

Cylchlythyr | Circular

The National Student Survey 2019

Date: 24 October 2018
Reference: W18/26HE
To: Governing bodies and heads of regulated and/or funded institutions in Wales
Student representative bodies in Wales
Other parties with an interest in public information
Response by: 28 November 2018
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This circular announces arrangements for the 2019 National Student Survey (NSS), and the action required from institutions by **Wednesday 28 November 2018**. This includes:

- providing up to date institutional contact details
- checking the sample list of students to be included in the survey (the “target list”) and providing students’ contact details.

If you require this document in an alternative accessible format, please email info@hefcw.ac.uk.



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Introduction

1. This circular announces arrangements for the 2019 National Student Survey (NSS), and the action required from institutions by **Wednesday 28 November 2018**. This includes:
 - providing up to date institutional contact details
 - checking the sample list of students to be included in the survey (the “target list”) and providing students’ contact details.
2. The 2019 survey will utilise the same core questionnaire design as 2018; this is attached as **Annex A**. The 2019 survey will include the addition of questions aimed at degree apprenticeship students which were included in the 2018 survey for students in England only and have been extended to include the rest of the UK.
3. The Office for Students (OfS) manages the NSS on behalf of the UK funding and regulatory bodies and Health Education England. In 2019 Ipsos MORI will administer the survey and offer support to providers in managing and promoting the survey. Texuna Technologies will deliver the data dissemination portal for providers.
4. The NSS is a key component of the quality assurance and wider regulatory landscape in UK higher education. In Wales, all regulated and funded institutions are required to participate.
5. All providers in Wales pay for the administration of the survey. HEFCW also contributes to the costs of administering the survey.
6. Detailed guidance relating to the 2019 NSS and the required action by institutions is attached as **Annex B**.

Actions for all institutions

7. All institutions are asked to review and update, if necessary, their relevant NSS institutional contact details. The information should be supplied to Ipsos MORI no later than **Wednesday 28 November 2018** using the ‘My Details’ form, available on the Ipsos MORI NSS extranet (www.ipsos-mori.com/nss/extranet). This is a password-protected site, and Ipsos MORI will send login details to the nominated main and secondary NSS contacts.
8. All providers should populate their 2019 NSS sample templates, provided by Ipsos MORI, with the requested contact details for students on their target list (this is a list of all students eligible for 2019 NSS based on the 2017-18 HESA student data submitted). Details should be supplied to Ipsos MORI by **Wednesday 28 November 2018** via the ‘Upload Sample Data’ section of the Ipsos MORI NSS extranet.
9. Instructions on how to supply this information are included in the NSS 2019 guidance ‘Preparing for the National Student Survey 2019’, which will be

issued to providers and available on the Ipsos MORI extranet from 24 October 2018. The guidance includes information regarding survey administration and key responsibilities and dates.

NSS 2019

10. The NSS will take place between January and April 2019 and will be administered by Ipsos MORI. The high level results will be published in July/August 2019 on the [Office for Students](#) website. Detailed results will be supplied to institutions through the dissemination portal provided by Texuna Technologies. As in previous years, NSS results at course level will be published on the [Unistats](#) website.
11. A detailed timetable for publication of the data will be available in April/May 2019.
12. In May 2018 we published circular [W18/09HE: National Student Survey and Unistats: Updated timetables and changes for 2018](#) which indicated (see para 4) that the OfS was seeking designation as a producer of official statistics. The 2018 results were published in line with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. The OfS has since achieved designation and the NSS results will be published in the same way as in 2018; this will mean that there will be no provider preview access to their own data and the report data available will be limited to that required for Unistats data quality processes.
13. Ipsos MORI are responsible for contacting students, promoting the survey and providing cleaned data to the OfS and funding bodies. As part of its role, Ipsos MORI will liaise directly with providers regarding survey administration and will support the running of the survey by:
 - offering guidance on the specifics of the survey programme, such as selecting optional questions
 - supplying NSS branded marketing materials and advising providers on the production of their own materials
 - facilitating provider incentive schemes to encourage students to take part in the survey.
14. Providers will be invited to select one of five starting weeks for their survey. There will be no communication with students outside of the timing agreed with individual providers.
15. Texuna Technologies will provide the results dissemination portal for institutions in 2019. The results portal will allow institutions to access particular elements of their data including students' open text comments and data below certain publication thresholds.
16. Texuna Technologies will also provide a dedicated NSS service desk to support providers in accessing their data and responding to queries.

17. Texuna Technologies will contact providers' NSS contacts in spring 2019 to:
 - confirm user and log on details
 - confirm the details of publication of NSS 2019 results on the portal
18. Whilst the survey is managed by Ipsos MORI and the UK funding and regulatory bodies, the active support of providers is vital in ensuring the data is high quality, particularly in delivering high response rates. We encourage all providers and students' unions to draw on the resources available and to contact Ipsos MORI or Texuna Technologies if they require additional support.
19. We will continue to work in partnership with the National Union of Students Wales (NUSW) to ensure that the NSS appropriately reflects the student experience in Wales.

Optional banks

20. As has been the practice in previous years, institutions will be able to choose up to six banks of optional questions to supplement the survey; these should be agreed with the institution's student representative body. Further information about this will be provided in the guidance from Ipsos MORI from 24 October 2018.

Intentions after Graduation Survey (IAGS)

21. The Intentions after Graduation Survey (IAGS) collects information from students completing the NSS about their plans following their studies. It will continue to run as a follow-on survey to the NSS. The IAGS provides valuable information about student progression, including postgraduate study. The costs of the IAGS will be covered by the UK funding and regulatory bodies. On completing the NSS, students completing first degree programmes will be invited to take part in a separate 'click-through' survey asking them about their intentions after graduation. This will be offered to online respondents only.

Degree apprenticeship questions

22. Students who are on degree apprenticeships leading to a higher education award will automatically be included in the NSS if they meet the standard eligibility criteria. In 2018 a set of degree apprenticeship questions were piloted in England to inform future approaches to surveying degree apprentices.
23. As numbers of apprentices were small the pilot will run again in 2019 but will include all degree apprenticeship students at eligible providers in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland this year. These pilot

questions will be offered to online respondents only and positioned after the main survey and optional banks, but before IAGS. The pilot data will be treated as research data to inform future approaches and will not be published at institutional level.

Inappropriate influence on the survey

24. The OfS is responsible, on behalf of the other funders and regulators, for managing the process for dealing with concerns that students have been inappropriately influenced in their completion of the NSS. To maintain integrity of the NSS data, we need to ensure that students who complete the survey have not been influenced by their provider, or any other parties, to respond in a way that does not reflect their true opinion.
25. The updated process for managing these concerns will be published in December 2018 before fieldwork takes place. This guidance is intended to be read in conjunction with the Good Practice Guide, issued by Ipsos MORI, which explains inappropriate influence and how to avoid this when encouraging student participation. We would urge institutions to ensure all staff who are responsible for the running of the survey are familiar with Ipsos MORI's guidance and seek advice where needed from Ipsos MORI or OfS on the funders' approach to avoiding inappropriate influence.

Research

26. The funding bodies have commissioned [Shift Learning](#) to undertake research looking at providers' practices associated with the NSS. The work has two main objectives, to gain further understanding of:
 - how the NSS is marketed and promoted by higher education providers including providers' understanding of inappropriate influence on the survey
 - to what extent the survey has an impact on providers' practices, including unintended consequences.
27. Shift Learning will ensure that all providers involved in the study would be unidentifiable to the OfS or funding bodies. The outputs of this will enable the funders to review communications and guidance for providers and give further insight into the impact of the NSS across the sector.

Further information

28. For further information, contact Dr Cliona O'Neill (tel 029 2085 9731; email cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk).

List of NSS 2019 questions

The teaching on my course

1. Staff are good at explaining things
2. Staff have made the subject interesting
3. The course is intellectually stimulating
4. My course has challenged me to achieve my best work

Learning opportunities

5. My course has provided me with opportunities to explore ideas or concepts in depth
6. My course has provided me with opportunities to bring information and ideas together from different topics
7. My course has provided me with opportunities to apply what I have learnt

Assessment and feedback

8. The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance
9. Marking and assessment has been fair
10. Feedback on my work has been timely
11. I have received helpful comments on my work

Academic support

12. I have been able to contact staff when I needed to
13. I have received sufficient advice and guidance in relation to my course
14. Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices on my course

Organisation and management

15. The course is well organised and running smoothly
16. The timetable works efficiently for me
17. Any changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively

Learning resources

18. The IT resources and facilities provided have supported my learning well
19. The library resources (e.g. books, online services and learning spaces) have supported my learning well
20. I have been able to access course-specific resources (e.g. equipment, facilities, software, collections) when I needed to

Learning community

21. I feel part of a community of staff and students
22. I have had the right opportunities to work with other students as part of my course

Student voice

23. I have had the right opportunities to provide feedback on my course
24. Staff value students' views and opinions about the course
25. It is clear how students' feedback on the course has been acted on
26. The Students' Union (Association or Guild) effectively represents students' academic interests
27. Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course

Guidance on the 2019 National Student Survey

1. The National Student Survey (NSS) will be carried out in 2019 across providers in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland by the Office for Students (OfS) working on behalf of the UK higher education and funding regulatory bodies. Ipsos MORI will manage the survey process and Texuna Technologies will provide the dissemination portal services. The 2019 NSS will follow a similar timetable to the 2018 survey.
2. The responsibilities of providers in the successful management of the NSS are:
 - a. Timely submission of the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Student Record and alternative provider student record. The final submission date is in October for higher education institutions and in November for alternative providers.
 - b. Ensuring good data quality by checking the NSS report (the target list) generated by HESA. Requests for any necessary changes which cannot be resolved by correcting the student data may be directed to Ipsos MORI for funding body approval within the period December 2018 to February 2019.
 - c. Timely submission of student contact details when requested by Ipsos MORI (November 2018).
 - d. Engagement with all guidance and requests issued by HEFCW, the OfS (where relevant), HESA, Ipsos MORI and Texuna Technologies, and attendance at relevant attending training opportunities.
 - e. Submitting survey preferences to Ipsos MORI. This includes timing of the survey and the choice of optional bank questions. Optional bank choices should be made in conjunction with the relevant student representative body (students' union, association or guild).
 - f. Promotion of the survey to students, ensuring all activities meet the guidelines on avoiding inappropriate influence provided by Ipsos MORI and the UK funding bodies' code of practice for higher education data collections.
 - g. Where appropriate, if advised by Ipsos Mori that response rates are low, undertake additional promotional activity to encourage students to complete the survey (during the surveying period January 2019 to April 2019).
 - h. Access the responses and results of the survey via Texuna Technologies' dedicated results facility (July/August 2019), Office for Students website (including benchmarked data) and Unistats site (for students).
3. Providers in Wales can access their target lists for the 2019 NSS via the HESA data collection system. They should provide the requested contact details for students on these lists to Ipsos MORI by **Wednesday 28 November 2018**. Further details can be found in the NSS 2019 'Guidance for providers and

Students' Unions', sent to institutional contacts by Ipsos MORI. The guidance document is also available on the NSS extranet.

4. Additions to or removals from the target list are admitted only under specific circumstances, details of which are provided in the guidance. Any such requests for additions or removals must be submitted to Ipsos MORI and agreed by HEFCW/OfS prior to their inclusion in or removal from the final target list. If approved, the OfS will inform the provider and make the amendment to the target list.
5. Students are able to opt out when the provider 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.
6. Providers may choose up to six banks of optional questions, and may include up to two additional questions specific to the provider. Providers are asked to agree with students' unions their choice of optional banks of questions for inclusion. Providers should submit their choice of optional banks and additional questions to Ipsos MORI.

Coverage

7. The following providers are covered by the 2019 NSS:
 - a. All universities and other higher education institutions in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.
 - b. Other higher education providers in England with specific course designation for new students in 2018-19 who completed a HESA return for 2017-18.
 - c. Further education colleges in England and Wales, where there are students on directly funded prescribed higher education courses.
 - d. All further education colleges in Northern Ireland.
8. All full-time and part-time undergraduate students registered at participating providers are eligible to undertake 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 and not before their third year of study) with the following exceptions:
 - a. Students on programmes that do not lead to undergraduate qualifications or credits.
 - b. Students on a course lasting one year or one full-time equivalent, or less.
 - c. Any students who were surveyed in the 2018 NSS (whether or not they responded) and who remain at the same provider.

- d. Any students who we expect to have completed one full-time equivalent or less since they were last surveyed by the end of academic year 2018-19.
9. Students are included in the 2019 survey population if they are expected to complete between 1 February 2019 and 31 January 2020 inclusive.
10. It is possible to add or remove students from the NSS target list in exceptional circumstances, for example if the length of a student's course has decreased after a provider has submitted its HESA return. The full criteria are set out in the guidance provided by Ipsos MORI.
11. Providers will be able to make requests to add or remove students to/from the NSS population once the target list has been finalised by the OfS. Requests for changes can be made from:
 - early December for higher education institutions
 - early January for alternative providers.
12. Requests should be submitted as soon as possible after these dates to ensure they can be processed prior to, or early in, the survey period. All requests must be made through the NSS extranet and should be made in a single file, including the required level of detail. The OfS or relevant funding body will review all requests for additions and removals and may request further details from providers where necessary. Submitting requests as early as possible and responding to queries in a timely manner will help expedite the process. It may be necessary for the OfS to prioritise approvals by survey start week but we will endeavour to action all requests prior to the survey start date.
13. With the exception of students on enhanced first degrees, postgraduates are not included in the NSS.

Reasons for excluding individuals from the survey

14. We enable providers to exclude specific groups of students from the target population. These are:
 - 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 on to 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)
15. These are the only grounds on which students may be excluded from the target population. If the provider feels that students are incorrectly included in the target

population owing to errors in the data, then these should be submitted as removal requests, using the process in paragraph 9.

16. Providers should code all excluded students on their sample submission as category 'C' (regardless of whether they meet criteria a, b or c in paragraph 13), and providers should not provide contact details for these students.
17. If a provider identifies an error after it has submitted data to HESA but then wishes to remove students, we may require the provider to submit a revised return to HESA that generates a revised target list where we believe the errors are widespread and material. HESA will apply a charge of 20 per cent of the provider's annual subscription to meet the costs of processing this change.
18. To enable us to monitor exclusions and verify their consistent application, providers should retain evidence to support them. Where a student asks that their details are not passed on, we will expect providers to retain evidence of this request. If the number of such requests at any provider is so high as to affect the successful running of the survey, OfS will discuss this with the provider.
19. Students should not be removed from the student data file supplied by Ipsos MORI even when their contact details are not supplied.
20. Although some students may withdraw in their final year, they will have had significant interaction with the provider, so their opinions are valuable and should be included.

Process for supplying student contact data

21. Following submission of the HESA data, a target list of students to be included in the NSS will automatically be generated. The provider should then provide contact details, according to the standard template that will be supplied by Ipsos MORI, for all students on the list. Students should be informed by the provider that their contact details may be passed on
22. Providers have the opportunity to define their own structure for receiving their own NSS data, through one of two optional fields on the sample file to indicate the internal 'department code' for each student. These codes, where provided, will be used solely for providing feedback to the provider.
23. Providers should submit the requested contact details for students on these lists to Ipsos MORI by **Wednesday 28 November 2018**. Ipsos MORI will provide guidance to its contacts on how to supply these lists as part of the NSS guidance document. The NSS achieves a high response rate, and to ensure this continues it is important that providers submit complete and robust contact details to Ipsos MORI by this date.

Administration of the survey

24. The 2019 survey will be conducted during the spring term so that the results can be published in summer 2019. To avoid concerns regarding impact on internal surveys, Ipsos MORI will continue to:
- brand the NSS independently, which clearly distinguishes its purpose
 - manage the survey's distribution centrally, so that providers are not involved in contacting students to complete the NSS.
25. A five-week 'window' will operate, so providers can choose to start the survey at a time that fits with term timetables and does not clash with examinations. Providers may select a week between 7 January and 4 February 2019 for the survey to start. There will be no communication with students by Ipsos MORI outside of the timing agreed with each provider.
26. Ipsos MORI will conduct the survey at each provider using a set sequence of email and telephone surveying. This will take up to eight weeks at each provider, although there may be a need for some targeted follow-up during and beyond this time to increase response rates. Ipsos MORI will deploy the survey modes tactically to personalise the survey to students and providers, and help increase online responses and reduce survey costs.
27. The five-week window is in place to ensure that results can be published in time for prospective students to make informed choices. However, we will consider individual requests for a short extension, where the activities of students make it impractical to conduct the survey during that time. Any provider that wishes to make a case for an extension should contact Ipsos MORI by **Wednesday 28 November 2018**.

Branding and awareness-raising

28. Comprehensive guidance on the NSS 2019, including guidelines on appropriate promotion of the survey, will be available from the Ipsos MORI NSS extranet. It is important that this guidance is adhered to and any queries raised with Ipsos MORI. The funding bodies treat seriously any breaches of this guidance, and may investigate and take action where there is evidence of a breach.
29. Ipsos MORI will produce promotional materials for providers and students' unions to distribute locally. If a provider or students' union wishes to use the NSS branding to develop its own marketing material, it may do so and should discuss this with Ipsos MORI who will advise on good practice and offer guidelines to ensure a reasonable degree of consistency across the sector. When it contacts providers, Ipsos MORI will discuss who in the provider is best placed to coordinate promotional activity. Welsh language versions of promotional material are available from Ipsos MORI.

30. Ipsos MORI will manage incentive schemes in which providers may take part. These are centrally managed schemes that enable providers to offer incentives to students to complete the NSS.
31. Students on flexible programmes will receive tailored communication that more accurately reflects their participation in higher education.

Questionnaire distribution

32. There are two main methods of data collection: online and telephone. Ipsos MORI operates a live, open-access website, where students can log in and complete the survey (this is in addition to the option to respond by following the link in a personalised email). 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, providers should adhere to the deadline for supplying student contact details.
33. We are committed to increasing the online response rate and so reducing the amount of telephone contact. However, conducting the survey by telephone remains an important element of the survey administration and will continue, so providers should provide students' landline and mobile phone numbers where available.
34. To monitor responses and to process data for analysis and reporting, responses are linked to students' HESA numbers or known student identifiers. 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.
35. Throughout the process Ipsos MORI will send reminders to students who have not responded.
36. Response rates, by provider and by subject area, will be monitored continuously 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 email and text message.
37. 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.
38. Provider response rates will be shared by Ipsos MORI during the fieldwork to help providers monitor their survey progress – providers should not share this data more widely. National response rates data will not be made available to providers.

39. Ipsos MORI will follow up with providers where response rates look as if they will be below those that can be published. The funding bodies reserve the right to agree changes to the survey period with individual providers that are at risk of not meeting the provider-level or subject-level(s) publication threshold.

Publication of 2019 NSS results

40. A key 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 role in improving the student experience, by helping providers to identify areas for action or development.
41. The current publication threshold for NSS results is a 50 per cent response rate with at least ten students responding. All results that meet the publication threshold will be published on the [Unistats website](#). Data will also be published on the OfS website, including benchmarking data.
42. Data will also be available to providers on the results portal delivered by Texuna Technologies. The results portal will allow providers to access particular elements of their data including optional bank questions, students' open text comments and data below certain publication thresholds
43. The OfS and UK higher education funding bodies may publish their own analysis of the data including open text comments and optional banks. For data which is not available publicly through the OfS website this will be at aggregate level and not allow providers, courses or individuals to be identified.