

Meeting	Agenda Item	Reference No
23/10/08	13	HEFCW/08/79

1 Issue

- 1.1 This paper provides for information the most recent outcomes of the National Student Survey (NSS). This includes the analysis of the results from 2005 to 2007 and the publication of the 2008 results. It also provides for approval the final costs of the 2008 survey, and estimated costs of the 2009 survey.

2 Corporate Planning Implications / Rationale for paper

- 2.1 Under the objective 'Reaching Wider' within our corporate plan, we aim to enable the sector to 'Offer flexible and accessible higher education provision which meets the needs of groups which are under-represented in higher education, measured by...Outcomes of the National Student Survey...', which we fund for Welsh institutions
- 2.2 The NSS forms part of the quality assurance framework for Wales. The NSS is one means by which students' satisfaction with their learning experience is identified, together with the identification of areas for further research and policy development.

3 Recommendation(s)

- 3.1 The Council is invited to:
- i. note the analysis of the results from 2005 to 2007;
 - ii. note the residuals for Welsh institutions;
 - iii. approve the payment of £197,955 from HEFCW for the costs of the 2008 survey;
 - iv. note the results for Wales in the 2008 NSS;
 - v. approve in principle the payment of the estimated cost of the 2009 survey of approximately £200,000, and to give delegated authority to the Chief executive to approve the precise sum when known.

4 Timing for decisions

- 4.1 Decisions are required now, as the first tranche of the cost for the 2009 survey will be invoiced shortly.

5 Council members' interests

- 5.1 No conflicts of interests have been declared in advance of the meeting.

6 Further information

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7 Background

- 7.1 In December 2002, Council approved the core principles and requirements of the new quality and standards framework for Wales, including support for an expansion of the National Student Survey (NSS), being developed in England and Northern Ireland, to include students in Wales. The categories of information for publication included quantitative data to be provided by HESA, qualitative data to be provided by HEIs, and the introduction of a new national survey to gain feedback from students about teaching quality.
- 7.2 The NSS has been carried out annually with final year undergraduate students since 2005. Therefore 2008 is the fourth year in which the survey has been operated. The survey is administered by HEFCE. All institutions in England, Wales and Northern Ireland participate, in addition to some Scottish institutions. Students may choose to answer the survey in Welsh.
- 7.3 The NSS asks final year undergraduate students for feedback on their programmes in twenty two questions, split into the following subheadings:
- Teaching on my course
 - Assessment and feedback
 - Academic support
 - Organisation and management
 - Learning resources
 - Personal development
 - Overall satisfaction
- 7.4 All students have the opportunity to add a comment on their student experience. Students of NHS subjects are also asked questions on NHS practice placements. Further information on the survey is available at <http://www.thestudentsurvey.com/>.
- 7.5 The results are available electronically on the Unistats website (www.unistats.com), which is operated by a UCAS-Hotcourses consortium. This website is available in English and Welsh.

8 Detailed analysis of the NSS results

- 8.1 The TQI-NSS steering group commissioned an analysis of the results from 2005 to 2007 from Paula SurrIDGE, University of Bristol, in order to identify areas of change and continuity.
- 8.2 The executive summary of the analysis is available at **Annex A**. Members should note that paragraph 13 of Annex A reflects the situation in England, and not Wales, where students of NHS subjects have been included in the NSS from the beginning. The full report has been published by HEFCE and is available at the following link http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/rdreports/2008/rd12_08/.

- 8.3 The analysis identified considerable stability in the effects of student, course and institutional characteristics over time. These factors had different effects on the six scales used, and on the students' overall satisfaction.
- 8.4 Overall, Asian students were less positive than white students on several scales and had lower overall satisfaction. However, the differences between Asian and White students' responses reduced over the three years on the Teaching and Learning and Assessment and Feedback scales. Dyslexic students were less positive than students with no declared disability on all scales with the exception of Teaching and Learning and Academic Support.

Council is invited to note the analysis of the results from 2005 to 2007.

- 8.5 The majority of institutions had gained the results anticipated given their student, course, and institutional profiles. The challenge for the HE sector as a whole is in maintaining the high scores achieved, and ensuring that students remain satisfied with the experience they receive.
- 8.6 The analysis of residuals compares the results achieved with those anticipated given the profiles. This information is available in Annex D of the report on the HEFCE website. The analysis for the UK as a whole identified stability in institutions performing better or worse than anticipated. **Annex B** provides the institutional residuals and statistical significance of results for Welsh institutions on all scales.
- 8.7 It can be seen from Annex B that in most cases Welsh institutions achieved the results expected, given their profiles. The principal variations for 2007 were as follows:

- Aberystwyth University – higher than predicted on Assessment and Feedback, Organisation and Management, Learning Resources and Overall Satisfaction;
- University of Wales, Newport – lower than predicted on Teaching and Learning, Organisation and Management, Personal Development and Overall Satisfaction. Higher than predicted on Assessment and Feedback and Learning Resources;
- University of Wales Institute, Cardiff – lower than predicted on Teaching and Learning and Overall Satisfaction;
- University of Wales, Lampeter – lower than predicted on Assessment and Feedback;
- Trinity College, Carmarthen – lower than predicted on Organisation and Management
- North-East Wales Institute of Higher Education (now Glyndŵr University) – lower than predicted on Overall Satisfaction.

- 8.8 No further analysis of the NSS results has been commissioned. This will be reviewed by the TQI/NSS steering group at future meetings.

Council is invited to note the residuals for Welsh institutions.

9 The 2008 survey

- 9.1 The cost of the 2008 survey to HEFCW had been estimated at £203,695. Council was informed of this through provision of the minutes of the April 2008

meeting of the LTC (item HEFCW/08/31 refers). The final cost to HEFCW of the 2008 survey has now been confirmed as £197,955. The cost of the NSS is paid from the learning and teaching fund. Half of the estimated cost is paid early in the academic year in which the survey is carried out. The final cost can only be determined when the results have been published, and therefore the balance is paid early in the following academic year.

Council is invited to approve the payment of £197,955 from HEFCW for the costs of the 2008 survey.

- 9.2 A total of almost 220,000 students completed the NSS in 2008.
- 9.3 This included over 6,000 students from FE colleges in England. The results for students in Wales studying on HE programmes franchised from a HEI were published against the HEI at which the students were registered and students of directly funded HE in FE programmes in Wales were not included in the NSS.
- 9.4 In total 149 HEIs participated in the NSS. Each HEI had an overall response rate of at least 50%, enabling the publication of data at institutional level for all institutions, for the first time.
- 9.5 The overall response rate was 65% for HEIs. This was an increase from the 60% response rate achieved in 2007. The overall satisfaction level was 83% for the HEIs surveyed.
- 9.6 Students of NHS subjects in England and Wales responded to the survey online only, and their survey included a set of additional questions on practice placements. The 2008 results were published on the Unistats website (www.unistats.com) on 11 September 2008.
- 9.7 The results for Wales can be seen in **Annex C**. These were similar to the results for the UK as a whole. Student satisfaction by institution throughout the UK is available in **Annex D**. This was done in order of result achieved, which was calculated to two decimal points, although results are presented as whole numbers.
- 9.8 A high percentage of students in the 2008 survey in Wales expressed satisfaction that staff were good at explaining things (88%) and that they had been able to access general IT resources when they needed to (89%).
- 9.9 The lowest levels of satisfaction were once more reserved for assessment and feedback. Only 53% of students in Wales expressed satisfaction that feedback on their work had been prompt, and 55% identified satisfaction that the feedback had helped them to clarify things they had not understood. Overall 63% of students expressed satisfaction regarding this category of questions. As a result of the NSS, assessment and feedback has been identified as a key area of work for the Higher Education Academy.
- 9.10 Aberystwyth University had the highest overall student satisfaction in Wales, at 90%.
- 9.11 Students from the North East Wales Institute (NEWI) and University of Wales, Newport (UWN) had the lowest overall student satisfaction in Wales, with only 76% of students in each institution expressing satisfaction. This was an increase for both from the 2007 results, where both achieved 73% overall student satisfaction.
- 9.12 Samples of press articles relating to the 2008 NSS results are attached at **Annex E**.

Council is invited to note the results for Wales in the 2008 NSS.

10 The 2009 survey

- 10.1 The scope and methodology of the NSS in 2009 will be similar to that in 2008. We will provide further details as they become available.
- 10.2 The cost of the 2009 survey is estimated to be in the region of £200,000. As stated in paragraph 9.1, we will not know the final cost until the survey has been completed. The costs include payment for the Unistats website, operation of the survey, the results website, and syndication from the UCAS website to the Unistats website. We will provide further information on the exact cost in autumn 2009, following completion of the survey. Half the cost for the 2009 survey will be paid in this academic year, and the balance will be paid in the following academic year.

Council is invited to approve in principle the payment of the estimated cost of the 2009 survey of approximately £200,000, and to give delegated authority to the Chief executive to approve the precise sum when known.

- 10.3 A review of the 2008 survey, which was carried out by Alan Brickwood Associates and commissioned by HEFCE on behalf of all the funders, revealed that stakeholders perceived the inclusion of students of NHS subjects online only, in order to enable them to answer additional questions on placements, to be unfair. It has resulted in fewer results being reported for Wales for these students who, unlike in other countries of the UK, have been included in the survey from the beginning. Officers are considering how this issue may be addressed without further expense.

11 Financial implications

- 11.1 As noted above, the cost of the 2008 survey was £195,955 and the cost of the 2009 survey is estimated to be in the region of £200,000. Additional costs, in the region of £18k, may be incurred if it is decided that HEFCW should bear the costs of students of NHS subjects undertaking the survey by all methodologies.

12 Communications implications

- 12.1 There was press interest surrounding the publication of the results of the 2008 survey. It is likely that there will continue to be publicity in future years.

13 Diversity and Equal Opportunities implications

- 13.1 The analysis of the results from 2005 to 2007 included whether student satisfaction varied according to the characteristics of students, in particular: (i) gender, (ii) age, (iii) socio-economic group, (iv) ethnicity, (v) declared disability, (vi) prior educational attainment, (vii) distance from address to University, and (ix) mode of study.
- 13.2 Students may respond to the National Student Survey in Welsh if they wish.

14 Risk Assessment

14.1 Potential risks are detailed in the table below:

RISK	ACTION TO ADDRESS RISK
Unistats website is not used by prospective students	HEFCE is working with UCAS and Hotcourses on behalf of all the funding bodies to address this issue and ensure that the website is promoted effectively.
Low level of response for Wales in 2009	HEFCW liaises with Ipsos MORI and identifies any institutions with low response rates. If necessary HEFCW would contact these institutions to discuss how response rates could be increased, within the guidelines issued by Ipsos MORI.
Poor results obtained in 2009	HEFCW's learning and teaching committee examines the results for each year and identifies issues to be addressed. The funding councils work with the HE Academy to address issues arising from the survey.
Institutions put pressure on students to answer the survey positively, thereby undermining the use of the survey as a quality tool	Ipsos MORI will issue guidance on behalf of all the funding councils about information which should be given to students, and stressing that there are sanctions available to the funding councils should inappropriate pressure be placed on students.
Survey is not useful as a quality tool, resulting in waste of HEFCW resources	TQI/NSS steering group, on which Wales is represented by HEFCW, HEW, NUS Wales and an institutional nominee, monitors the survey and its outcomes to ensure it remains a useful source of information on quality of provision. The LTC also advises HEFCW on issues to be brought to the attention of the steering group, and on key aspects of the survey for Wales.
Results are published late on the Unistats website, resulting in reduced usefulness to potential students	HEFCE monitor delivery and coordination of the Unistats website in order to ensure timescales are maintained as tightly as possible.