

## The National Student Survey

### BACKGROUND

The National Student Survey (NSS) was introduced in 2005 with the primary purpose of providing information that would help prospective students decide what and where to study. The NSS has now established itself in universities' calendars and with each year the data becomes more useful in allowing institutions to identify trends and also monitor the reaction of students to any initiatives.

### COVERAGE OF THE SURVEY: THE TARGET LIST

The NSS is completed by final year students at all publicly-funded HEIs in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, as well as all Alternative Providers (APs) in England with specific course designation for new students. Further Education Colleges (FECs) in England and Northern Ireland, and Further Education Institutions (FEIs) in Wales with directly funded higher education students are eligible to participate.

All full-time and part-time undergraduate students in their final year of study are eligible, with the following main exceptions:

- students on programmes that do not lead to undergraduate qualifications or credits;
- students on a course lasting one year or one FTE or less;
- any students who were eligible in the previous year's NSS (whether they responded or not) and who remain at the same institution;
- students under the age of 16.

The list of students to be included in the NSS each year, the "target list", is extracted from the University's "Student Record" to the Higher Education Statistics Agency (the "HESA return"). On submission of the Student Record to HESA, an NSS target list will automatically be generated. Inaccuracies in the HESA return may result in students being wrongly included in or excluded from the target list. To ensure that the target list is as accurate as possible, the Student Survey Team distribute bespoke lists to the DEs within each School for checking and verification. Schools can identify students that are missing, or those they believe should be excluded, these students are then submitted to the Office for Students (OfS) for consideration as additions or removals to the target list. OfS review all requests on a case-by-case basis. The approved additions are added to the final NSS target list and the students confirmed for removal are excluded from the final list.

### ADMINISTRATION OF THE SURVEY

The market research agency Ipsos MORI is commissioned by OfS to conduct the survey on behalf of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), the Department for Economy Northern Ireland (DfENI), the Scottish Funding Council (SFC), Health Education England (HEE) and participating private/alternative Higher Education providers. The target list of students is supplied by the institutions and all contact with the students is carried out by Ipsos MORI. In order to achieve the minimum 50% response rate required for publication of data, a variety of methods are used to contact students. Initially students are sent an email inviting them to complete the questionnaire online. Those students that do not respond are then sent email and SMS reminders. If students still do not respond, they are then contacted by telephone. Survey data becomes more reliable and robust as the response rate increases; therefore, a number of measures are taken within Queen's to maximise student response. Academic staff are urged to encourage their final year students to complete the NSS, however, they *must not* attempt to influence students' survey response. There are strict guidelines in place to avoid any risk of undue influence, these guidelines are made very clear to staff via email and face-to-face briefing sessions prior to the launch of the survey.

## THE QUESTIONNAIRE

The questionnaire used in the NSS has 27 core questions grouped under nine headings:

- Teaching
- Learning opportunities
- Assessment and feedback
- Academic support
- Organisation and management
- Learning resources
- Learning community
- Student voice
- Overall satisfaction

There is also an open-ended question which allows respondents to highlight any particularly positive or negative aspect of their student experience.

Since 2007, as well as the core questions, the NSS has included optional questions about other aspects of the student experience. Individual institutions select categories of questions which they wish to be put to their students. These categories are selected on an annual basis and reflect the University's priorities, concerns and/or particular areas of interest.

## PUBLICATION OF THE RESULTS

The NSS results are made available to prospective students through the national Unistats website (<https://unistats.ac.uk/>), normally in September each year. OfS also publishes overall results on its website, which can be downloaded, however open comments data is not published and can only be viewed by the relevant institution. Within Queen's, the detailed results are published on the Student Survey Results section of the DASA SharePoint site (<http://go.qub.ac.uk/StudentSurveys>).

## RESPONDING TO THE RESULTS

Within the University, the NSS has established itself as a key performance indicator and is increasingly taken into account in shaping University policy (for example, on assessment and feedback). The results are distributed to Directors of Education and heads of units in academic support areas. A report on the results is considered by the University Operating Board (UOB) and the Education Committee, and these committees will, in due course, receive reports on the action taken by Schools and units in response to the Survey results.

## FURTHER INFORMATION

Further information about the NSS is available from:

<https://www.thestudentsurvey.com/>

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-information-and-data/national-student-survey-nss/>