**NSS 2022**

**Advice for Staff   
Briefing**

English

**October 2021**

**Contents**

[Introduction 3](#_Toc83219617)

[Eligible Students 4](#_Toc83219618)

[NSS Questionnaire 6](#_Toc83219619)

[Inappropriate Influence  8](#_Toc83219620)

[Running Dedicated Sessions 13](#_Toc83219621)

[Prize Draws 14](#_Toc83219622)

[Contacting Students 15](#_Toc83219623)

[Response Rates 16](#_Toc83219624)

# Introduction

The National Student Survey (NSS) gathers students’ opinions on the quality of their courses which helps to:

• inform prospective students’ choices

• supply data that supports providers in improving the student experience

• support public accountability.

This document outlines guidance for promoting the NSS and on inappropriate influence.

In 2022, providers in England are not required to promote the National Student Survey to their students. However, they can choose to do so if they wish. Providers in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are still required to promote the survey to their students.

Staff at providers are often best placed to communicate the benefits and importance of the NSS. Their objectivity is crucial to safeguard the integrity of the survey and the reliability of the results.

In order for NSS data to be made publicly available, each provider needs to achieve a minimum of 10 respondents and 50% response rate from the students eligible at overall provider level and by each Common Aggregation Hierarchy group (CAH).

Staff should be clear on:

• Who is eligible to complete the survey;

• The importance of the NSS results;

• What the NSS is, why it is important and how the survey is administered;

• The guidelines relating to the promotion of the NSS; and

• The rules regarding inappropriate influence.

# Eligible Students

**1. Who is eligible to complete the NSS?**

Staff should take care to ensure that they are only asking eligible students to complete the survey. They should work with the relevant departments within their providers to clearly understand which students are on their NSS target list.

All students studying on courses leading to undergraduate credits or qualifications (such as Bachelor’s Degrees, Foundation Degrees and Higher Education Diplomas) will be surveyed in their expected final year of study.

Students are included in the 2022 survey population if they are expected to complete their course between 1 February 2022 and 31 January 2023 inclusive.

In addition, students who:

* Are on more flexible part-time programmes (whose final year cannot be easily predicted) will normally be surveyed during their fourth year of study.
* Have withdrawn from study during their final year will be included in the survey as their feedback is equally valuable.
* Are repeating their penultimate year in 2022 will be surveyed (NOT when they eventually progress to their final year), unless they are specifically submitted for removal.
* Have changed their course arrangements but were originally expected to graduate in 2022, will be eligible this year and not when they eventually reach their final year, unless specifically submitted for removal.

Students are not eligible for the NSS if they:

* Study programmes that do not lead to undergraduate qualifications or credits;
* Are on a course lasting one year or one FTE (full-time equivalent);
* Are on a course lasting under one-year FTE (full-time equivalent);
* Were eligible in the NSS 2021 (whether or not they responded) and remain at the same provider, unless removed by the OfS.;
* Are under the age of 16.

**2. Which students should I communicate with?**

Staff should take care to ensure that they are only asking eligible students to complete the survey. They can work with the relevant departments within their providers to clearly understand which of their students are on the NSS target list.

Staff should understand the purpose of the NSS and clearly communicate to students that it is their opportunity to provide honest feedback and that their survey responses are confidential.

**3. What to do if an eligible student cannot access the online survey?**

Please liaise with the Main or Second NSS contacts at your provider to identify which students are included in the list of eligible students for the 2022 survey. You can also contact the NSS helpline at [nss@ipsos.com](mailto:nss@ipsos.com).

Students can also contact us directly at [thestudentsurvey@ipsos.com](mailto:thestudentsurvey@ipsos.com) where we can check their eligibility.

**4. Why is it important to meet the threshold for publication of results?**

In order for results to be made publicly available on the OfS and Discover Uni websites, a publication threshold of a minimum of both 10 respondents and 50% response rate has to be met.

NSS data remains an important tool for improving and enhancing the student experience and helping prospective students make decisions about what and where to study in the future. Staff should encourage eligible students to complete the NSS in an honest way.

Regular response rate reports are uploaded onto the NSS Extranet for participating providers. The reports will provide response rates by course, department, subject and survey mode.

**Please note that Ipsos MORI cannot provide the details of students that have/have not completed the survey in order to protect student anonymity.**

# NSS Questionnaire

**1. What is being asked in the NSS?**

The survey asks undergraduate students to provide feedback on their courses in a nationally recognised format. The full questionnaire and optional banks can be found on the NSS Extranet home page – please speak to the Main or Second NSS Contact.

There are 27 core questions, relating to the following aspects of the student learning experience:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Teaching on my course | **Academic Support** | **Learning Community** |
| Learning Opportunities | **Organisation and Management** | **Student Voice** |
| Assessment and Feedback | **Learning Resources** | **Overall Satisfaction** |

Students are also given the opportunity to provide comments on their learning experience.

Providers can also add up to six optional questions from a series of banks and/or two of their own questions to the core questionnaire. Students may also be asked additional questions about their NHS practice placement, and a marketing question about where/how they found out about the NSS. Students who are on degree apprenticeships courses will continue to remain eligible for the NSS and will be invited to participate in the survey, but they will not be asked additional questions about their training programmes.

In addition, the OfS and the UK funding and regulatory bodies will be testing some alternative questions and response options. After completing the main survey, students may be asked if they would like to take part in a pilot study and to let us know what they think about the questions. Taking part in the NSS and this pilot study is voluntary.

**2. How can students access the NSS?**

**Online**

All students with valid email addresses will be sent email invitations to take part in the survey by Ipsos MORI. The emails will contain personalised survey links - when clicked, students must enter their date of birth and this will take them directly into the survey.

Students entering the survey via the survey website will need to provide the following information in order for us to verify that they are eligible to take part:

• Registering provider

• Known ID (student number)

• First and third letter of forename

• First four letters of surname

• Day and month of birth

Once a valid survey has been received from a student, they will be sent a confirmation email. They should not be contacted again. If students complete the survey and are still being contacted by Ipsos MORI, or if they have not received a confirmation email, it may be that they either did not fully complete or submit the survey, or they did not enter sufficient information to allow us to identify them in the NSS target population.

Ipsos MORI will also contact your students via text message. All students for whom we have a valid mobile number will be sent a short SMS prompt including a direct link into the survey. If students have not responded or opted out of the text reminders, they will be sent a second SMS during the follow-up stage.

**Telephone**

From the third week of fieldwork, Ipsos MORI will begin follow up calls to non-responding students for whom we have valid UK telephone numbers. The times and days of the week that call attempts are made is changed to optimise the opportunities for response. Ipsos MORI will attempt to make contact by phone, calling each number up to a maximum of eight times to reach an outcome. Please note that we will call students to complete the survey – they cannot call Ipsos MORI directly to complete the survey but may arrange an appointment if they wish.

Students are called on the following days/times:

Monday to Friday – 9am to 9pm

Saturday and Sunday – 10am to 7pm

**Follow-ups**

From early March, we will begin targeted follow-up reminders. This will include additional email reminders, one additional SMS reminder and targeted telephone follow-ups. In particular, we will use alternative numbers where call attempts have not been maximised. Particular attention at this stage will be focused on those providers and cohorts below the publication threshold, however we will continue to contact all non-responding students by email and also by telephone where the maximum call attempts have not been reached. In addition to the targeted follow-ups, all providers who are at risk of not meeting the publication threshold will be automatically put into the booster phase whereby Ipsos MORI will send additional reminders to their non-responding students. If the threshold is met by any of these providers, the booster phase will stop.

**3. Who should I contact if I have a query about the NSS?**

Please liaise with the Main or Second NSS contacts at your provider to identify which students are included in the list of eligible students for the NSS 2022. You can also contact the NSS dedicated helpline at [nss@ipsos.com](mailto:nss@ipsos.com).

# Inappropriate Influence

It is no longer a requirement for providers in England to promote the National Student Survey however, they can choose to do so if they wish. Providers in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are still required to promote the survey to their students.

Providers should communicate with students and ensure they give their honest feedback on their learning experience. Communications and/or providers’ marketing materials must not attempt to sway the opinion of students in any way.

There is a further developed guide on inappropriate influence for students which sets out what the NSS is and how it is promoted by providers. The guide details what may constitute inappropriate influence when promoting the NSS and the types of promotion providers are, or are not, allowed to undertake. It provides details on the help and support available to students - if they feel they are being or have been influenced in how to respond to the survey, along with the process in place to investigate allegations of inappropriate influence and what happens in case of a breach of guidance. Providers are asked to inform students about this guide as part of their NSS pre-launch survey plans and a NSS pre-notification email template is provided in the set up guide.

**1. What is inappropriate influence?**

The OfS (in partnership with the UK funding and regulatory bodies) define inappropriate influence as **any activity or behaviour that may encourage students to reflect anything other than their true opinion of their experiences during their course in their NSS responses.**

Inappropriate influence can emerge in several ways, for example:

1. Explicit or implicit instruction on the type of responses students should make, including the provision of standard or example responses.
2. Explaining how the survey is presented to students and drawing attention, explicitly or implicitly, to the consequences of negative responses, with regard to:
   1. conflation with other surveys undertaken by providers whether internal or external
   2. league tables, the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) or Quality Assessment processes
   3. employers’ perceptions of positive and negative outcomes.

c. Instruction on how the response scale is understood by third parties.

d. Encouraging students to avoid a particular point on the response scale.

e. Failure to ensure that methods to encourage participation in the survey, such as campaigns, the use of promotional materials (either explicitly or implicitly) or incentivisation methods (such as prize draws), do not bias responses.

f. Holding compulsory sessions at which the NSS must be completed.

When promoting the survey, providers should take into consideration whether the campaign could inappropriately influence the type of responses participants may give. In addition, the OfS (in partnership with the UK funding and regulatory bodies) expects providers to have processes to ensure that all staff (both academic and professional services) have engaged with the guidance and measures in place to prevent inappropriate influence throughout their NSS activities.

**2. What could the consequences of inappropriate influence be for my provider?**

Where a concern or allegation is raised, it will be investigated by the OfS through the Allegations Procedure. If an investigation were to find that promotional activities and/or marketing materials had resulted in inappropriate influence, whether intentional or unintentional, the integrity of the NSS data could be called into question.

The OfS (in partnership with the UK funding and regulatory bodies) could take action to suppress the affected NSS data for the provider meaning that no NSS results would be published for the affected courses in that specific year, nor would it be available to use in marketing activities, learning enhancement work or inclusion on Discover Uni, the OfS’s website etc.

More information on the Allegations Procedure for raising concerns, and how the OfS deal with allegations of inappropriate influence, can be found in their guidance ‘National Student Survey: Procedures for investigating allegations of inappropriate influence on survey results’; this guidance can be read in full at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-information-and-data/national-student-survey-nss/promotion-of-the-nss/>

If you have any questions or concerns regarding inappropriate influence, please speak to the survey manager at the provider or to the person who deals with the provider’s data submissions, who should be able to provide further guidance regarding ‘inappropriate influence’ in student surveys. Alternatively, please do not hesitate to contact the OfS Allegations team at [NSSAllegations@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:NSSAllegations@officeforstudents.org.uk) or Ipsos MORI at 020 8861 8110 or [nss@ipsos.com](mailto:nss@ipsos.com) who can pass this on to the OfS for investigation.

**3. Avoiding Inappropriate Influence – Dos and Don’ts**

**Do:**

* **Run a neutral campaign that focuses solely on boosting responses in the NSS.**It is important that the NSS is treated as an independent social research survey. As a result, marketing campaigns should focus on the survey rather than the provider and should not encourage students to respond in a particular way.
* **Provide examples of where NSS feedback has resulted in particular improvements in previous years.**Demonstrating how feedback from the NSS has led to tangible changes at the provider can be a powerful way to promote the survey. For example: “Your feedback counts – in a previous NSS, students expressed that library opening hours were an issue. Since then, we introduced a 24-hour central library.” However, care must be taken not to combine this with other internal campaigns – please see **‘do not’** below.
* **Encourage eligible students to participate.**All eligible students should be targeted in promotional campaigns.
* **Allow students to give their feedback regardless of their opinion.**If promoting the NSS, providers should encourage all students to participate regardless of their opinion of the provider or course.
* **Be wary of tone and use of language when discussing the NSS and asking students to complete it.**If you opt to promote the NSS, be sure to keep promotion of the NSS as neutral as possible. Staff can explain the importance of the NSS, improvements that their feedback has led to in previous years, and how it will help prospective students. Do not link the NSS to league tables, a provider’s performance in the TEF or to the perceived value of students’ degrees.
* **Target promotion in departments or courses with low response rates.**During the NSS fieldwork, Ipsos MORI will share response rate information with providers, which can be used to identify targets for promotional campaigns.
* **Inform students that they are free to interpret the survey questions how they wish.**Questions for the NSS are self-explanatory. Students should be encouraged to answer the survey questions however they interpret them.
* **Hold voluntary NSS completion sessions.**Organising completion sessions is an effective way to encourage students to complete the survey. However, these sessions must be voluntary.
* **Ensure students have total privacy when completing the survey.**Students must not feel pressured to respond in any particular way. Therefore, staff should respect students’ privacy when they are taking the survey. At voluntary completion sessions, staff must not look at students’ screens or at the responses they are giving and must abide by the relevant provider’s Covid-19 safety measures.
* **Use incentives or a prize draw to promote the survey.**Incentives and prize draws are both proven to be effective in improving response rates. This can form a part of the promotional campaign. Students should be made aware that there is no link between how they respond and their chances of winning a prize. Completion of the survey cannot be a condition to entering the online prize draw as all eligible students have an equal chance of winning. Please see the [MRS guidelines on incentives and prize draws](https://www.mrs.org.uk/pdf/Regulations%20for%20Incentives%20and%20Prize%20Draws%20July%202015.pdf) for more information.
* **Ensure that all staff are aware of the guidelines.**To facilitate understanding of the guidelines and to prevent inappropriate influence in the promotion of the NSS, there is a print-out help card which can be circulated to academic staff, staff in professional services such as administrative or student support staff, or any other members of staff in a student-facing role.

**Do not:**

* **Embed NSS marketing activity in broader provider promotional activities, for example ‘Pride’ and ‘I Love’ campaigns.**A clear division between marketing campaigns must be made to ensure all promotion of the NSS is neutral. This includes ‘you said, we did’ campaigns, where it must be clear that particular changes came about from the NSS rather than from internal campaigns.
* **Combine the NSS with other surveys being undertaken at the provider.**If providers opt of promote the NSS, it must be promoted independently, and students must not be led to confuse the NSS with other surveys, whether internal or external, undertaken at the provider.
* **Explicitly or implicitly advise students on how to interpret the survey.**It is very important that students are not influenced on how they interpret the survey questions or response scale. These are self-explanatory and students should be left to interpret them in a way they see fit. Therefore, providers are not permitted to explain the meanings of questions or responses. This includes defining ‘neither agree nor disagree’ as a negative response or comparing the response scale to another scale with a different purpose (e.g. assignment marking schemes).
* **Advise or request students to respond in a certain way.**Providers are not permitted to recommend that students respond in a certain way, e.g. ‘I recommend that you select agree or mostly agree’ or provide standard or example responses.
* **Make entering a prize draw conditional on completing the NSS.**Prize draws are a good way to encourage student interest in the NSS. However, taking the NSS cannot be made an explicit condition to enter the prize draw, as this has the potential to influence responses to the survey.
* **Link the NSS to league tables, job prospects and the perceived value of students’ degrees.**Providers are not permitted to tell students that negative responses could make their degrees look bad to future employers. There should be no link made between completion of the survey and employers’ perceptions of positive and negative outcomes. This includes links between the NSS and university league tables or the TEF.
* **Say that the survey is compulsory.**Participation in the NSS, while beneficial to providers, is completely voluntary for students.
* **Make it a requirement or pressure students to attend dedicated NSS sessions.** Arranging these sessions is allowed however providers should not enforce them or make students feel there may be consequences if they do not attend.
* **Take students through the survey on an individual basis.**Providers should not stand or sit beside students when they are completing the survey or take them through their responses question-by-question. Students should be given due privacy so they can respond with honesty. Staff and students must always abide by the relevant provider’s Covid-19 safety measures.
* **Complete the survey on behalf of the student.**The survey should not be accessed or completed on behalf of the student. The NSS is a confidential student feedback survey and should only be completed by the eligible student.

**This is not an exhaustive list and staff should be alert to other possible types of inappropriate influence.**

# Running Dedicated Sessions

Staff can run dedicated sessions where time is set aside to allow eligible students to complete the survey. These sessions should be completely optional for students to attend and they should be encouraged to give their honest opinion.

Staff and students must always abide by the relevant provider’s Covid-19 safety measures.

Please note that staff should not be ‘standing over students’ while they are completing the survey. Staff should make it clear that they are there to provide support on technical issues and not to monitor responses.

**1. When should I hold dedicated NSS completion sessions?**

Dedicated sessions can be held at any time during the survey fieldwork. Students can log onto [www.thestudentsurvey.com](http://www.thestudentsurvey.com) and select the option to **‘Enter the Survey’**. To utilise the personalised email links sent to student email accounts, you could also arrange sessions to coincide with their delivery.

Please note these sessions should **not** be compulsory for students to attend.

# Prize Draws

**1. How does the prize draw process work?**

You will be told if your provider is running a prize draw for all eligible students. If a prize draw is being run, you can communicate it to eligible students.

When entering the online survey, students can enter the prize draw on offer by ticking the ‘Enter the prize draw’ box which appears on screen before the main NSS questions. **Students do not need to complete the survey in order to enter the prize draw.**

After the closing date, Ipsos MORI will draw the required number of winners at random and notify the necessary NSS contacts at your provider.

# Contacting Students

**1. Sending Targeted Emails**

Communications from someone known to students (e.g. the Principal, Dean of the provider or Pro-Vice-Chancellor) is an effective method of promotion that encourages students to participate. In sending emails to eligible students, staff should make it clear that the NSS provides an opportunity to give their feedback in a confidential way. Staff can encourage completion online via [www.thestudentsurvey.com](http://www.thestudentsurvey.com) and acknowledge that the survey is independent of the provider.

Eligible students should not feel pressured to do the survey or told that by not responding or responding in a certain way, there will be consequences or an impact on the value of their degrees.

**2. Can I send reminders to eligible students?**

Sending targeted emails that invite students to complete the survey at [www.thestudentsurvey.com](http://www.thestudentsurvey.com) can be useful, however we would recommend against too many reminders as this may have an adverse effect. Staff should be aware of the impact of survey fatigue and time communications in a way that encourages participation rather than ‘harass’ students to complete the survey.

Please ensure that any emails sent to eligible students complement/coordinate with Ipsos MORI’s and your provider’s communication schedule. This helps to ensure that students are not over-contacted and that communications do not overlap with our activities. The email content should be signed off by a senior member of staff.

**Please liaise with the Main NSS contact at your provider to ensure that emails are only being sent to eligible students.**

# Response Rates

**1. Will I get updates on response rates during fieldwork?**

Ipsos MORI will share interim response rate reports with providers **three times a week** throughout the fieldwork. Your NSS Main and Second contacts will have access to these reports and will either issue them to relevant members of staff or be able to provide you with more information.

The sharing of this information is subject to **restrictions**. Therefore, even if you are familiar with the NSS, please read the relevant section of the NSS Good Practice Guide carefully to ensure your provider’s practice is compliant with the new guidelines. NSS contacts have the responsibility to ensure that these guidelines are followed.

Please note that the figures quoted in the NSS response rate reports are based on data collected during the fieldwork period. At the end of the NSS fieldwork, the NSS data undergo a cleaning process. Part of this involves removing any invalid interviews; these are interviews where for example the respondent has selected ‘Not applicable’ for all the core NSS questions or for a whole section of questions (e.g. ‘the teaching on my course’). Due to this cleaning process, response rates in the final data may not match the response rate reports.

**2. How can we boost our response rates?**

There are several ways to promote the NSS within your subject areas; please refer to the guidance provided in the NSS 2022 Good Practice Guide.