# Obedience Liaison Council

## Results of OLC Novice Class Survey Sept/Oct 2026

## Summary of Novice Class Survey

Based on the feedback in the initial obedience community survey, the OLC's overarching aim is to make competitive obedience accessible and appealing for all ages and abilities. Therefore, one of the OLC's strategic objectives is to review the existing tests at all levels to ensure fitness for the future, both to encourage new competitors and retain existing competitors. Subsequent discussions and feedback suggest that most classes lack elements of progression to the next class, and some classes are considered repetitive and uninteresting.

An OLC subgroup has been set up to work on the review of the classes, and they decided to start with looking at community views about the Novice class.

A short survey was issued on 22nd September 2026 asking for the community's thoughts on the Novice class and if and how it might be improved. The survey closed on 11th October 2026.

The survey received 482 responses, and the full details of the responses are included after this summary.

The majority view (68.7%) is that the Novice class can be improved with the amount and length of heelwork emerging as the most prominent concern. Many respondents favour reducing heelwork which is often considered excessively long and repetitive. Suggestions include shortening heel on lead, limiting the number of turns, or replacing one heelwork exercise with a simple progression exercise.

Novice is the class with the broadest range of handler experience from those who have just won out of Pre-Beginners to Ticket handlers with a young dog. The same applies to the dogs themselves ranging from dogs having their first ring experience to 'experienced' Novice dogs chasing the wins or the points. Therefore, others believe Novice should remain unchanged, emphasising its importance as an accessible introduction for young dogs or inexperienced dogs and handlers. Concerns were expressed that increasing difficulty could discourage newcomers stressing that Novice should be an achievable, enjoyable and confidence-building experience for both dogs and handlers.

Interestingly 78.4% agreed that Novice should help prepare dogs and handlers for the higher classes, although this view is not supported by responses to other questions in the survey with a reluctance to add in any simple elements of exercises from the higher classes nor to have any elements of reduced verbal cues and body signals. It is possible that Novice is seen as an entry level class that already prepares dogs and handlers for the higher classes.

Finally, respondents were asked to consider if there are any classes that should be a priority to review. Whilst a third didn't have any strong view and 18.5% said that none of the classes need changing, 33% of those who felt change was needed selected Class A.

## Conclusions and Considerations

Novice is a unique class that needs to cater for the widest range of experience of both handlers and dogs. As such there is little appetite to change the content of the class by adding in more challenging exercises.

However, competitor concerns about the amount and repetitive nature of the heelwork element need to be addressed. Several options that could be considered are:

- Do nothing
- Only have one round of heelwork which could be off lead or on or off lead at the handler's choice
- Change the regulations so heel on lead is considerably shorter than heel free
- Set rules for the duration of both heelwork rounds including number of turns
- Provide guidance to judge on the ideal length of both heelwork rounds
- Something else

Based on these results the OLC working group has decided to take no immediate action on the Novice class, although it is useful for anyone judging Novice in the future to be aware of the concerns about the length and repetitive nature of the heelwork.

In due course, the OLC working group will be seeking community views on Class A and Beginners and Pre-Beginners.

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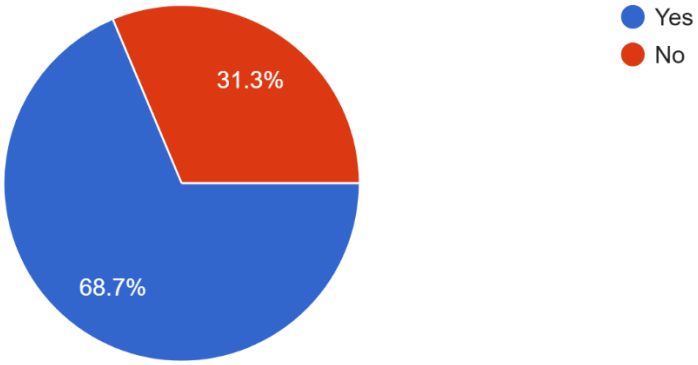
# Survey Results

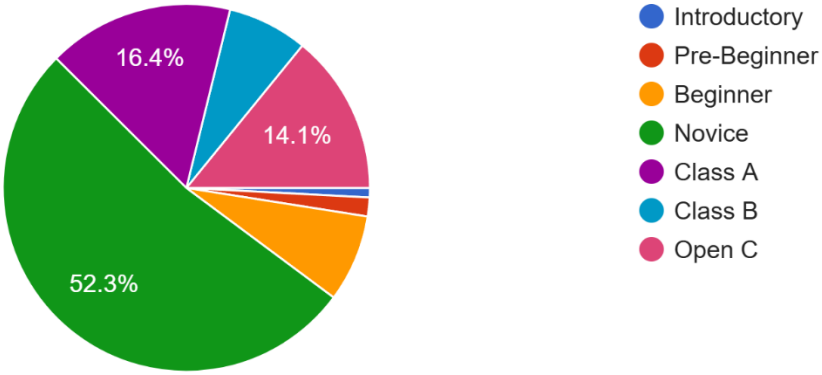
## OVERALL RESPONSES

We received 482 responses of which 331 (68.7%) thought that the content of the Novice class could be improved.




## LOWEST CLASS CURRENTLY WORKED BY RESPONDENTS

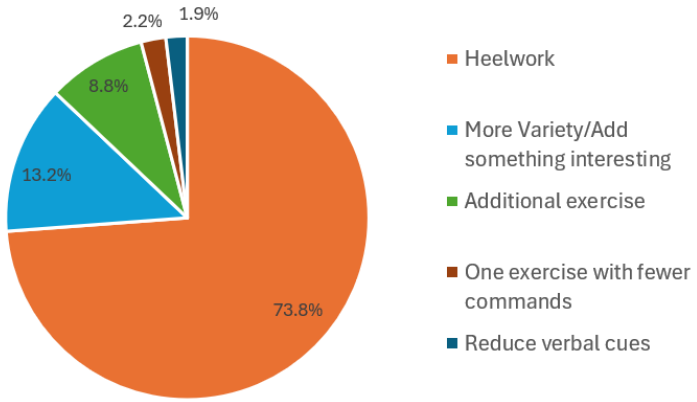
Over half those who responded had a dog eligible for Novice as their lowest class.



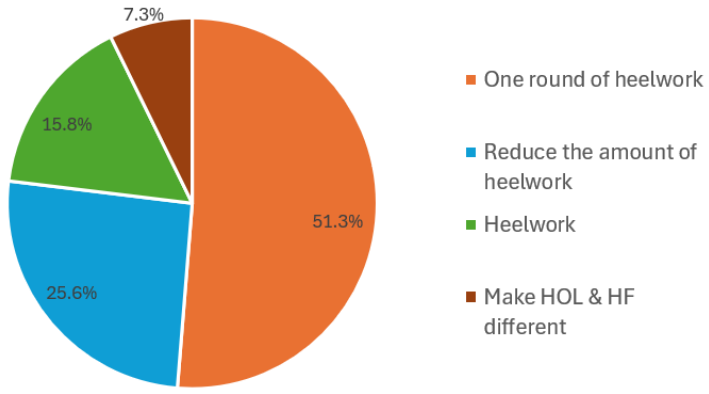

## WHAT IS THE ONE THING YOU WOULD CHANGE?

Those who thought the class content could be improved were asked what the one thing was that they would change. Almost 74% said Heelwork.

Other responses included adding variety to make the class more interesting and different from Beginners, adding in an existing exercise or part of one from the higher classes and in preparation for A, having one exercise with reduced verbal cues or generally reducing verbal cues.




As this was a free text response, the breakdown for the Heelwork response is on the chart below. Over 50% suggested reducing it to one round of heelwork with the majority suggesting this should be off lead. Some just responded with the word Heelwork, over 25% said the amount of heelwork including the number of turns needed to be reduced and 7% suggested different rounds for heel on lead and off lead some saying the off lead heelwork round should be shorter.

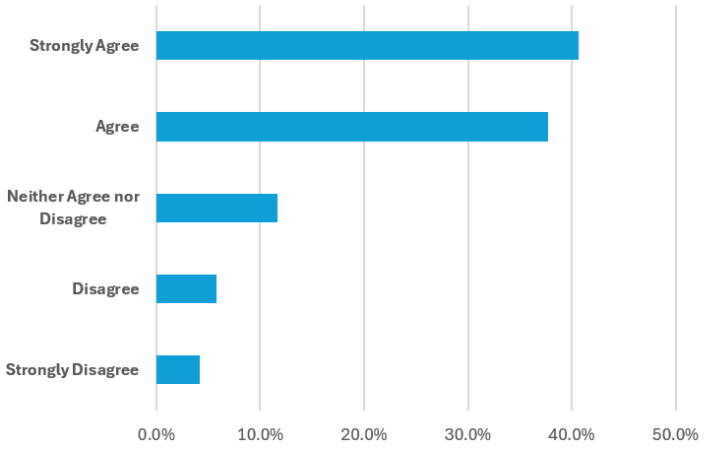



## THE PRINCIPLES OF NOVICE

Respondents were asked to give their views on the following suggested principles for the Novice class to help build a picture of the changes they may be looking for.

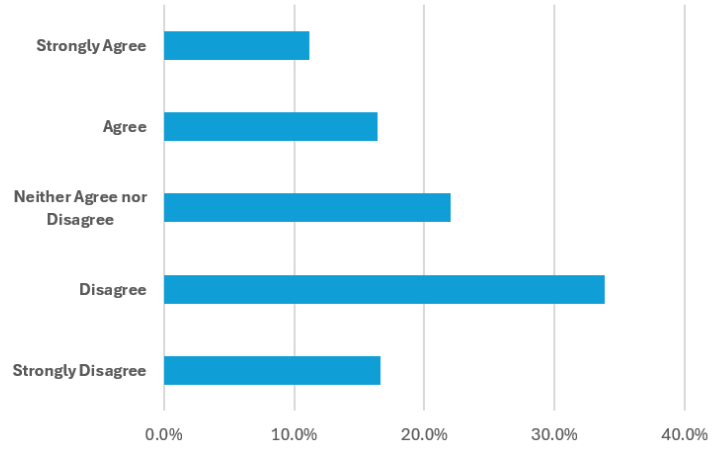
### Novice should help prepare handlers and dogs for Class A and beyond

There was agreement (78.4%) that Novice should help prepare dogs and handlers for the higher classes although this view is not supported by responses to other questions in the survey. (Chart on next page)



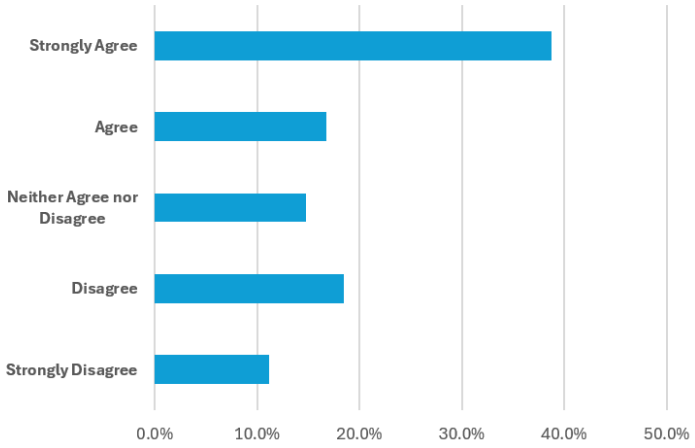

## Novice should include some elements with reduced verbal cues and body signals

Whilst respondents agreed above that Novice should help prepare teams for the higher classes, there was not the support for reducing verbal cues and body signals in Novice. 50.4% disagreed with the principle and 22% neither agreed nor disagreed.



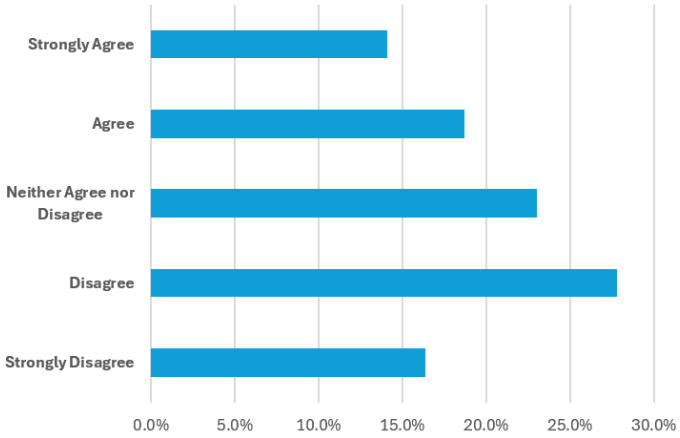

## Novice should include only one round of heelwork (heel off lead)

There was agreement (55.6%) that Novice should only include one round of heelwork. Again not a resounding majority, but there is enough evidence in the responses about heelwork in question 2 to indicate that this is an area that needs addressing. (Chart on next page)

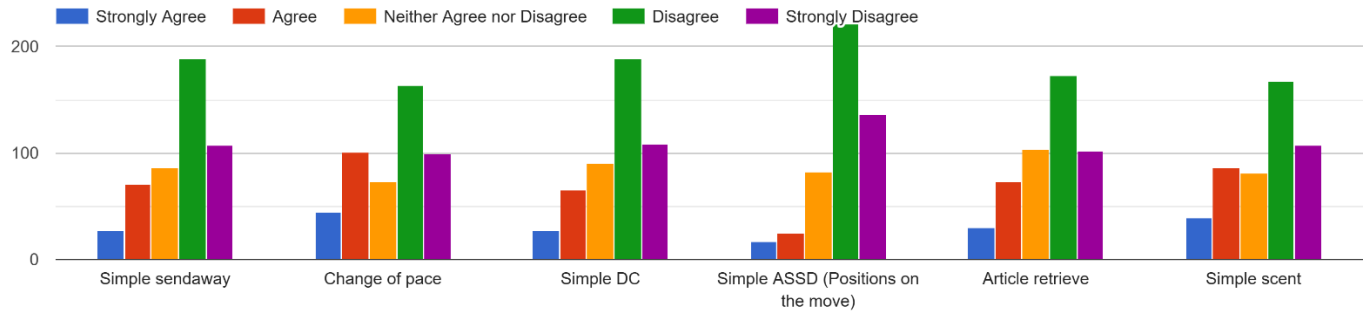



## Novice should replace the current recall with a short A recall using verbal cues and body signals

This principle received the most inconclusive response with 44.2% disagreeing, 32.8% agreeing and 23% neither agreeing nor disagreeing.




## SHOULD NOVICE CONTAIN ANY EXERCISES FROM OPEN C



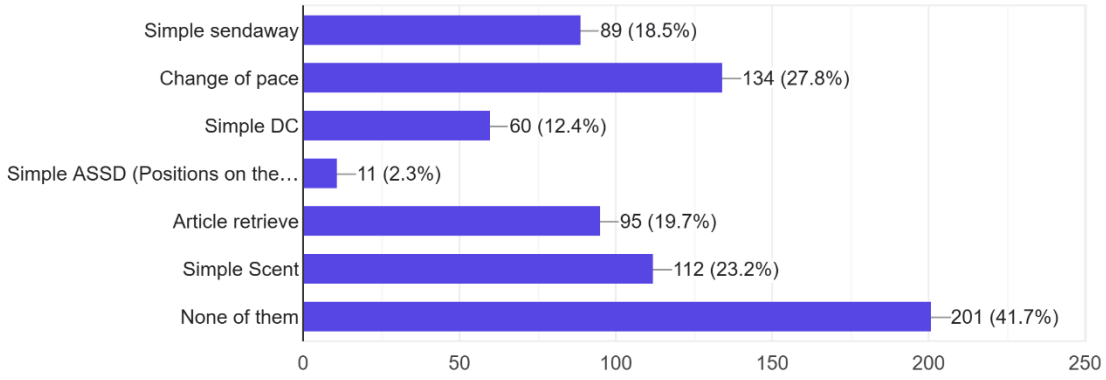

There was general disagreement to Novice containing any exercises from Open C which was surprising given the level of agreement to the principle that Novice should help prepare dogs and handlers for the higher classes.

Combining the percentages of those who disagreed and strongly disagreed the percentages were as follows:

Simple Sendaway – 61% disagreed or strongly disagreed
Change of pace - 55% disagreed or strongly disagreed
Simple DC - 62% disagreed or strongly disagreed
Simple ASSD - 74% disagreed or strongly disagreed
Article Retrieve – 57% disagreed or strongly disagreed
Simple Scent - 57% disagreed or strongly disagreed

### Preferred additions

When asked of the above which would be your most preferred additions (max 2 choices) almost 42% didn't want any included. Of those who chose, change of pace was the most popular followed by a simple scent.




## OTHER SUGGESTIONS TO DEVELOP THE NOVICE CLASS

There were 254 suggestions giving a range of views about developing the Novice class, with the amount and length of heelwork emerging as the most prominent concern. Many respondents favour reducing heelwork which is often considered excessively long and repetitive. Suggestions include shortening heel on lead, limiting the number of turns, or replacing one heelwork exercise with a simple progression exercise.

Others believe Novice should remain unchanged, emphasising its importance as an accessible introduction for young or inexperienced dogs and handlers progressing from Pre-Beginners and Beginners. Concerns were expressed that increasing difficulty could discourage newcomers, particularly when competing against experienced handlers with new dogs.

There is also support for introducing elements that better prepare dogs and handlers for the higher classes, such as a simplified A recall, changes of pace, or elements of scent or send away exercises. Some suggested allowing opportunities to reward or play with dogs to maintain motivation and confidence.

## PRIORITY CLASSES TO REVIEW

Respondents were asked if there are any classes that should be a priority to review and they could select a maximum of 3 classes. 34% said they don't have any strong views on priorities and 18.5% said that none of the classes need changing. Of those who felt change was needed, 33% said class A and almost 15% selected Introductory.

