

Plans for the National Student Survey 2013 (HEFCE Circular letter 24/2012)

Annex A

Guidance on the 2013 National Student Survey for higher education institutions

1. The National Student Survey (NSS) will be carried out in 2013 across institutions in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, in collaboration with the National Union of Students. Ipsos MORI will continue to manage the survey process, and the 2013 NSS will have a similar format and timetable to the 2012 survey. This annex provides guidance specifically for higher education institutions (HEIs).
2. HEIs can access their target lists for the 2013 NSS via the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data collection system. They should provide the requested contact details for students on these lists to Ipsos MORI by **Friday 23 November 2012**. Further details can be found in the NSS 2013 Guidance for Institutions and Students' Unions, which will be published by Ipsos MORI and sent to institutional contacts on **Friday 26 October 2012**. The guidance document will also be made available on the NSS extranet, www.ipsos-mori.com/nss/extranet, by the end of October. Additions to the target list are only admitted where a student's course length has changed such that they are now expected to complete between 1 February 2013 and 31 January 2014 inclusive. Any such additions must be agreed by HEFCE prior to their inclusion in the final target list.
3. As in the 2012 NSS, students will be able to opt out when the institution asks if they wish to have their contact details passed on to the survey agency (Ipsos MORI) or at any stage during the survey process.
4. As in the 2012 NSS, to make the survey more useful to institutions, institutions may choose up to a maximum of six banks of optional questions, and may include up to two additional questions specific to the institution. As noted in 'Provision of information about higher education: Outcomes of consultation and next steps' (HEFCE 2011/18), from 2012 we expect institutions to work with students' unions in nominating banks of questions for inclusion. Institutions should submit these to Ipsos MORI.

NHS-funded provision

5. Inclusion of students on NHS-funded provision was previously supported by Skills for Health, but it is no longer able to fund this. We are in discussion with the Department of Health to secure funding so that they can be included, and expect to be able to make an announcement in November.

Scope and coverage of the survey

Coverage

6. The coverage of the 2013 NSS is:
 - a. All HEIs in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland and the independent University of Buckingham.

- b. Further education colleges (FECs) where there are students studying on directly funded or prescribed higher education courses.
- c. Students on initial teacher training courses funded by the Teaching Agency.
- d. All full-time and part-time undergraduate students registered at these HEIs and FECs, or on these initial teacher training courses, are eligible for the NSS during their final year of study (or, for flexible programmes where the final year cannot be predicted, after they are expected to have undertaken more than one full-time equivalent (FTE) and not before their third year of study) with the following exceptions:
 - i. Students on programmes that do not lead to undergraduate qualifications or credits.
 - ii. Students on a course lasting one year or one FTE, or less.
 - iii. Any students who were eligible in the 2012 NSS (whether or not they responded) and who remain at the same institution.
 - iv. Any students who we expect to have completed less than one FTE since they were last surveyed by the end of academic year 2012-13.

7. Students are included in the 2013 survey population if we expect them to complete between 1 February 2013 and 31 January 2014 inclusive.

8. As was the case for the 2012 survey, it will not be possible to add extra students to the NSS target list once it has been generated. The one exception to this is where the length of a student's course has decreased after an institution has submitted its HESA return, so that they now finish their course within the dates stipulated in paragraph 7 of this annex and meet the eligibility criteria more generally for the survey. If you wish to add students to the target list, contact Ipsos MORI at nss@ipsos.com prior to submitting your sample, stating:

- the number of extra students you wish to add
- the students' HESA Unique Student Identifiers (HUSIDs) or Individualised Learner Records (ILRs)
- for each student, how they meet the criteria in paragraph 6, with any relevant supporting information
- for each student, the name of the course they are studying.

Once extra students are added to the target list, it is not possible to remove them.

9. Taught postgraduates are not included in the NSS. This may change in the future, but it is unlikely that the NSS, designed for undergraduates, could simply be extended to postgraduates without significant adaptation of the questionnaire design, administrative methodology, timing and reporting methods.

Reasons for excluding individuals from the survey

10. Since the survey began, we have enabled institutions to exclude students from the target population and will continue to do so for the 2013 NSS. Therefore, the following are to be excluded from the survey:

- a. Students who are deceased.

- b. Students with serious health difficulties (including mental health difficulties) where seeking a response may be distressing for the student.
- c. Students who, having been informed that their contact details will be passed onto the survey agency (Ipsos MORI) for the purposes of the NSS, state that they do not wish to be contacted (students will also be able to opt out during the survey process).

These are the only grounds on which students may be excluded from the target population.

- 11. As in the 2012 NSS, institutions should code all excluded students on their sample submission as category c (regardless of whether they meet criteria a, b or c above), and institutions should not provide contact details for these students.
- 12. If an HEI identifies an error after it has submitted data to HESA but then wishes to remove students, we require it to submit a revised return to HESA that generates a revised target list. HESA will apply a charge of 20 per cent of the institution's annual subscription to meet the costs of processing this change.
- 13. To enable us to monitor exclusions and verify their consistent application, institutions should retain evidence to support exclusions. Where a student asks that their details are not passed on, we would expect institutions to retain evidence of this request. If the number of such requests at any HEI is so high as to affect our ability to conduct the survey successfully, we will discuss this with the institution.
- 14. However, students should not be removed from the file even though their contact details are not supplied.
- 15. Although some students may withdraw in their final year, they will have had a significant interaction with the institution, so their opinions are valuable and they should be included.

Process for supplying student contact data

- 16. Following submission of the HESA data, a target list of students to be included in the NSS will automatically be generated. The institution should then provide contact details, according to the standard template that will be supplied by Ipsos MORI, for all students on the list.
- 17. For the 2013 survey as in the 2012 NSS, students should be informed by the institution that their contact details may be passed on. For HEIs, text to explain this has been added to the model HESA student data collection notice.
- 18. Institutions have the opportunity to define their own structure for receiving institutional feedback, through an optional field on the student target list to indicate the internal 'department code' for each student. This would be instead of, or in addition to, feedback using the structure of the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS). These codes, where provided, will be used solely for providing feedback to the institution.
- 19. Institutions should provide the requested contact details for students on these lists to Ipsos MORI by **Friday 23 November 2012**. Ipsos MORI will provide guidance to its contacts on how to supply these lists. We have achieved a high response rate for the survey so far, and to ensure this continues it is important that institutions provide robust contact details to Ipsos MORI by this date.

Administration of the survey

20. As in previous years, the 2013 survey will be conducted during the spring term so that the results can be published in summer 2013, in time to inform the next cohort of applicants to higher education. To avoid concerns regarding impact on internal surveys, Ipsos MORI will continue to:

- a. Independently brand the NSS, which clearly distinguishes the purpose of the NSS.
- b. Centrally manage the survey's distribution, so that institutions are not involved in contacting students to complete the NSS.

21. The five-week 'window' will operate again, so institutions can choose to start the survey at a time that does not clash with examinations, fits with term timetables and so on. Institutions may select a week between 7 January and 4 February 2013 for the survey to start.

22. Ipsos MORI will conduct the survey at each institution using a set sequence of e-mail, postal and telephone surveying. This will take up to eight weeks at each institution (although there may be a need for some targeted follow-up during and beyond this time to increase response rates). To personalise the survey to the student and to institutions, Ipsos MORI will deploy the survey modes more tactically to help increase online responses and reduce survey costs.

23. We wish to avoid extending this window as this could jeopardise publication of the results in the Key Information Set for each course in time for them to be useful for the next cohort of applicants. However, we will consider individual requests for a short extension, where the activities of students during the window make it impractical to conduct the survey at that time. Any institution that wishes to make a case for an extension should contact Ipsos MORI by **Friday 23 November 2012**.

Branding and awareness-raising

24. Comprehensive guidance on the NSS 2013, including guidelines on appropriate promotion of the survey, is available from the Ipsos MORI NSS extranet.

25. As in previous years, Ipsos MORI will produce promotional materials for institutions and students' unions to distribute locally. However, if institutions and/or students' unions wish to use the NSS branding to develop their own marketing material, they may do so and should discuss this with Ipsos MORI. Ipsos MORI will advise on good practice and offer guidelines to ensure a reasonable degree of consistency across the sector. When it contacts institutions, Ipsos MORI will discuss who in the institution is best placed to co-ordinate promotional activity.

26. As in the 2012 NSS, Ipsos MORI will manage an incentive scheme for institutions that wish to take part. This is a centrally managed scheme that enables institutions to provide an incentive to students to complete the NSS. For example, some institutions provided printer credits for students who completed the survey online.

27. As in the 2012 NSS, students on flexible programmes will receive tailored communication that more accurately reflects their participation in higher education.

Questionnaire distribution

28. Ipsos MORI manages the NSS centrally. There are three methods of data collection: online, post and telephone. Ipsos MORI operates a live, open-access web-site, so that students can log in and complete the survey (this is in addition to the option to respond by following the

link in a personalised e-mail). The aim of the site is to verify the identity of students at the point of logging in; once students have completed the survey and their response is validated, they will be automatically removed from the target list and not contacted again. To enable this, and to enable efficient working of the survey more generally, institutions should adhere to the deadline for supplying student contact details.

29. Although there are three methods of data collection, we are committed to increasing the online response rate and so reducing the amount of postal and telephone contact. We have had some success in achieving this since the 2005 survey. However, telephoning remains an important element of the survey and will continue, so we expect institutions to provide students' landline and mobile telephone numbers where possible.

30. In order to monitor responses and to process data for analysis and reporting, we link all responses to students' HESA numbers or known student identifiers. Postal questionnaires will be personalised and include the student identifier. Telephone interviewers will have automatic access to identifiers. Once students have completed the survey, they will be removed from the target list and not contacted again.

31. Throughout the process Ipsos MORI will send reminders to students who have not responded.

32. Response rates, by institution and by JACS-based subject area, will be continuously monitored during the process. During the telephone stage, response rates will be reviewed and some areas may be identified for additional, targeted follow-up activity, to bring responses up to a sufficient level to report results. This additional activity will involve reminders by e-mail, text message and post.

33. At any stage during the survey process students may opt out of the survey and will not be contacted again. To do this, students will need to verify their identity by providing some data such as their date of birth.

34. Ipsos MORI follow up with students and institutions where response rates are looking as if they will be below those that can be published (see paragraph 36). The completeness and accuracy of students' contact data, as supplied by institutions, will be a significant factor in the survey's ability to achieve this.

Publication of 2013 NSS results

35. A major purpose of the NSS is to provide information to help potential students and their advisers make choices about higher education (it also has an important function in enhancement, by helping institutions to identify areas that students have concerns about). Therefore all results that meet the publication threshold will be published on the Unistats web-site, <http://unistats.direct.gov.uk>, in summer 2013. Following advice from the former Teaching Quality Information for Higher Education in FECs Steering Group, the Higher Education Public Information Steering Group agreed that, in principle, the results from students studying on directly funded higher education programmes in FECs will be shown as being from the institution at which the student studied for the majority of their first year. This will help potential students make informed choices about what and where to study.

36. The current publication threshold for NSS results on the Unistats web-site is a 50 per cent response rate with at least 23 students responding.

37. We will also make more detailed data available to institutions to help them to identify good practice and improve the student experience. This is currently undertaken by Ipsos MORI via its results web-site, www.ipsos-mori.com/nss/results.

Annex B

Guidance on the 2013 National Student Survey for further education colleges

1. The 2013 National Student Survey (NSS) will be carried out across institutions in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, in collaboration with the National Union of Students. Ipsos MORI manages the survey process, and the 2013 NSS will have a similar format and timetable to the 2012 survey. This annex provides guidance specifically for further education colleges (FECs).

2. FECs can access their target lists for the 2013 NSS via the HEFCE web facility for 2011-12 statistics derived from Individualised Learner Record (ILR) data. In order to ensure that the target list generated by the HEFCE web facility can be replicated on receipt of ILR data from the data service, colleges must ensure that their final version of their ILR LR05 return is uploaded to the web facility by **23 November 2012**. They should provide the requested contact details for students on these lists to Ipsos MORI by **Friday 23 November 2012**. Further details can be found in the NSS 2013 Guidance for Institutions and Students' Unions, which will be published by Ipsos MORI and sent to institutional contacts on **Friday 26 October 2012**. The guidance document will also be available on the NSS extranet, www.ipsos-mori.com/nss/extranet. Additions to the target list are only admitted where a student's course length has changed such that they are now expected to complete between 1 February 2013 and 31 January 2014 inclusive. Any such additions must be agreed by HEFCE prior to their inclusion in the final target list.

3. As in the 2012 NSS, to make the survey more useful to institutions, institutions may choose up to a maximum of six banks of optional questions, and may include up to two additional questions specific to the institution. As noted in 'Provision of information about higher education: Outcomes of consultation and next steps' (HEFCE 2011/18), from 2012 when institutions are nominating banks of questions we expect institutions to work with students' unions to ensure where they want a bank of questions included. Institutions should submit these to Ipsos MORI.

4. As in the 2012 NSS, students will be able to opt out when the institution asks if they wish to have their contact details passed on to the survey agency (Ipsos MORI) or at any stage during the survey process.

NHS-funded provision

5. Inclusion of students on NHS-funded provision was previously supported by Skills for Health, but it is no longer able to fund this. We are in discussion with the Department of Health to secure funding so that they can be included, and expect to be able to make an announcement in November.

Scope and coverage of the survey

Coverage

6. The coverage of the 2013 NSS is:
- a. All HEIs in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, and the independent University of Buckingham.

- b. FECs where there are students studying on directly funded of prescribed higher education courses.
- c. Students on initial teacher training courses funded by the Teaching Agency.
- d. All full-time and part-time undergraduate students registered at these HEIs and FECs, , or on these initial teacher training courses, are eligible for the NSS during their final year of study (or, for flexible programmes where the final year cannot be predicted, after they are expected to have undertaken more than one full-time equivalent (FTE) and not before their third year of study) with the following exceptions:
 - i. Students on programmes that do not lead to undergraduate qualifications.
 - ii. Students on a course lasting one year or one FTE or less.
 - iii. Any students who were eligible in the 2012 NSS (whether or not they responded) and who remain at the same institution.
 - iv. Any students who we expect to have completed less than one FTE since they were last surveyed by the end of academic year 2012-13.

7. Students are included in the 2013 survey population if we expect them to complete between 1 February 2013 and 31 January 2014 inclusive.

8. As was the case for the 2012 survey, it will not possible to add extra students to the NSS target list once it has been generated. The one exception to this is where the length of a student's course has decreased, so that they now finish their course within the dates stipulated in paragraph 7 of this annex and meet the eligibility criteria more generally for the survey. If you wish to add students to the target list, contact Ipsos MORI at nss@ipsos.com prior to submitting your sample, stating:

- the number of extra students you wish to add
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These are the only grounds on which students may be excluded from the target population.

11. As in the 2012 NSS, institutions should code all excluded students on their sample submission as category c (regardless of whether they meet criteria a, b or c above) and institutions should not provide contact details for these students (students will also be able to opt out during the survey process)

12. If an FEC identifies an error after it has submitted data to HEFCE, but then wishes to remove students, it will need to explain to HEFCE the nature of the error, the students affected and provide an explanation of how it will ensure the error does not occur again. HEFCE will then decide if these students should be removed from the target list.

13. To enable us to monitor exclusions and verify their consistent application, FECs should retain evidence to support exclusions. Where a student asks that their details are not passed on, we would expect institutions to retain evidence of this request. If the number of such requests at any FEC is so high as to affect our ability to conduct the survey successfully, we will discuss this with the institution.

14. However, students should not be removed from the file even though their contact details are not supplied.

15. Although some students may withdraw in their final year, they will have had a significant interaction with the institution, so their opinions are valuable and should be included.

Process for supplying student contact data

16. Following submission of the ILR data to the HEFCE extranet, a target list of students to be included in the NSS will automatically be generated. The institution should then provide contact details, according to the standard template that will be supplied by Ipsos MORI, for all students on the list.

17. For FECs the standard collection notice already covers the use of student contact details in general surveys. However, given the nature and importance of the NSS, the former Teaching Quality Information for Higher Education in FECs Steering Group (which included representatives from the Association of Colleges, FECs and the National Union of Students) agreed that institutions should contact students eligible to take part in the survey informing them that they will be contacted by Ipsos MORI and that they may opt out, if they wish. Suggested wording is at Annex C.

18. Institutions have the opportunity to define their own structure for receiving institutional feedback, through an optional field on the student target list to indicate the internal 'department code' for each student. This would be instead of or in addition to feedback using the structure of the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS). These codes, where provided, will be used solely for providing feedback to the institution.

19. For FECs, HEFCE will map between Learndirect codes on the ILR and the JACS subject hierarchy for publication purposes.

20. Institutions should provide the requested contact details for students on these lists to Ipsos MORI by **Friday 23 November 2012**. Ipsos MORI will provide guidance to its contacts on how to supply these lists. We have achieved a relatively high response rate for the survey so far, and to ensure this continues it is important that institutions provide robust contact details to Ipsos MORI by this date.

Administration of the survey

21. The survey will be conducted during the 2013 spring term so that the results can be published in summer 2013, in time to inform the next cohort of applicants to higher education. To avoid concerns regarding impact on internal surveys, Ipsos MORI will continue to:

- a. Independently brand the NSS, which clearly distinguishes the purpose of the NSS.
- b. Centrally manage the survey's distribution, so that institutions are not involved in contacting students to complete the NSS.

22. The five-week 'window' will operate again, so institutions can choose to start the survey at a time that does not clash with examinations, fits with term timetables and so on. Institutions may select a week between 7 January and 4 February 2013 for the survey to start.

23. Ipsos MORI will conduct the survey at each institution using a set sequence of e-mail, postal and telephone surveying. This will take up to eight weeks at each institution (although there may be a need for some targeted follow-up during and beyond this time to increase response rates). To personalise the survey to the student and to institutions, Ipsos MORI will deploy the survey modes more tactically to help increase online responses and reduce survey costs.

24. We wish to avoid extending this window as this could jeopardise publication of the results in the Key Information Set for each course in time for them to be useful for the next cohort of applicants. However, we will consider individual requests for a short extension, where the activities of students during the window make it impractical to conduct the survey at that time. Any institution that wishes to make a case for an extension should contact Ipsos MORI by **Friday 23 November 2012**.

Branding and awareness raising

25. Comprehensive guidance on the NSS 2013, including guidelines on appropriate promotion of the survey, is available from the Ipsos MORI NSS extranet.

26. As in previous years, Ipsos MORI will produce promotional materials for institutions and students' unions to distribute locally. However, if institutions and/or students' unions wish to use the NSS branding to develop their own marketing material, they may do so and should discuss this with Ipsos MORI. Ipsos MORI will advise on good practice and offer guidelines to ensure a reasonable degree of consistency across the sector. When it contacts institutions, Ipsos MORI will discuss who in the institution is best placed to co-ordinate promotional activity.

27. As in the 2012 NSS, Ipsos MORI will manage an incentive scheme for institutions that wish to take part. This is a centrally managed scheme that enables institutions to provide an incentive

to students to complete the NSS. For example, some institutions provided printer credits for students who completed the survey online.

28. As in the 2012 NSS, students on flexible programmes will receive tailored communication which more accurately reflects their participation in higher education.

Questionnaire distribution

29. Ipsos MORI manages the NSS centrally. There are three methods of data collection: online, post and telephone. Ipsos MORI operates a live, open-access web-site, so that students can log in and complete the survey (this is in addition to the option to respond by following the link in a personalised e-mail). The aim of the site is to verify the identity of students at the point of logging in; once students have completed the survey and their response is validated, they will be automatically removed from the target list and not contacted again. To enable this, and to enable efficient working of the survey more generally, institutions should adhere to the deadline for supplying student contact details.

30. Although there are three methods of data collection, we are committed to increasing the online response rate and so reducing the amount of postal and telephone contact. We have had some success in achieving this since the 2005 survey. However, telephoning remains an important element of the survey and will continue, so we expect institutions to provide students' landline and mobile telephone numbers where possible.

31. In order to monitor responses and to process data for analysis and reporting, we link all responses to students' ILR learner reference number or known student identifiers. Postal questionnaires will be personalised and include the student identifier. Telephone interviewers will have automatic access to identifiers. Once students have completed the survey, they will be removed from the target list and not contacted again.

32. Throughout the process Ipsos MORI will send reminders to students who have not responded.

33. Response rates, by institution and by JACS-based subject area, will be continuously monitored during the process. During the telephone stage, response rates will be reviewed and some areas may be identified for additional, targeted follow-up activity, to bring response up to a sufficient level to report results. This additional activity will involve reminders by e-mail, text message and post.

34. At any stage during the survey process students may opt out of the survey and will not be contacted again. To do this, students will need to verify their identity by providing some data such as their date of birth.

35. Ipsos MORI follow up with students and institutions where response rates are looking as if they will be below those that can be published (see paragraph 37). The completeness and accuracy of students' contact data, as supplied by institutions, will be a significant factor in the survey's ability to achieve this.

Publication of 2013 NSS results

36. A major purpose of the NSS is to provide information to help potential students and their advisers make choices about higher education (it also has an important function in enhancement, by helping institutions to identify areas that students have concerns about). Therefore all results that meet the publication threshold will be published on the Unistats web-site

<http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/>, in summer 2013. Following advice from the former Teaching Quality Information for Higher Education in FECs Steering Group, the Higher Education Public Information Steering Group agreed that, in principle, the results from students studying on directly funded higher education programmes in FECs will be shown as being from the institution at which the student studied for the majority of their first year. This will help potential students make informed choices about what and where to study.

37. The current publication threshold for NSS results on the Unistats web-site is a 50 per cent response rate with at least 23 students responding.

38. We will also make more detailed data available to institutions to help them to identify good practice and to improve the student experience. This is currently undertaken by Ipsos MORI via its results web-site, www.ipsos-mori.com/nss/results.

Annex C

Suggested wording for further education colleges to invite eligible students to take part in the National Student Survey

1. We are committed to encouraging and helping institutions to improve the response rate of students studying higher education in further education colleges, and where the proportion of eligible students opting out is over 5 per cent, we expect institutions to contact such students to encourage them to participate in the survey. However, it is only fair that students who feel strongly should be able to opt out of completing the survey.
2. We therefore suggest the following wording:

You are invited to take part in the 2013 National Student Survey (NSS).

The NSS, which is fully supported by the National Union of Students, is an opportunity for students to give feedback on their academic experience, for example on issues such as teaching, academic support and learning resources. The results are published online and used to help future students to choose courses that best suit their needs and interests. The NSS is conducted across the UK, so that results can be compared nationally. As well as providing important information to prospective students, the results are used by the college to inform improvements and changes that will benefit students in the future. You can see the results of last year's survey at <http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/>.

The survey is conducted by Ipsos MORI, an independent market research agency, and has been run annually since 2005. Students studying on higher education courses run directly by further education colleges are included. All students who are currently in their final year on such courses, and expect to complete their studies between 1 February 2013 and 31 January 2014, are eligible to take part. All survey responses are treated anonymously.

The survey (which can be taken online, by post or by phone) takes about five minutes to complete. It is increasingly important in providing information to prospective students and to institutions. We very much hope that you will be willing to take part. Ipsos MORI will contact all eligible students in the 2013 spring term. However, if you would prefer not to be contacted, please let **xxxxx (contact name)** know by **xxxx (date)**.