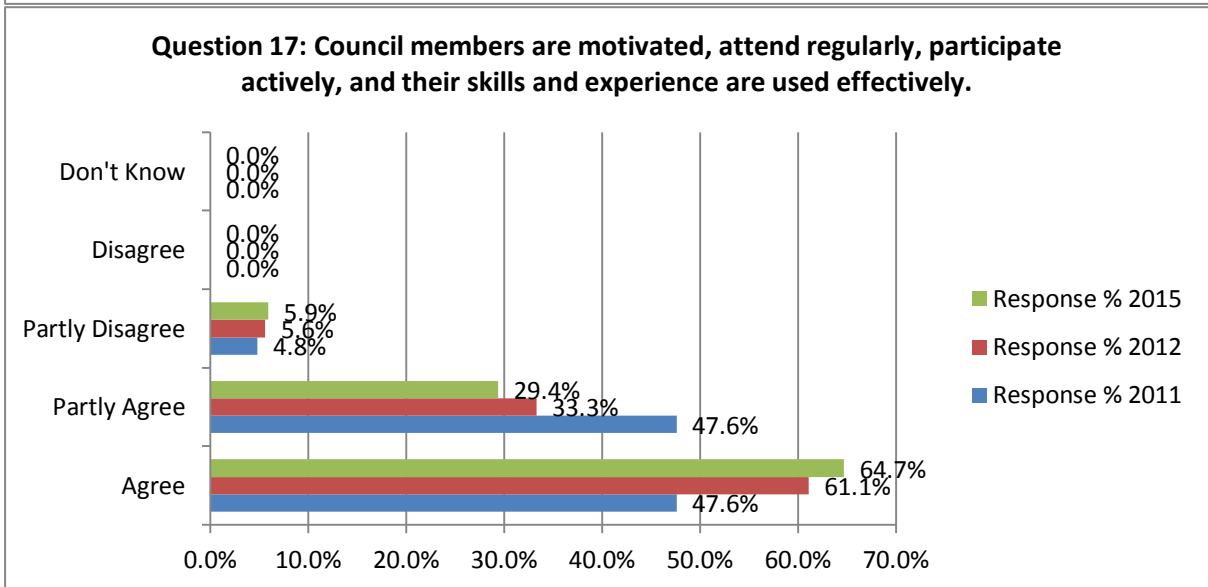
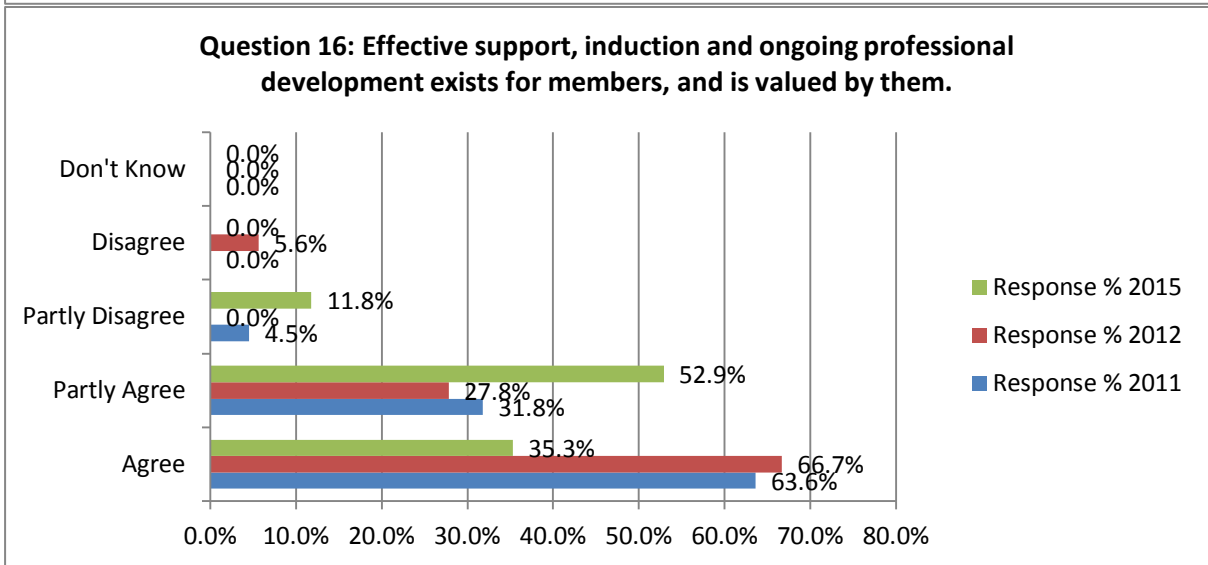
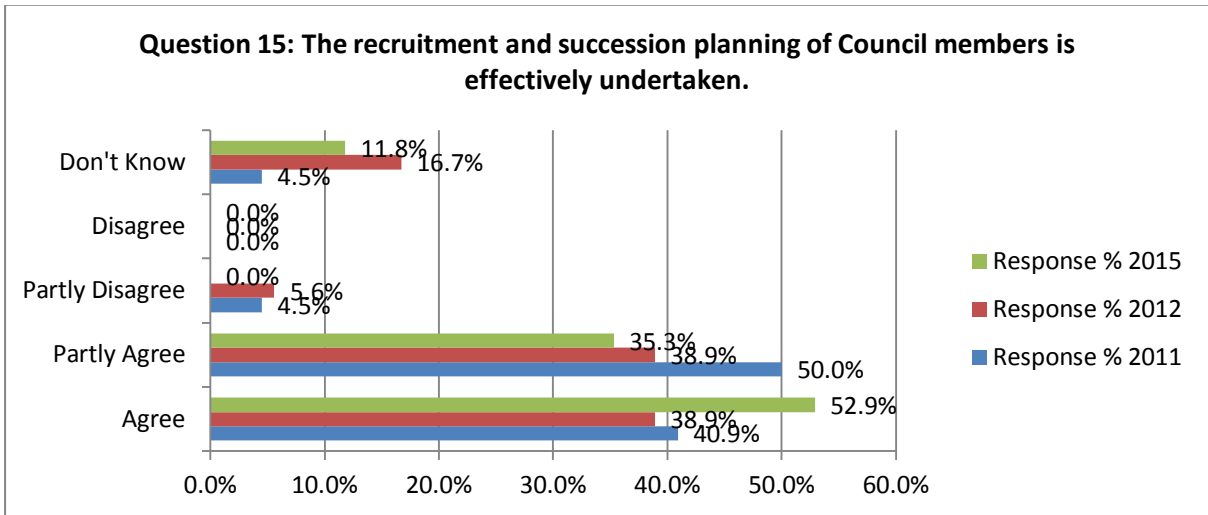


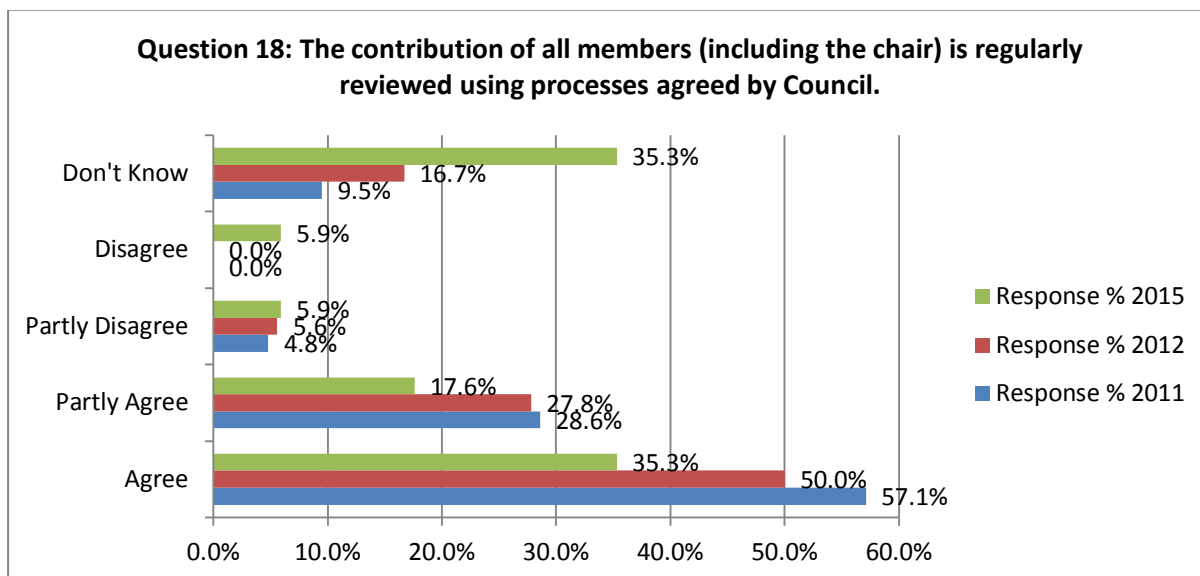
Question 13: Additional Comments on Questions 8-12

- Senate has been through a quiet phase, and so the effectiveness of Council's relationship with Senate has not really been tested recently.
- The Governance Committee review has identified some areas for improvement in each of these matters which reflect my views.
- This seems to be a running theme but often there is very little debate around the 'University's educational character' at Council. Perhaps Councillors see this as Senate's business.
- Again a regular update and refreshment of Council members' knowledge and understanding of these would help and doesn't need to be either time consuming or onerous.
- For some years I've not been fully convinced that the overall financial and compliance decisions of Council are fully able to link with and deliver academic objectives. I think Council should ask for a stronger academic justification for some investment decisions, such as Xiamen.

Section 3: Effective Council Membership



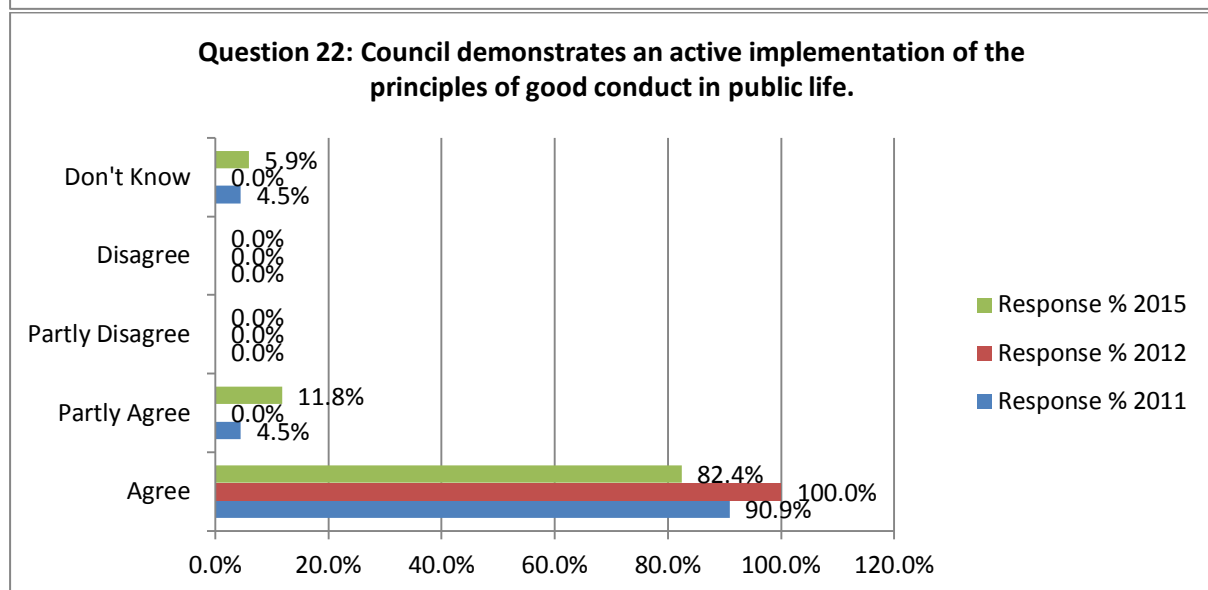
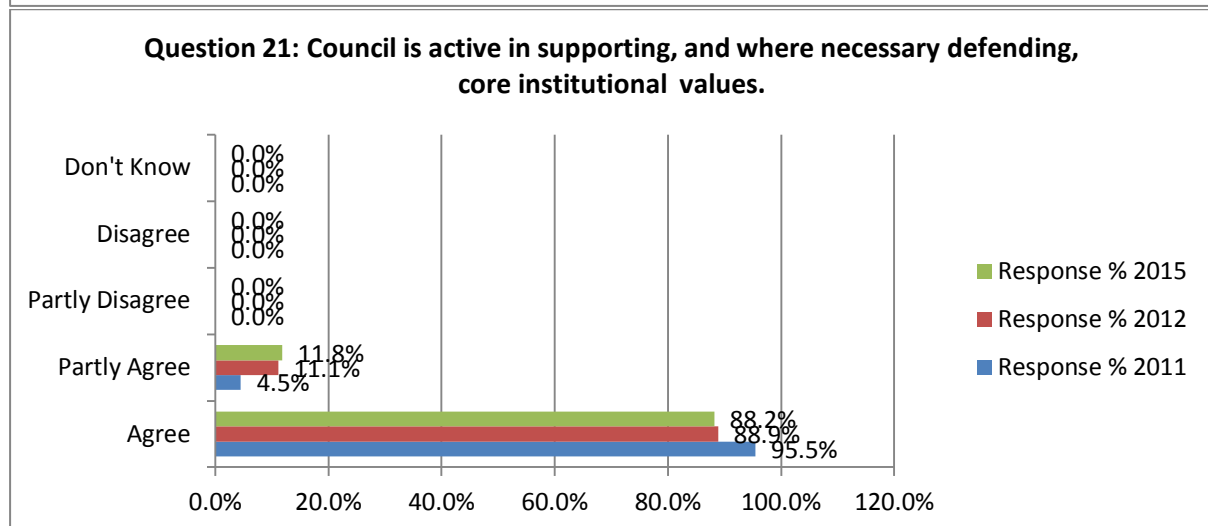
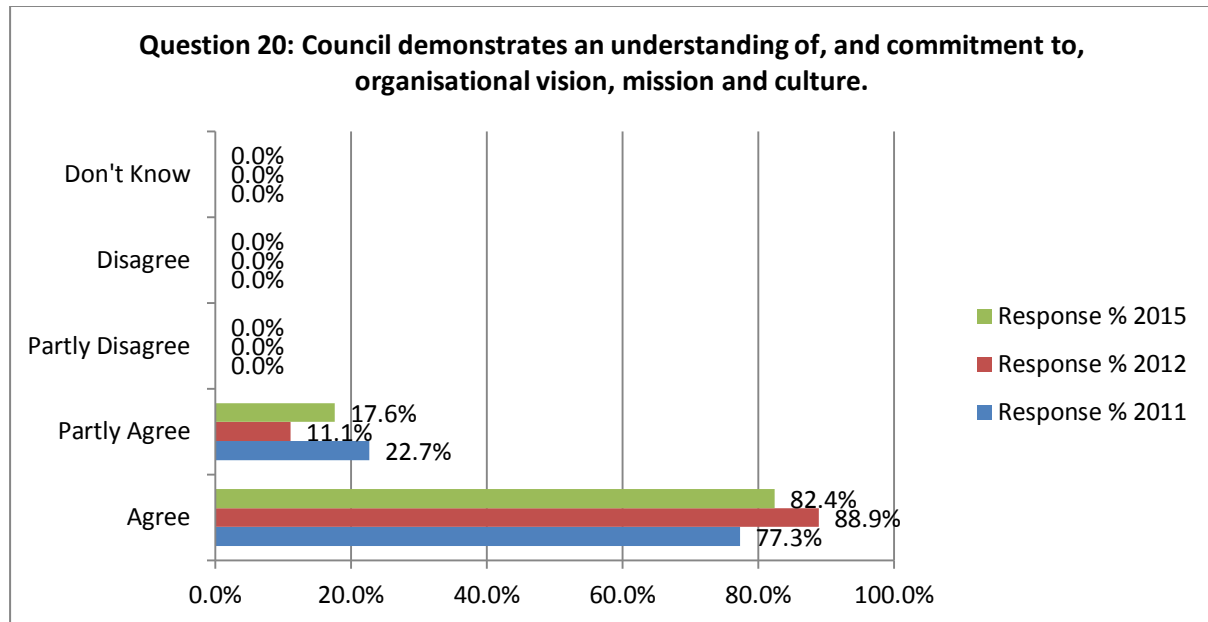


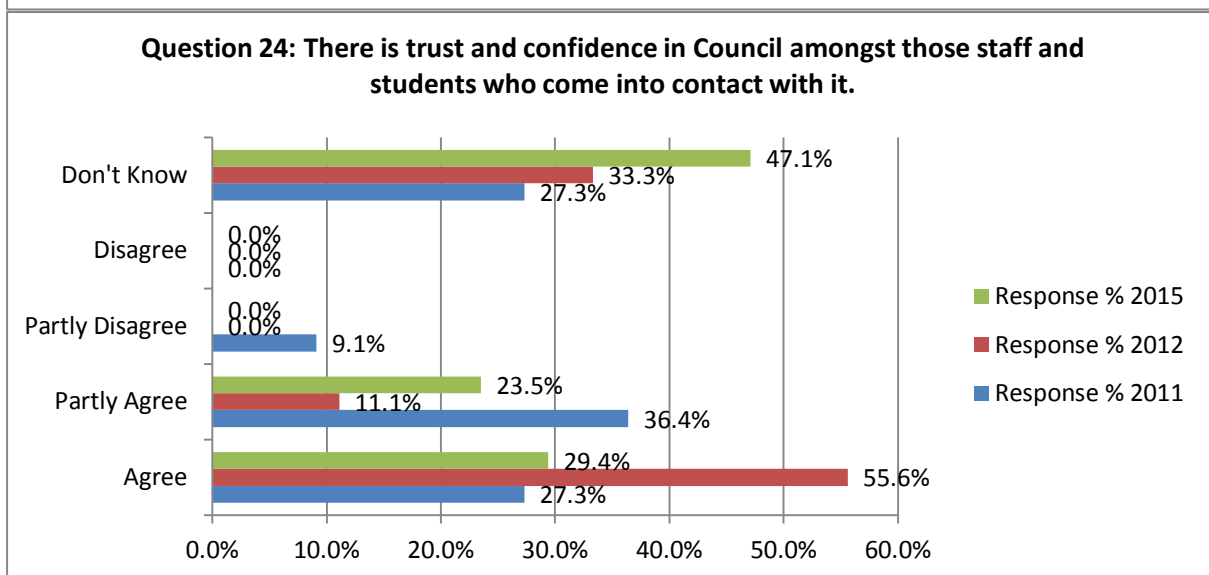
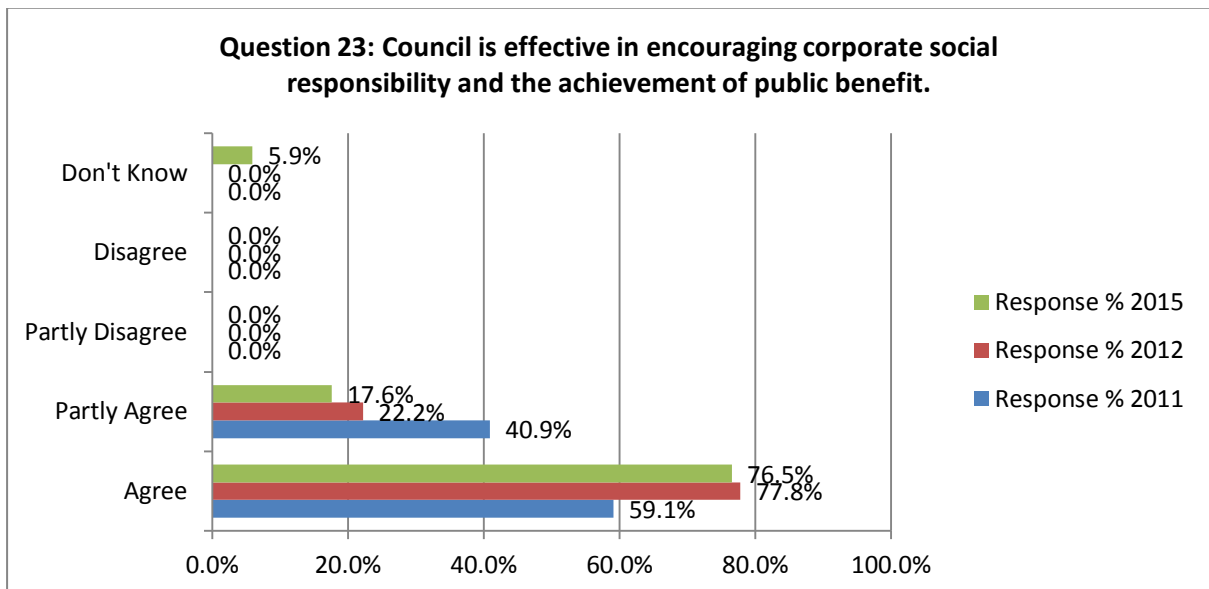


Question 19: Additional comments on Questions 14-18

- Recruitment onto Council is more systematic now than it used to be, which is good. Council briefing sessions are not always well attended.
- I am not familiar with the processes for review of the contributions of individual members of Council.
- I still feel the Council is too big
- Recruitment for new members could be more structured and transparent
- Some time since I received any feedback on my personal contribution. Lay member briefing sessions could be better organised
- The size of Council membership is about right but there are still skills gaps e.g. Estates. Council diversity has improved in respect of gender balance but more should ideally be done re ethnicity. Recent recruitment seems to have been effective.
- Support and induction are good but we need to do more on development by changing the way that Council briefings are carried out – make them more focused on issues that members need to be briefed on.
- The review of members' contributions has been limited and it should take place more frequently. It does not need to be a very formal process but a discussion between the member and the Chair so that the member can give his/her views on where his/her skills can best be used and the Chair can give feedback on the member's contribution would be helpful.
- It is my impression that the skills of Council members are used very effectively in SIGs and sub-committees. Perhaps that is also partly why meetings of Council itself often lack debates.
- There are skills shortages in property and in HE knowledge (from an external perspective).
- It is disappointing that Council briefing sessions are poorly attended. I find it difficult to attend these sessions regularly other than on Council or Committee days.
- In relation to question 18 I am not aware of the process for this. As far as question 16 is concerned there are opportunities but members don't take them up. It all needs rethinking.
- More input from academic members on academic strategy would be useful.

Section 4: Council commitment to organisational vision, culture and values



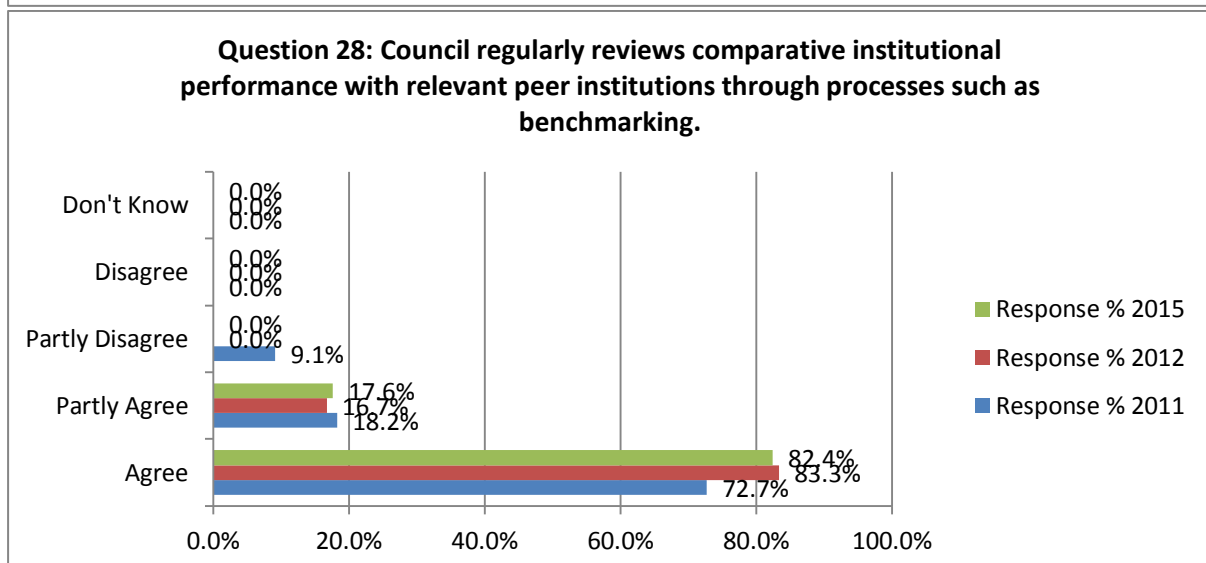
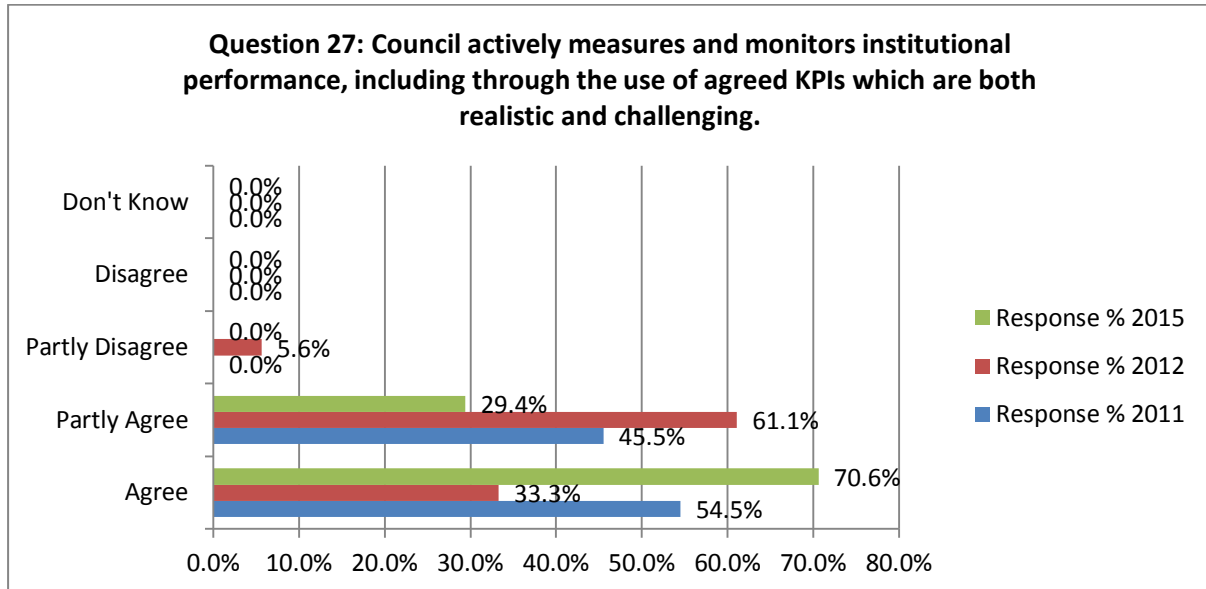
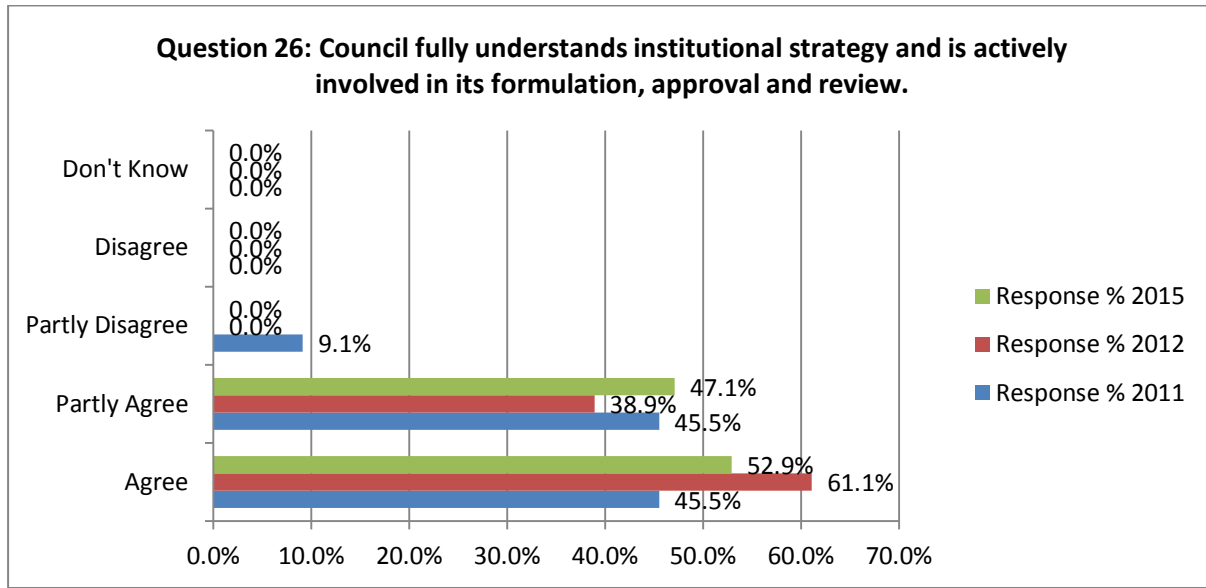


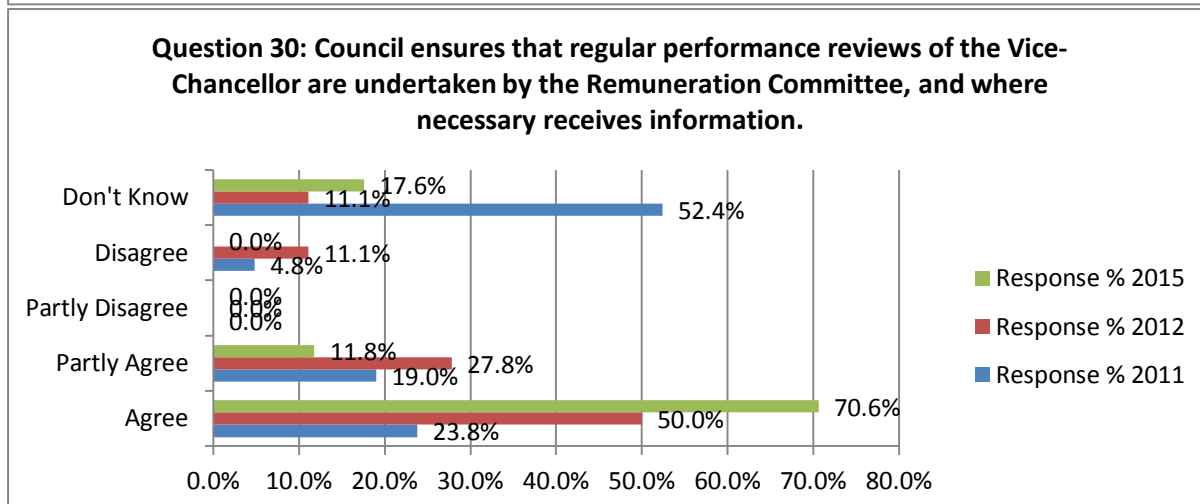
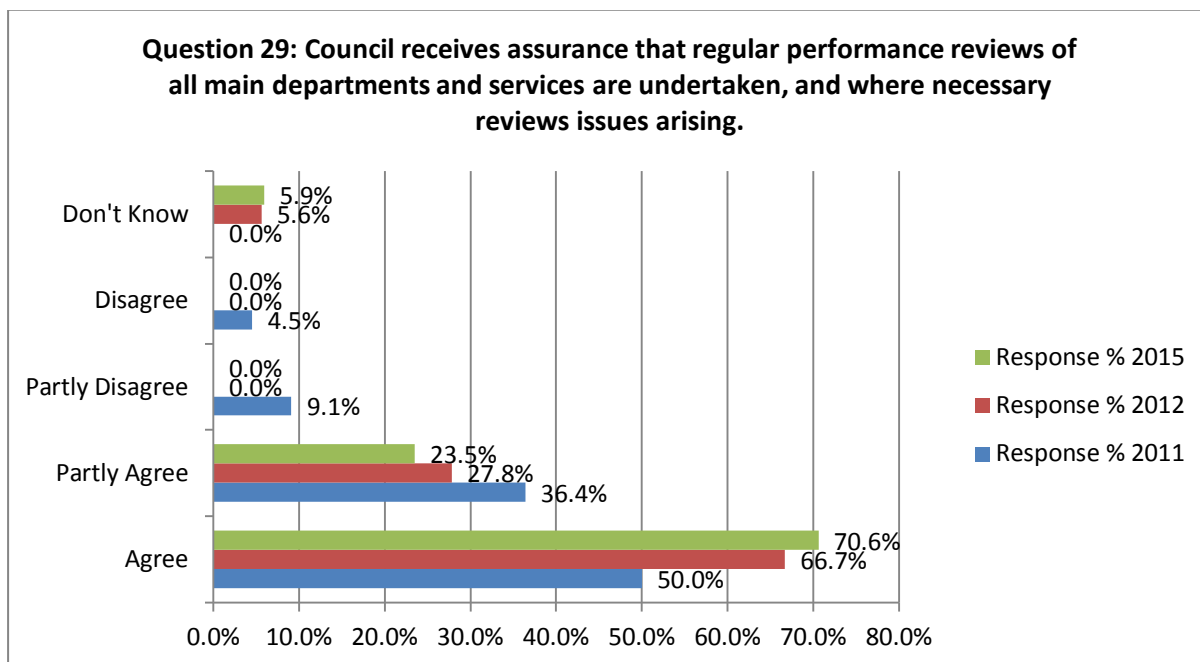
Question 25: Additional comments on Questions 20-24

- I am not sure we have asked staff and students about their trust and confidence.
- I am not aware of the wider level of trust and confidence of staff and students in Council other than those with whom I engage in the admin and finance functions.
- Apart from regulated CSR such as 'widening participation ' I am unclear what the aims and deliverables are on CSR?
- I have some residual concerns over recent Remuneration Committee decisions.
- Little feedback available on question 24.
- The less formal meetings that Council has had - the December meeting and the Joint session with Senate - gave Council a better understanding of vision etc. and as a result there is more of a shared commitment - more such sessions would be welcome. Values are something which hopefully are born in mind by Council but we don't expressly refer to them much and perhaps we should do so more. CSR and Public Benefit do not expressly feature often and probably should have a higher prominence via a session focusing on them.
- Difficult to know how much trust and confidence there is in Council - probably not enough known about Council's work and therefore the need for more direct engagement with staff and students.
- Some of these questions ought to be directed to non-members of Council (e.g. Q24).

- I think most staff and students have no knowledge at all of the Council role or its members.

Section 5: Effective strategic development and performance measurement

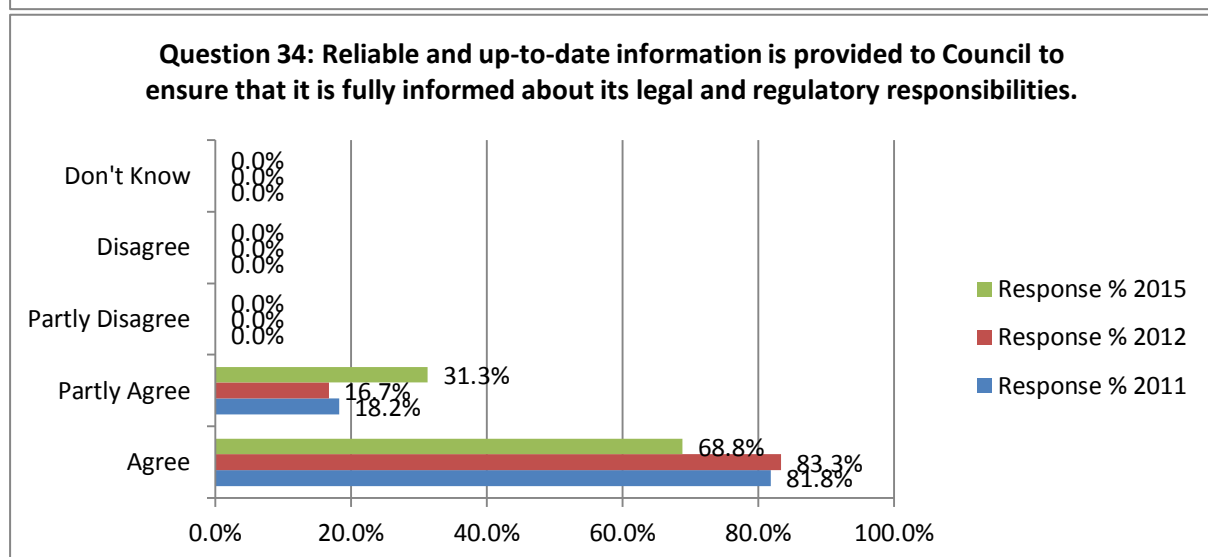
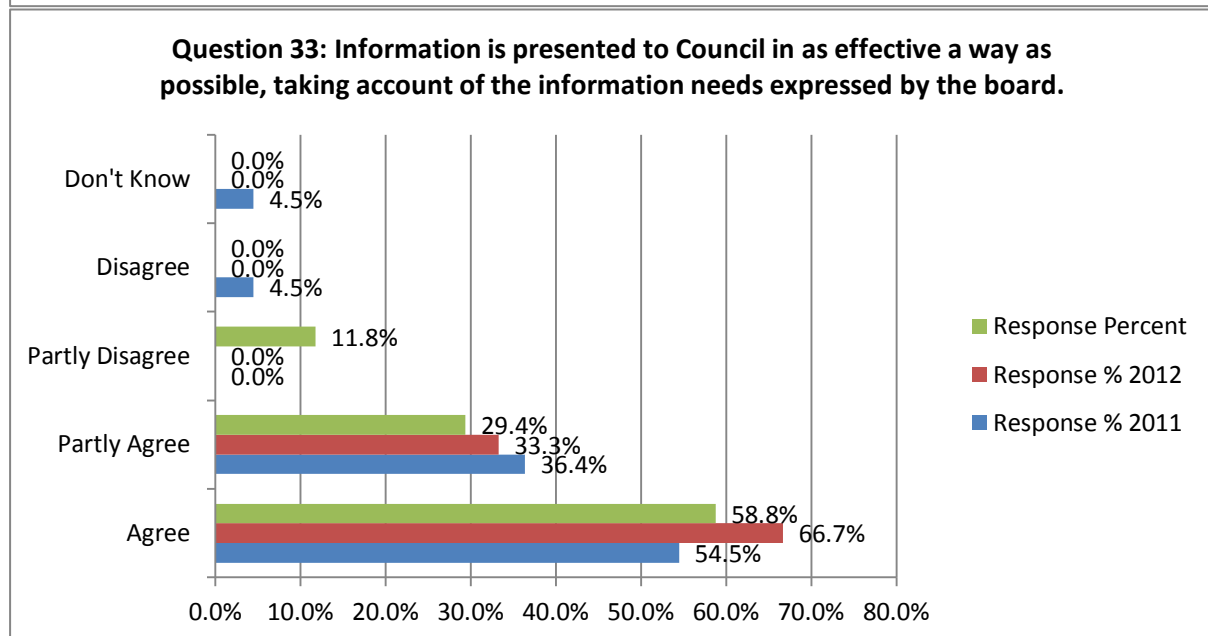
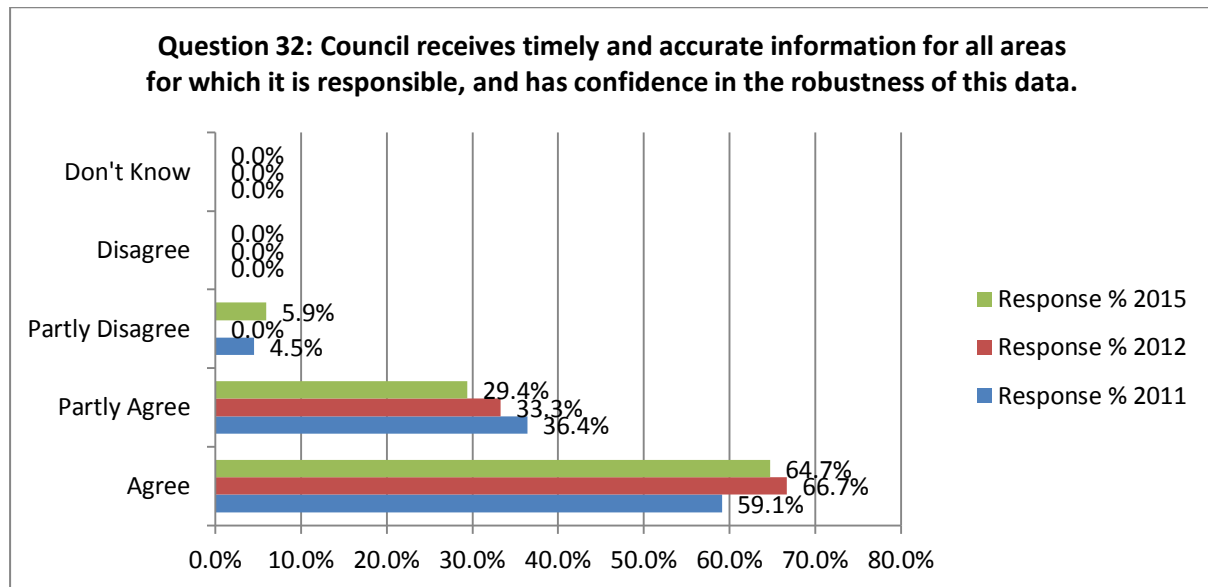


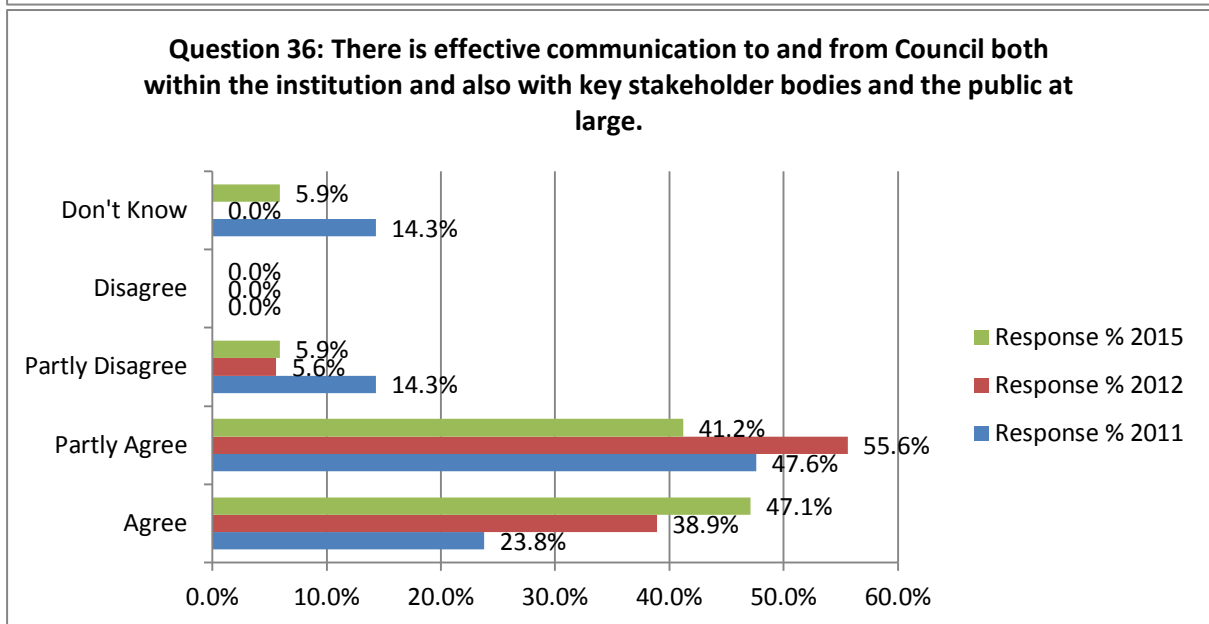
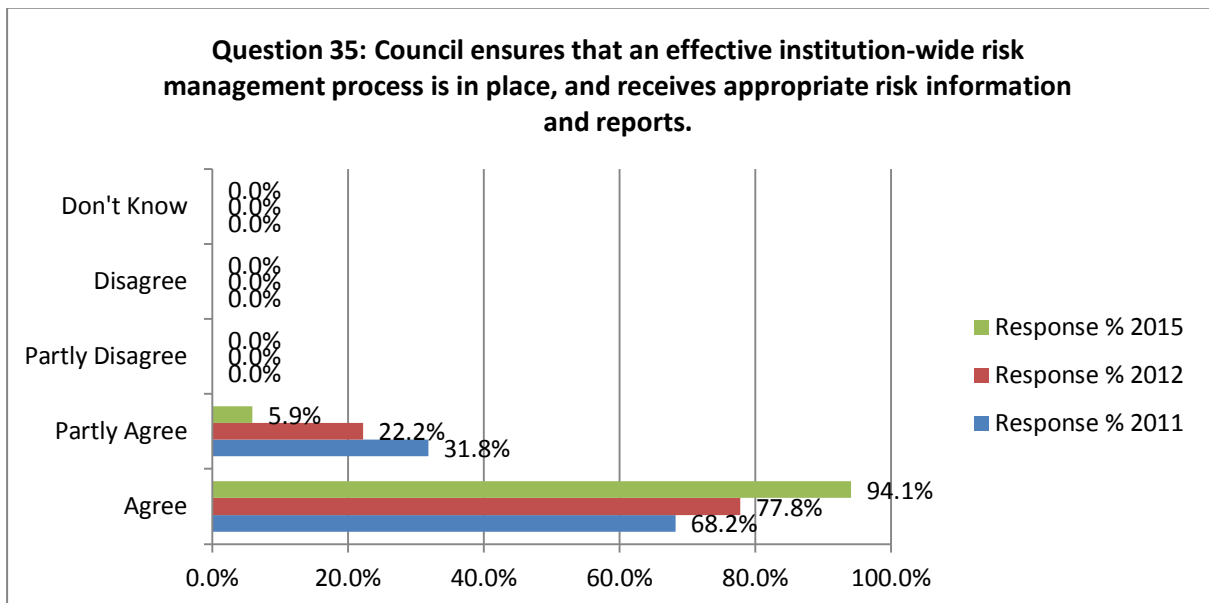


Question 31: Additional Comments on Questions 26-30

- I think it's very clear what our strategic direction is and we track progress well. I think the raising the bar initiative is great and the process of consultation.
- Strategy - the comments in relation to Q20 apply. Council is more involved than it was although there are some occasions when strategic issues have effectively been decided by EB before Council is fully involved. There has however been a significant improvement in this. On Q29 rely on Audit Committee for aspects of this and not sure whether or not this covers regular review of everything...The cycle of presentations to Council from Faculty PVCs and others now works reasonably well.
- I do think it sometimes would be useful to have more comparative information before making certain decisions but I accept that there are limits on what information is available about competitors and striking a balance between information overload.
- The REF has been useful in bringing performance to the fore; whether we would know as much out of the REF cycle possibly needs to be considered.
- In relation to Question 30 this is undertaken by the Chair who confirms their opinion of performance
- Not sure whether KPIs are an adequate measure of institutional progress, e.g. in measures that may address reputation.

Section 6: Effective Council information and communication



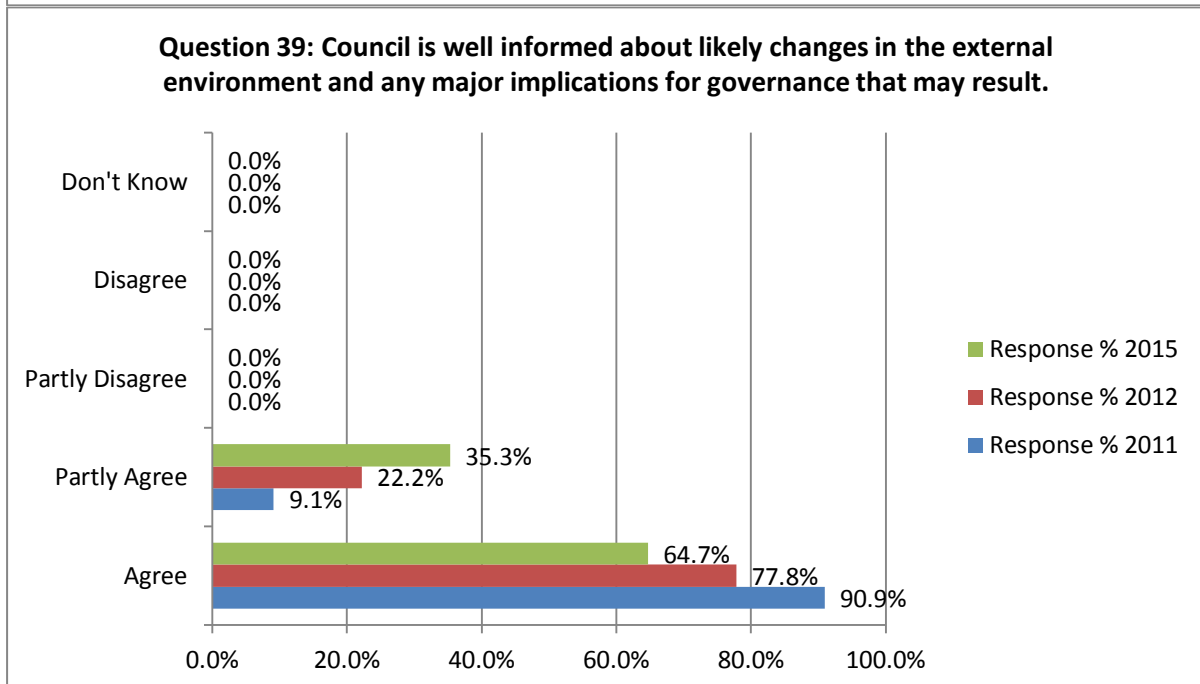
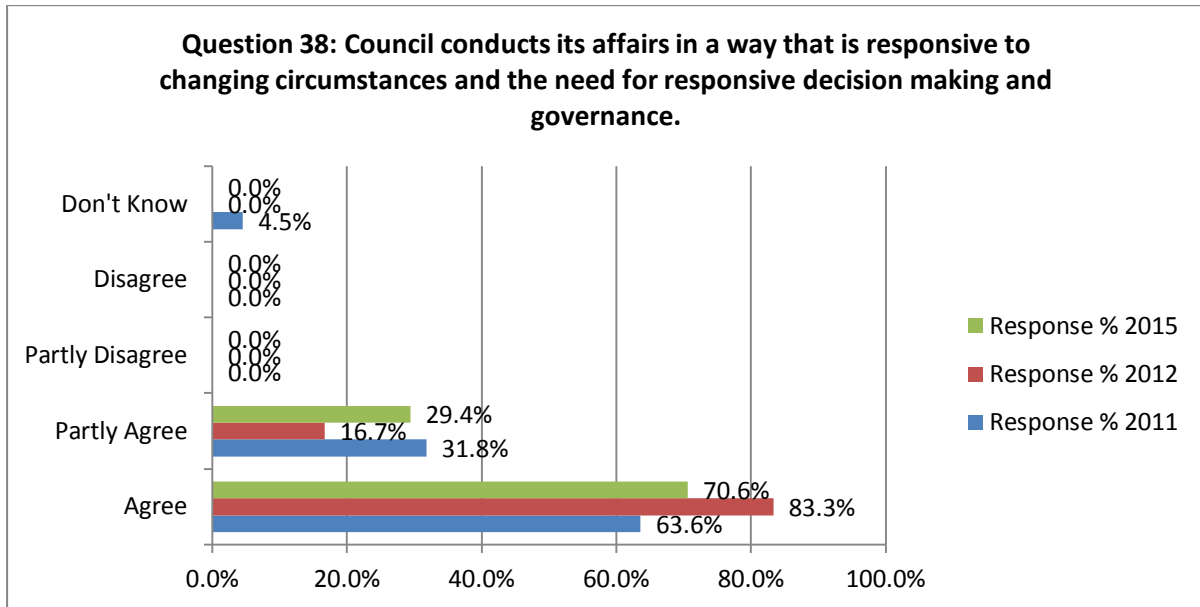


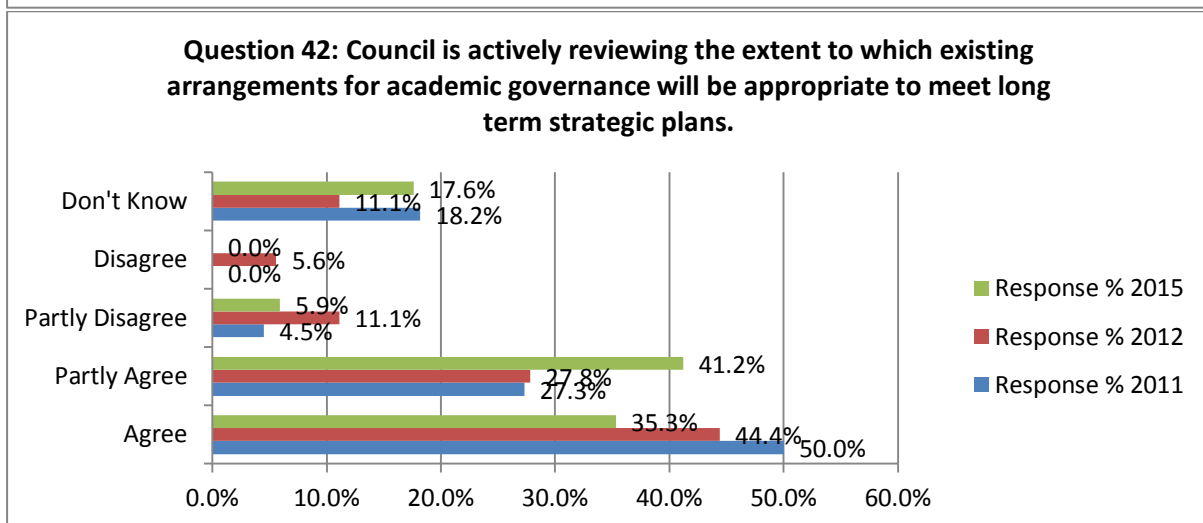
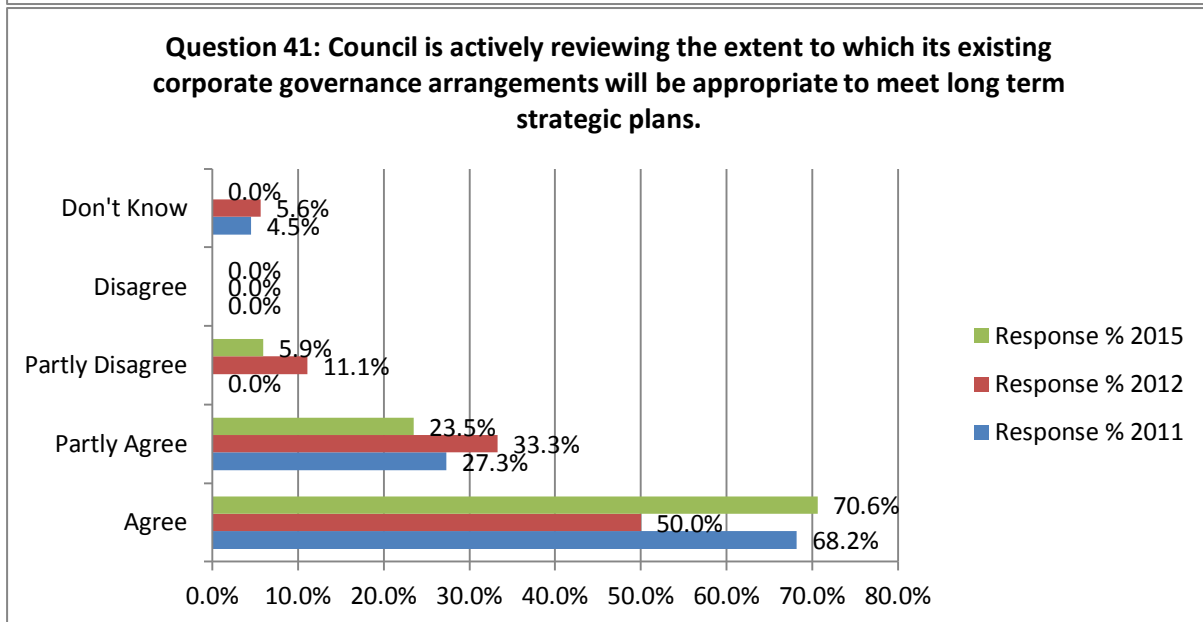
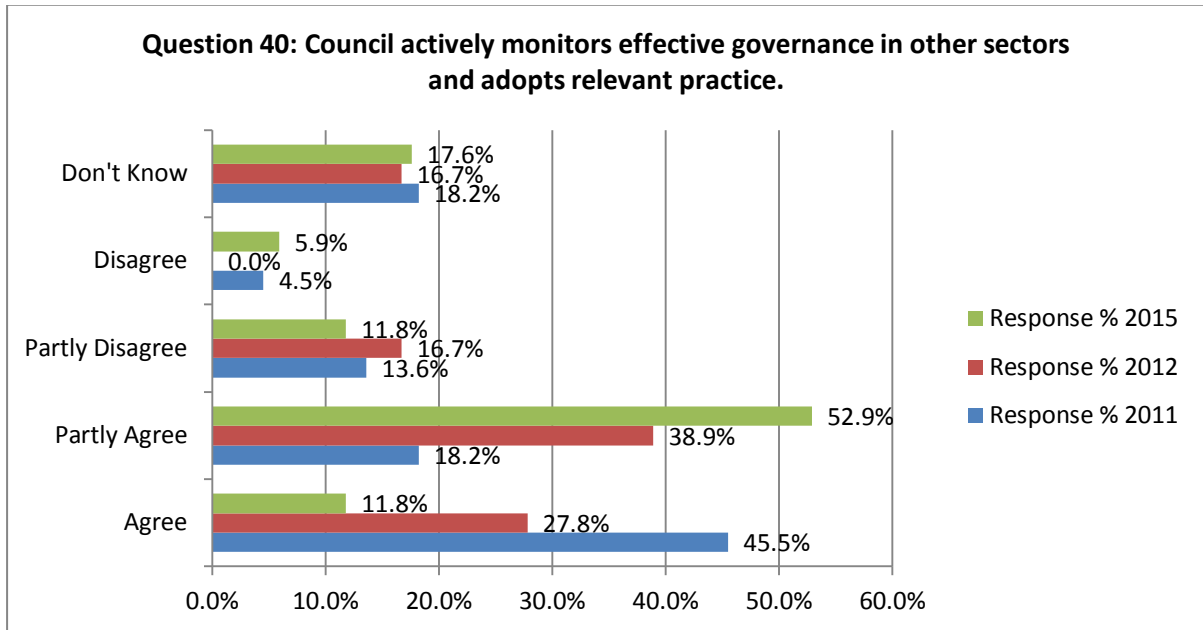
Question 37: Additional Comments on Questions 32-36

- Risk management is carried out very conscientiously, in considerable detail, and at all levels.
- I believe that communication to / from Council within the University and with stakeholders/public is effective but, as a lay member, I am not sufficiently close to staff and students to assess this independently.
- I think we are given far too much information at Board meetings. It's almost impossible to read it all and be assured you have picked out the most salient points. I think we should undertake a review and look at best practice for Board comms. This should get us in a much more efficient and effective way of working.
- In general Council receives the information that it needs. Some of it is in a slightly indigestible format. More still needs to be done to ensure that papers presented to Council are fit for purpose. They should set out succinctly what the purpose of the paper is, give a concise background showing the process which has been gone through prior to a paper being presented to Council and set out proposals which clearly state the matters on which a decision is required. The paper should be of limited size with supporting information in appendices.

- On Q36 there is not much communication from Council as such - communication is generally on behalf of the University as a whole or from individuals such as the VC. This seems appropriate as long as such communication reflects Council's views which on the whole it does. However more could be done on publicising what Council does.
- Not entirely sure that we are effective in communication with stakeholders.
- Sometimes a late item has less information regarding legal and similar issues.

Section 7: Future Governance



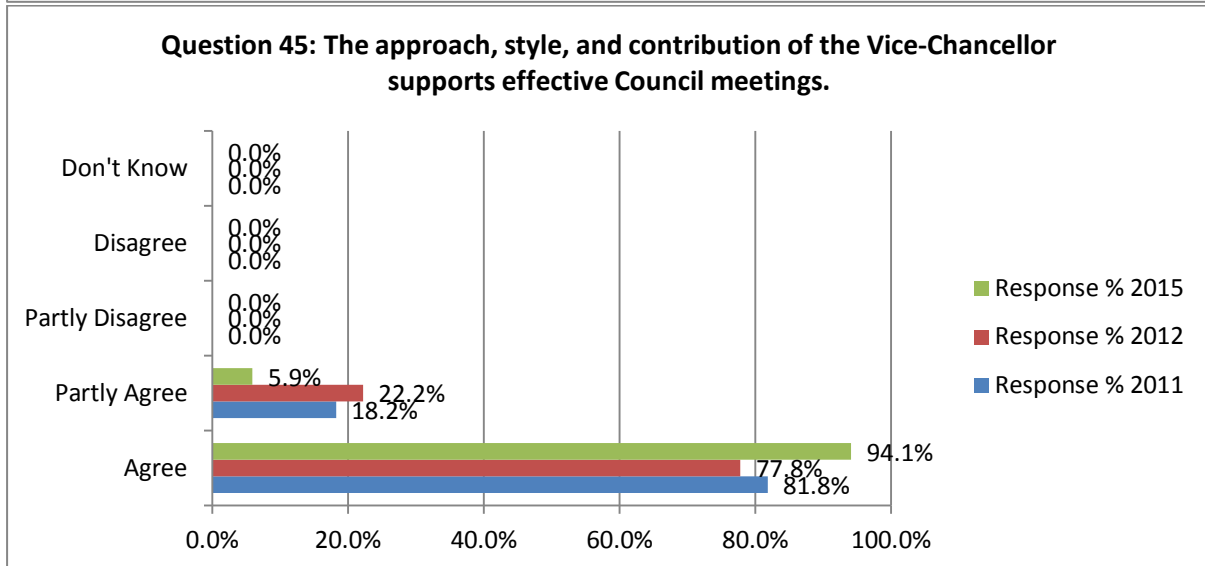
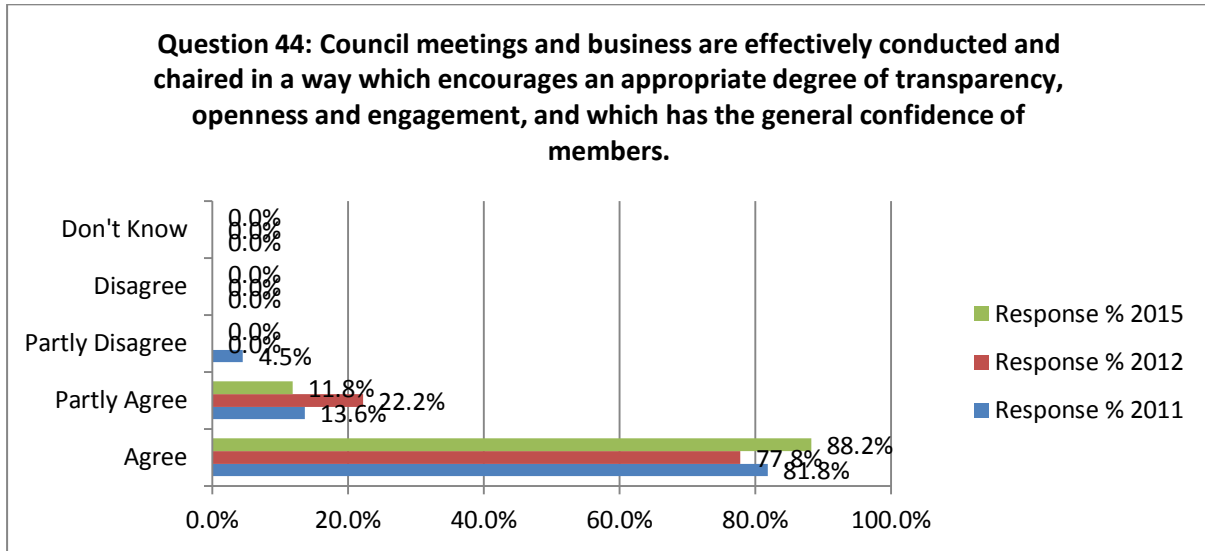


Question 43: Additional Comments on Questions 38-42

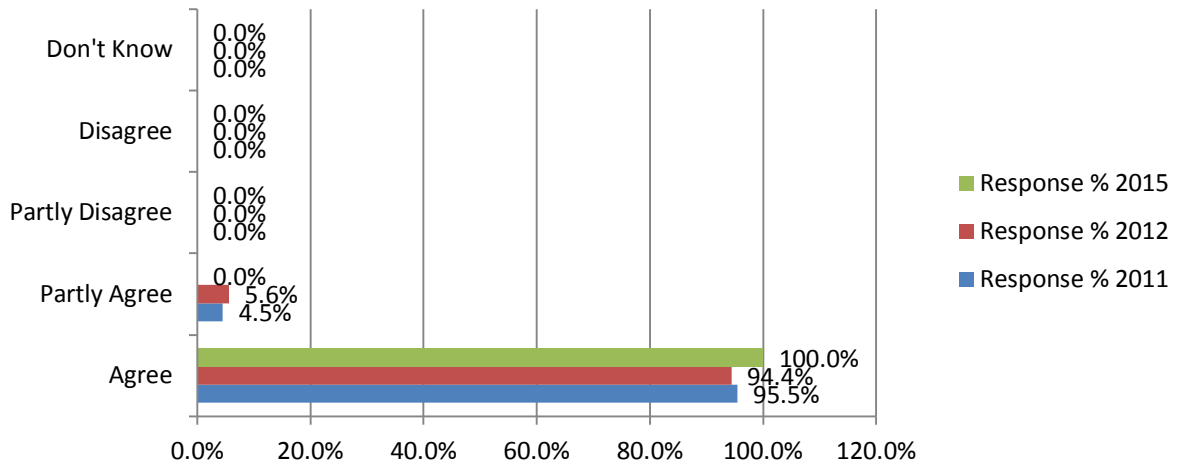
- Not sure about the monitoring of effective governance in other sectors.

- I believe that arrangements for academic governance are controlled by Senate rather than Council.
- I'm not aware of us looking in any depth at alternative governance best practice.
- The current Council Governance Review covers these points. Council does get well briefed on current issues.
- On Q40 Council does not specifically do this but members bring their expertise from other sectors.
- Not sure what I don't know in relation to Q 42.

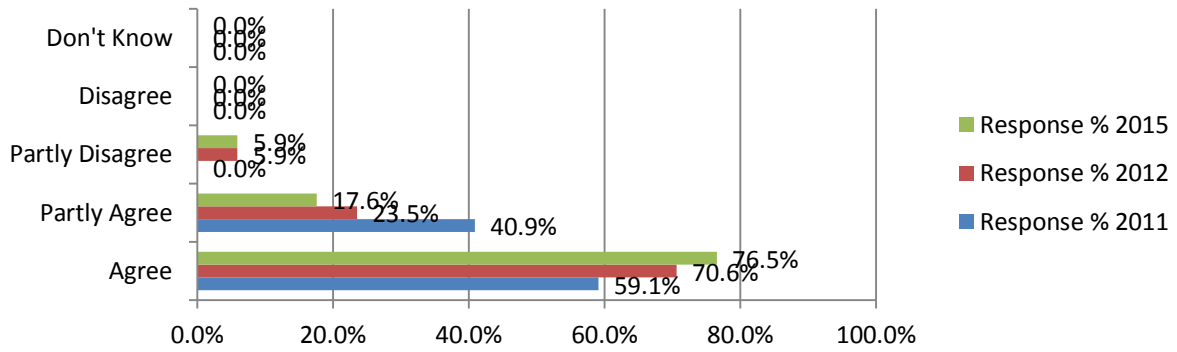
PART B: WORKING RELATIONSHIPS AND BOARDROOM BEHAVIOUR



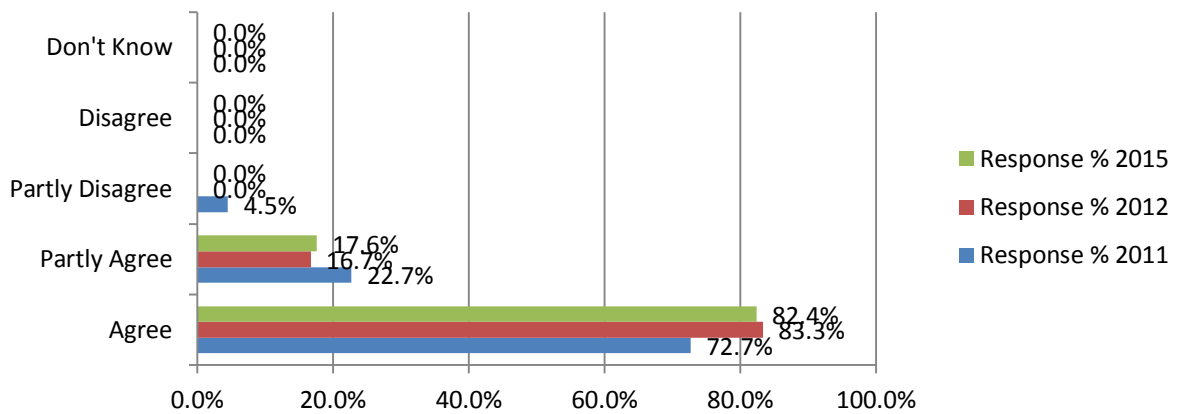
Question 46: The approach, style, and contribution of Council secretariat supports effective Council meetings.

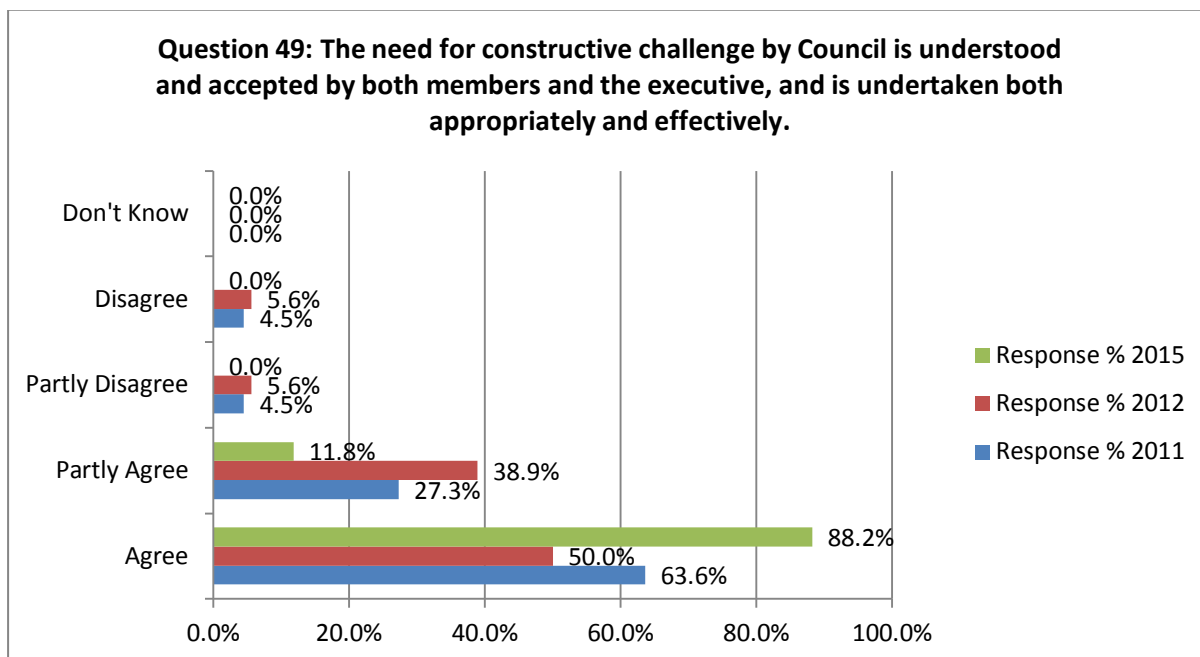


Question 47: All governors are actively involved in discussion and demonstrate a shared purpose and commitment, whilst maintaining the distinction between governance and management.



Question 48: In practice, working relationships between Council members and the executive are good, and a positive atmosphere exists to support effective governance.





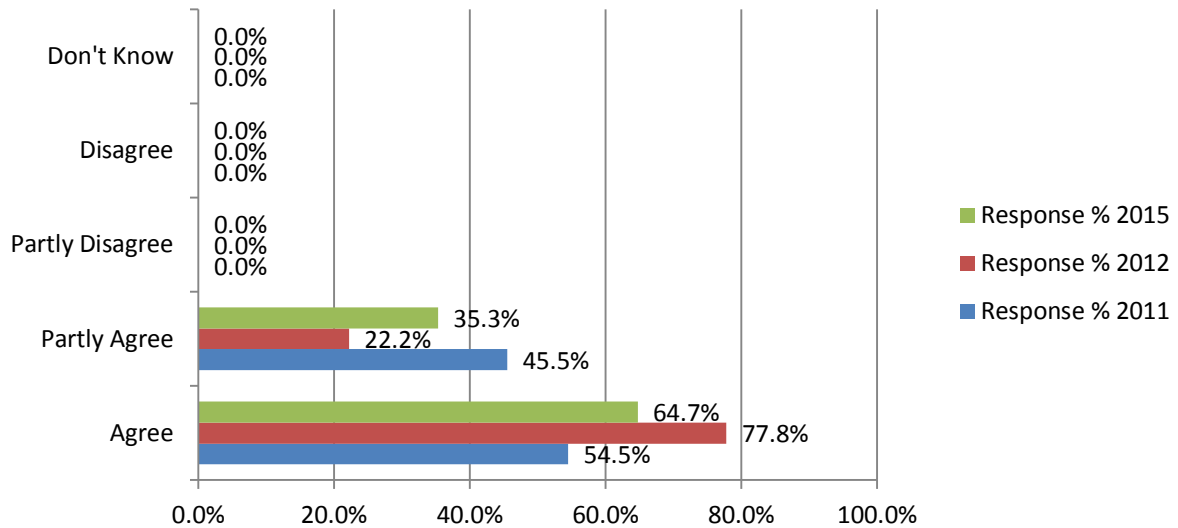
Question 50: Additional comments on Questions 44-49

- The mood is good.
- Council meetings work better than was previously the case.
The VC's business session is informative although it is not always clear whether or not an opportunity is being given for raising questions on the issues covered by it. It would be helpful if, after each topic of substance which the VC covers, he could invite questions.
The papers for Council meetings vary in quality. Some are very difficult to digest. There should be much more consistency in style/content with papers to set out clearly the objective of the paper and the key points and what Council needs to consider and is being invited to make a decision on. Papers should be no more than 2/3 pages long with Appendices, if necessary.
- Pre meetings are very helpful and the Chairman and Vice-Chancellor are very accessible.
- Sometimes discussion is too short about a major issue.

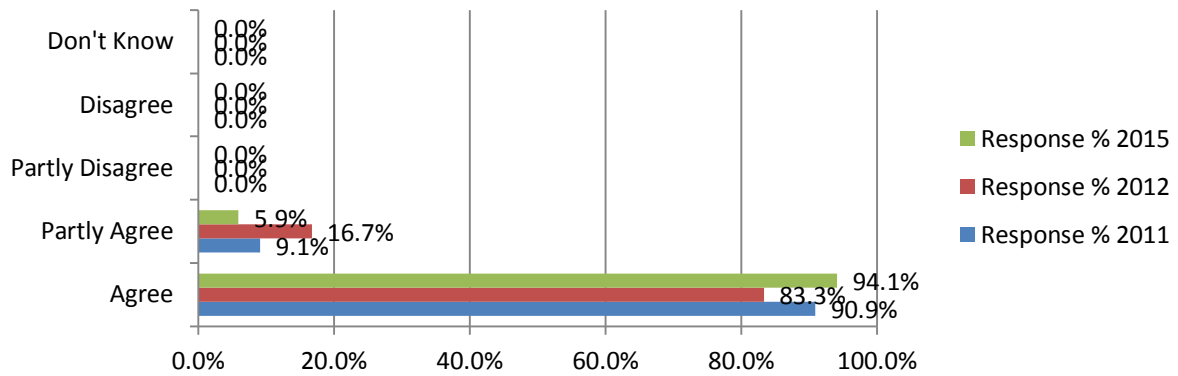
PART C: THE OUTCOMES ACHIEVED BY COUNCIL

The following questions are about the achievement or outcomes of Council. Ultimately these are those factors that really determine how effective our board is, including the extent to which it 'adds value'.

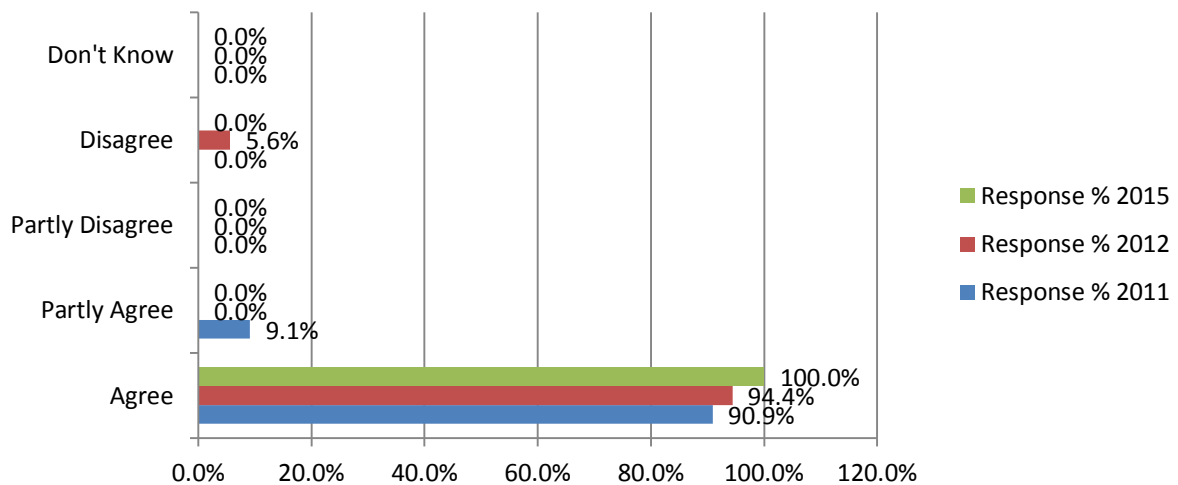
Question 51: That the agreed institutional strategic plan is being achieved.



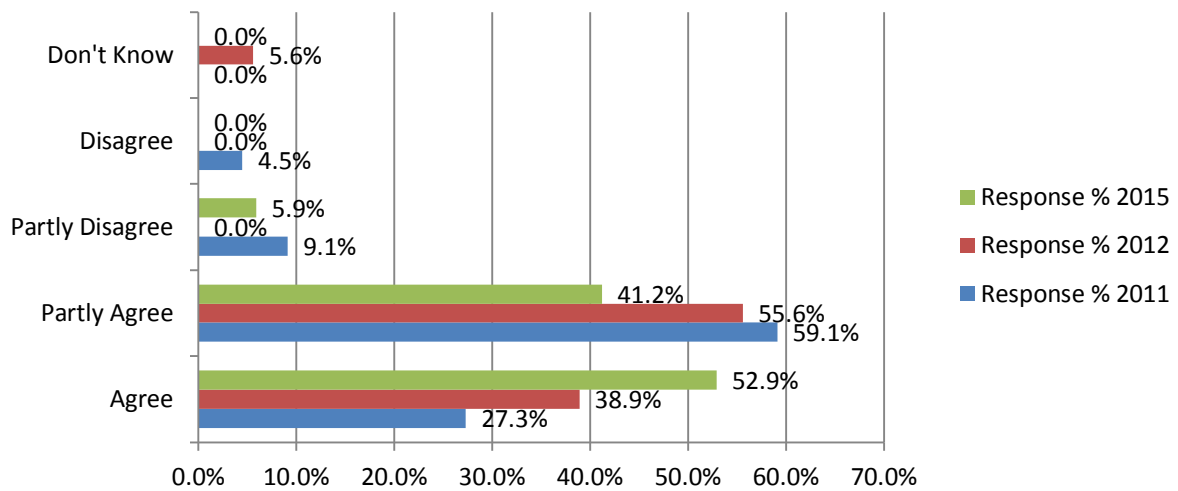
Question 52: That agreed standards of institutional financial health and sustainability are being achieved.



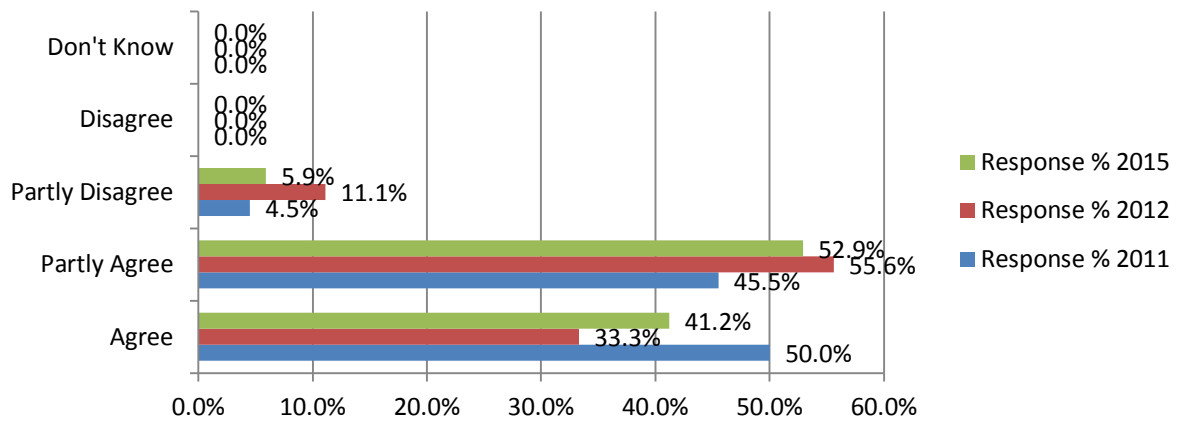
Question 53: That the required standards of accountability and legal/regulatory compliance are being achieved.



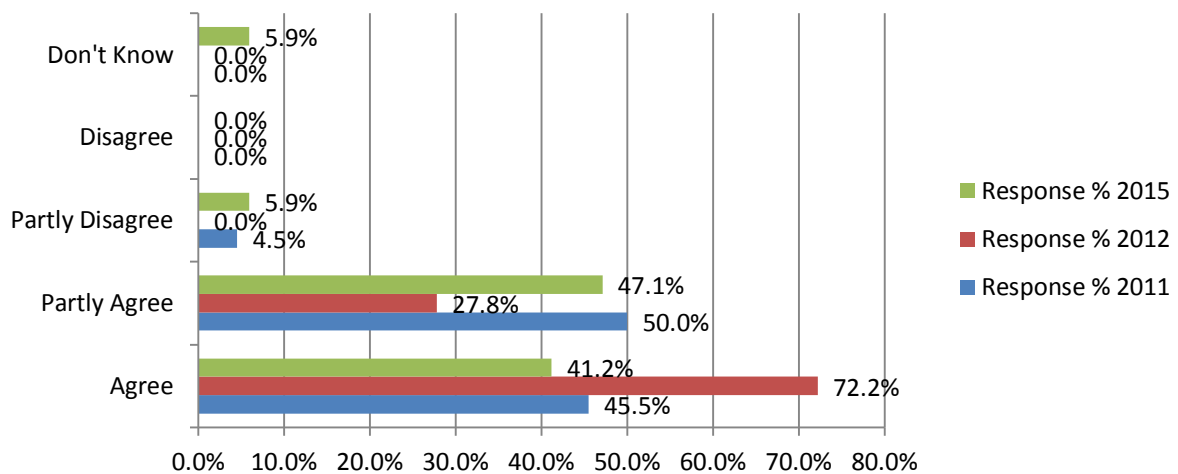
Question 54: That defined quality levels in academic and service provision and the student experience are being achieved.

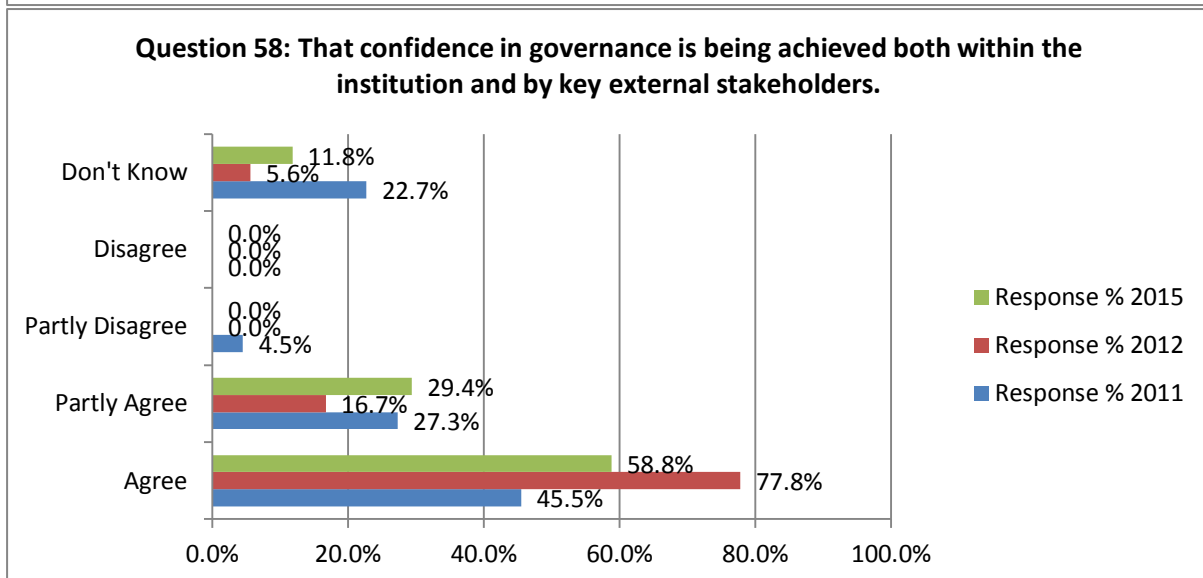
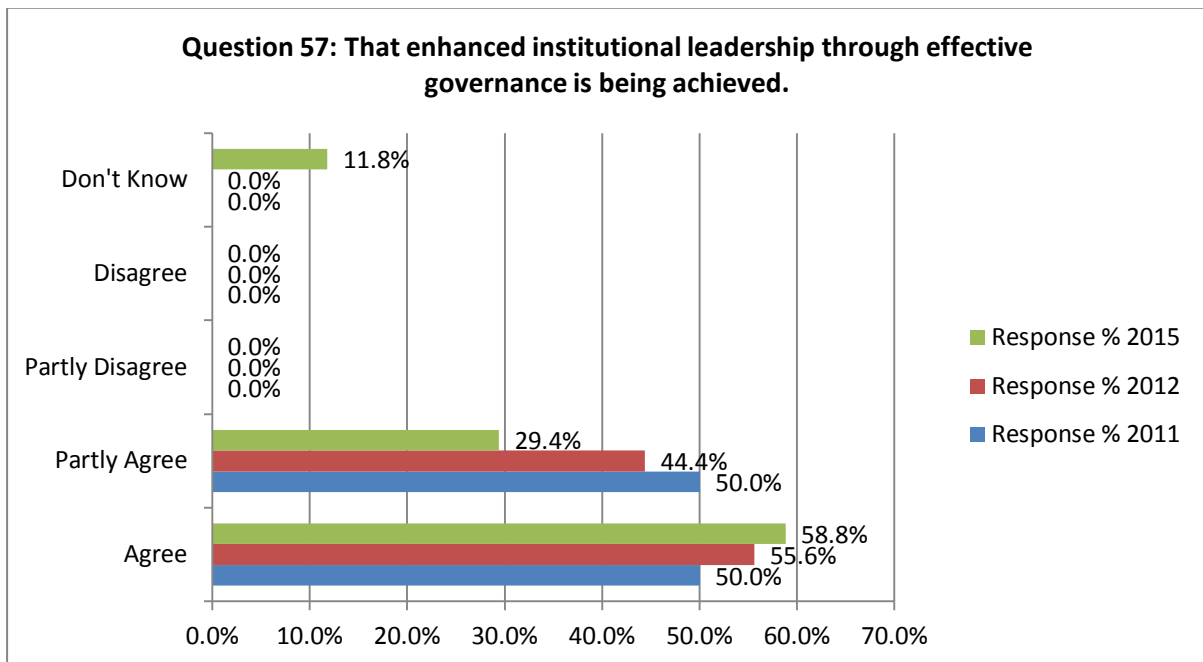


Question 55: That both the effective management of risk and optimal support for innovation are being achieved.



Question 56: That enhanced institutional reputation and competitiveness is being achieved.





Question 59: Additional comments on Questions 51-58

- Overall the business of Council is carried out very effectively.
- Not sure about optimal support for innovation being achieved. What do we mean by enhanced?
- Institutional reputation and competitiveness are strong within the UK but ratings have fallen in global surveys.
- We have set a high bar for achievement. Although we are doing well we haven't met them all yet.
- The institutional strategic plan is largely being achieved. Some areas are work in progress and Council is involved in reviewing and overseeing progress. There have been some occasions where the involvement of Council in strategic initiatives has been limited until the initiative is already effectively communicated e.g. Xiamen, and Council should be involved before this happens. Financial health and sustainability are being achieved but there are challenges to ensuring that this remains so as conditions change. Compliance largely achieved but it is appropriate to obtain external views on this from time to time. Don't have direct knowledge of academic quality and could do with assurance on that. Risk is managed but don't know enough about support for innovation - some feedback on that would be helpful. Reputation -

more needs to be done to achieve the world reputation that the University aspires to. Confidence in governance - I believe so but would welcome independent verification of this.

- I still have slight concerns that performance management is not deeply embedded and owned by 'the line'. Getting this right is going to be critical in achieving stretching objectives over the next few years.
- I don't know if there is clear evidence to answer Questions 57 & 58. I am not aware of any internal survey other than possibly the outcome of this one to determine whether this is so and not aware of how external stakeholder opinions are measured.
- Again, not sure if reputation raising is being achieved and whether Council should have more discussion on this.

Question 60: How do you know?

For the questions above please summarise the information base for your answers (e.g. it is opinion, observation, based on 'hard evidence', or what?):

- If there were a tool for comparing the performance of this Council with those of other universities I believe (based on observation and experience) we would come out quite well.
- Council papers and meetings. Personal observation.
- Opinion, supported by review of Council papers and other hard evidence.
- My information base is 10 years of experience as an academic at Newcastle University, heavily involved in both teaching and research.
- KPI data. League tables. Board papers etc.
- This is my opinion on what I have observed, both in Council meetings and outside of these meetings.
- Combination of hard evidence and observation. More objective data on external reputation is perhaps required.
- This is an observation.
- A combination of personal knowledge, the University's financial results, reports to Council, the results of student surveys, ranking tables and the REF and benchmarking exercises.
- Merely based on opinion.
- Through reports to Council.
- Open discussion sessions - e.g. the session at the last meeting regarding REF and the day discussing property strategy. Routine reporting on key issues, and one off communications on emergency matters.
- Other than 57 and 58 Council gets significant assurance from the Finance and Audit Committee as well as getting significant evidence on a regular basis of reputation and competitiveness; quality of service and student experience.
- Most comments relate to whether Council understands and challenges the academic mission and whether it is likely to be achieved. I base this on long experience of academic life and repeated membership of both Senate and Council.

PART D: REFLECTION ON PERSONAL CONTRIBUTION TO COUNCIL

Question 61: Do you believe you have been able to make an effective contribution to Council over the last 12 months?

- Yes x9
- Yes. The meetings encourage participation and debate. Suggestions are acted upon.
- Yes, very much so. Council members are always keen to hear the student perspective on matters.

- Yes.....when I have been able to attend meetings.
- I think so but others would be better judges of that. Some feedback on that would be appreciated.
- In part yes.
- As a newcomer I feel I have been able to contribute and have been briefed to get me up to speed on matters that are new to me.
- I am fully committed to making the best contribution I can and undertake a number of additional roles and activities. I try to support extra events run by the university and the Students' Union. I am a regular attender of Development sessions.

Question 62: If not, what additional support would you require to enable you to improve the effectiveness of your individual performance?

- Would be good to get the Council dates out earlier i.e. for 2017 so that I can get them in my diary.
- More in depth knowledge about how certain parts of the University operate. I appreciate that Council members are offered briefing sessions but I would like to have sessions focused on areas where members need to be briefed and for the topics to be publicised in advance and for them to be at times that work for me - in particular not to clash with committees.
- I would like to set up a day or two learning in depth on some matters - this is for me to initiate.

Question 63: Are there other ways in which you believe you could make a contribution to the work of Council and the work of the University more generally?

- No x3
- No - Already on Audit Committee and Senate.
- I would like to be more involved in decisions over capital expenditure. I feel these discussions take place outside of Finance Committee.
- Given my current work base. Not really.
- Nothing obvious but I would be happy to have a more specific discussion on this.
- More Council/staff interaction.
- Would like to have closer ties with some schools (e.g. the Business School) but this is for me to find the time and take the initiative.
- More opportunity to discuss the interface between academic mission and governance.

Question 64: Do you believe that your commitment of time to Council is reasonable?

- Yes x 12
- Yes. Given I have an executive role, I believe it's appropriate.
- Just about manageable.
- Not really as I have missed too many meetings....but please see q62.
- Since everything we do is voluntary I think it is up to an individual to determine what is reasonable for their own circumstances.

PART E: OTHER VIEWS

If you have other views on the effectiveness of Council or our governance more generally, please summarise your views in the box below.

- It may be a good idea to circulate the new CUC Code of Governance to all Council members.
- To broaden my general feel for the University experience of staff and students, I would welcome the opportunity to visit selected student residences, good and less

good lecture and tutorial space and research labs.

I would also like to visit the Monkey House, which has been at the centre of an issue, this year that caused me some concern.

- I think Council is very effective. It is well organised with high quality documents supplied in a timely manner. Meetings are well chaired, and I feel the balance between lay, academic and student members is appropriate, allowing Council to function well.
- Things seem pretty satisfactory.
- Is there a way that agenda could be streamlined.....it seems quite "old fashioned"!!
- The NU council compares well with other organisations where I have a governance role.
- I think the outcome of the current governance review will suggest a number of minor changes which will positively help to enhance this.

PART F: LOOKING FORWARD

Finally, thinking about your answers to all of the questions above, what do you think are the implications for the future operation of Council? Please summarise your views in the box below. If you conclude that significant change is required, then please say so and take the opportunity to be constructively radical!

- With the Raising the Bar agenda now unfolding, there may be more topics for Council to consider, but I believe the current structures and processes are essentially sound.
- I do not judge that significant change is required. However, to ensure that Council has access to a full range of skills, experiences and external views, I feel that Council would benefit from the inclusion of lay members with property experience and, probably, representation from the City Council.
- I think the Raising the Bar initiative will challenge the University to achieve significantly more. We need to ensure we take our commitment to it seriously as it will not be easy to achieve and it may be tempting to seek to justify achieving lowering standards.
- I think that often the way in which information is presented in Council can be reformulated. Sometimes there are long presentations which could be more succinct, allowing more time to have discussions on the key issues.
- I still think that Council is too large.
- No radical changes required but I think the agenda for meetings have become too routine. I also think we need to spend more time discussing the market place that we operate in and review on a more frequent basis what our competitors are doing. I also worry about the capital structure and believe we need a more sophisticated approach to our long term capital requirements and also how we allocate capital.
- I wonder if there will be sufficient members of Council with the time needed to be involved in all the Council processes.
- No need for significant change.
- Finding a better way to keep members of Council up to date with the vast array of key areas of information, concern and practice so that their collective expertise, knowledge and experience has the optimum impact and influence in helping the University achieve their ambitions.
- Largely repeating what I've said above, I think lay Council members need more input from 'ordinary' academics, i.e. beyond Executive Board. I think discussion might be more frank with no UEB members present.