

Consultation: Changes to the National Student Survey, Unistats and information provided by institutions

Summary: What do our consultation proposals mean for alternative providers?

1. In July 2015, as a result of the consultation 'Improving Quality and Value for Money'¹, the Government determined that all English alternative providers with designated courses should provide the same information to students as HEFCE-funded providers. In accordance with this, alternative providers will be required by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to participate in the National Student Survey starting in the academic year of 2016-17, and provide other data to enable the production of the Key Information Set (KIS).
2. HEFCE and the other UK higher education (HE) funding bodies are consulting on changes to information about learning and teaching, and the student experience². This includes changes we propose to make to the National Student Survey, to the Unistats website and to information provided by institutions.
3. As part of this consultation we are seeking views from providers outside the publicly funded sector. This document summarises our consultation proposals and highlights aspects which may be of particular interest to such institutions.

Background

4. The UK HE funding bodies work collectively to provide information for three purposes: to **help students make decisions about study**, to **improve learning and teaching** and to **support quality assessment and accountability**. Since 2005 we have run the National Student Survey (NSS), a survey of final year undergraduates who are on courses longer than one full-time equivalent year. We publish the NSS data on the Unistats website, which is aimed at prospective undergraduate students. The site also houses other course-level data, including a subset of data called the Key Information Set. The KIS is based on the data which students said they found useful in research in 2010³. In England, HE institutions in the publicly funded sector have been required to publish NSS and Unistats data as part of their conditions of grant. Further information about our work on information is available on our websites.
5. For alternative providers the collection of NSS data will begin in spring 2017, to be published in September 2017. The administrative processes required to enable participation in the NSS will begin in 2016. The National Student Survey in 2017, and data collected and published as part of the KIS, will be affected by our consultation proposals.

How can alternative providers engage with the consultation?

6. We are keen to hear from a wide range of institutions in higher education. We would encourage **all** providers of higher education courses to read the consultation document and to consider the research reports that are published alongside it. Responses should be made online

¹ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/alternative-providers-of-higher-education-improving-quality-and-value-for-money>.

² See 'Review of information about learning and teaching, and the student experience: Consultation on changes to the National Student Survey, Unistats and information provided by institutions', available at www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/roiconsult/.

³ See 'Understanding the information needs of users of public information about higher education', available at www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rereports/Year/2010/hepublicinfouserneeds/.

at www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/roiconsult/. The deadline for responses is **noon on Friday 4 December 2015**.

7. We are holding three consultation events for UK HE institutions and other stakeholders during November 2015 in Cardiff, Edinburgh and London. We would encourage alternative providers to attend. You can register to attend online at www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/roiconsult/events/.

What are we proposing to change and why?

8. The consultation is the first stage of a **two-stage review process**. We are consulting now on specific changes to Unistats and the NSS to bring them up to date and improve their effectiveness. We are also seeking early ideas for how feedback might be gathered from students who are not covered by the NSS, and also how qualitative data is collected. These proposed changes are based on an extensive programme of research and testing, details of which can be downloaded alongside the consultation at www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/roiconsult/.

9. **Stage two** is a planned consultation on any changes that may be required as a result of the Government's plans for a Teaching Excellence Framework and our planned review of indicators of learning (outcomes and factors that contribute to high-quality learning and teaching). We are awaiting publication of the Government's Green Paper in autumn 2015 before developing our proposals in this area.

What are the key proposals with relevance for alternative providers?

10. We are proposing to:

- a. Change questions in NSS 2017 to bring the survey up to date and include new questions on student engagement, to strengthen the role of the survey in improving learning and teaching.
- b. Change the data collected and published as part of the Key Information Set for 2017. We are proposing to transfer the publication to institutions of three elements of the KIS – learning, teaching and assessment data, accommodation and fees – as research shows these are not suitable for presentation as simple metrics on Unistats. The Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) has set out the information that providers are already required to provide. Working with experts we will develop good practice guidance to help providers meet CMA's expectations as outlined in its guidance⁴.
- c. Redesign Unistats to make it easier to find and understand information, and so that it reflects students' differing information priorities and needs, particularly those unfamiliar with HE who may need more support to make the most of available data.

11. We are also seeking views on some longer-term changes after 2017. These relate to gathering feedback from students not included in the NSS, including those on flexible and short course provision, and other groups of students.

⁴ CMA has published two documents relevant to information that institutions should provide. Its report on consumer law outlines the 'material information' required to comply with consumer law. Its report on regulation outlines information in addition to this which it deems to be good practice. See www.gov.uk/cma-cases/consumer-protection-review-of-higher-education and www.gov.uk/cma-cases/competition-and-regulation-in-higher-education-in-england.

Full summary of proposals

Changes for 2017	
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.