

Consultation: Changes to the National Student Survey and the Unistats website

Summary: What does the consultation mean for students and for student advisers?

1. HEFCE and the other UK higher education (HE) funding bodies¹ are seeking views on changes to the National Student Survey, to the Unistats website and to information provided to students by universities and colleges. Consultation views will inform the changes we introduce from 2017 onwards.
2. This document summarises our consultation proposals and highlights aspects which may be of particular interest to students and student advisers. The deadline for responding to the consultation is noon **on Friday 4 December 2015**.
3. The Government has recently announced its plans for a Teaching Excellence Framework in England. The implications of this across the UK are not yet clear. We may need to consult again in the future to reflect the impact the Framework may have on information gathered from students and provided to them.

Background

4. Since 2005 we, as funding bodies, have run the **National Student Survey (NSS)**. This is the official survey that most final-year undergraduates across the UK complete, based on their opinion of the teaching and facilities on their course. We publish the NSS results on Unistats (<https://unistats.direct.gov.uk/>), which houses national data about every UK undergraduate course to help students decide about future study options. Unistats allows students to make side-by-side comparisons between courses at different universities and colleges, to see their relative strengths and weaknesses.
5. More information about how Unistats works is available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=65iU97jC67g>.

What if you would like to respond to the consultation?

6. We are very keen to hear from students directly, and from advisers such as school careers advisers. The information we collect and publish is intended to help students make decisions about study, and – through NSS – to ensure that feedback from current students helps universities and colleges to make improvements for future students.
7. We have involved students in the review through the National Union of Students' representation on steering groups and have involved students as participants in research. We welcome responses from students, their advisers and groups representing students.
8. Responses should be made online at www.hefce.ac.uk/it/roiconsult/. The deadline for responses is **noon on Friday 4 December 2015**.

What are we proposing to change and why?

¹ The four UK higher education funding bodies are the Department for Employment and Learning Northern Ireland (DEL NI), the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC).

9. We are proposing to make the following changes:
- a. **Changes to the questions in NSS survey.** This would affect students graduating in 2016-17. One of the major changes is including questions on a new topic of 'student engagement'. This will gather information on factors that researchers suggest make a difference to the quality of students' learning, such as students being involved in shaping their learning, feeling a sense of belonging, and being encouraged to adopt a 'deep approach to learning', for example, learning that is intellectually challenging. We are also suggesting other changes to bring the survey up to date.
 - b. **Redesign Unistats** to make it easier for students to find and understand information, and to reflect students' priorities. We particularly want to help students who may not know anyone who has been to university, who may want more support to understand the type of questions to ask, what data might help them answer those questions and where to find it.
 - c. Asking institutions to provide **detailed information about their courses** on their websites in a way that is consistent but will provide a good summary of what the course will be like. This includes information about how a course is taught and what might be expected of students, as this was the top priority for all the students who participated in our research.
 - d. We are asking for views about how we can **gather feedback from students who are not currently included in the NSS** such as students on short courses and taught postgraduate students. We are also interested in how we can gather and publish first-hand accounts from students about their experiences to help future students. This was something that students in the research said they would be interested in.
10. Further information about the consultation, and the supporting research the funding bodies have commissioned, is available at www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/roiconsult/.

Full summary of proposals

| Changes for 2017 | |
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| Unistats and the Key Information Set | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain and develop the UK website of authoritative national data for students, their advisers and other stakeholders. • Redesign Unistats to reflect diverse student information needs. • Transfer publication of learning, teaching and assessment information to institutions. • Provide more help for students to navigate information during their decision-making journey. |
| Information published by institutions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask institutions to publish detailed course information in line with Competitions and Markets Authority guidance. • Provide good practice developed with sector experts to support consistent but nuanced presentation of information. |
| National Student Survey | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply criteria for questions in main survey. • Include new questions on student engagement. • Amend questions on learning resources and assessment and feedback. • Merge duplicative questions. • Transfer personal development and student union questions to optional banks. • Bring optional questions up to date. |
| Potential changes after 2017 | |
| Methods for capturing qualitative data from students for publication. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider options for publishing qualitative information including National Student Survey comments. |
| Feedback from undergraduate students not included in the NSS | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider priority groups for whom we should collect data. • Consider options for capturing and publishing feedback. |
| Information for taught postgraduate students | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider approaches to capturing and publishing feedback from taught postgraduates. |