

**To: Heads of higher education institutions
in Wales**

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NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY 2005: NEXT STEPS

This circular letter has been issued to clarify arrangements for the first full-scale National Student Survey (NSS) in 2005. Please find attached five copies of the HEFCE circular, 'National Student Survey 2005: Outcomes of consultation and guidance on next steps' October 2004/33 (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/hefce/2004/04_33/). The HEFCE circular provides final guidance information on the NSS 2005 for HEIs in England, Northern Ireland and Wales.

BACKGROUND

In 2003, HEFCE commissioned the Open University to facilitate two rounds of NSS developmental pilots, both of which included Welsh institutions, firstly in summer 2003 with 23 HEIs (including UWIC), and then, with further refinements, in early 2004 with 11 HEIs (including a bilingual survey at UW Bangor). The outcomes from these pilots can be found at <http://iet.open.ac.uk/nss/>.

HEFCW Circular W04/30HE 'National Student Survey 2005' was published in May 2004. It was released alongside a HEFCE NSS consultation circular to which institutions in Wales were invited to respond. The Circular confirmed that HEFCW would be approaching HEFCE to request an expansion of the NSS, being developed in England and Northern Ireland, to include students in Wales. As part of the HEFCE consultation process in May 2004, a HEFCW funded NSS seminar was held in Cardiff to disseminate the outcomes of the NSS pilots, and assist HEIs in Wales to prepare for the first full-scale NSS. In July 2004, the NSS Pilot Steering Group, on which the HEFCW Chief Executive had observer status, discussed the outcomes of the HEFCE consultation and made final recommendations for the conduct of the 2005 NSS. A summary of the responses, alongside final details of the survey, including guidance about any implied actions for institutions is provided in the HEFCE circular attached.

In parallel to piloting the NSS, a Teaching Quality Information (TQI) web site has been developed by HERO as a mechanism for publishing the information aspects of the new quality assurance frameworks across the UK. During 2004/05 the TQI website will be populated with a range of information on the quality of teaching in higher education across the UK. The results of the NSS will be added to this site in Summer 2005.

NSS 2005: KEY FEATURES

The first full NSS will be conducted during the spring term 2005. The 2005 NSS will include all undergraduate students registered at publicly-funded HEIs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, during or near to their final year of study. The questionnaire to be used is presented in Annex A of the HEFCE Circular (page 21). A Welsh medium version of the questionnaire is currently being translated. The Welsh medium questionnaire piloted at UW Bangor is available upon request.

Ipsos UK have been appointed by HEFCE, on behalf of the three funding bodies, to conduct the 2005 NSS using a range of online, postal and telephone survey methods, and to co-ordinate a promotional campaign across the sector to boost responses. HEFCW officers were involved in the appointment process. SHEFC have decided to opt out of the NSS since they already undertake a longitudinal student survey, but will be involved in wider TQI activities, including the HERO website. The NSS will be ambitious in attempting to report results that are both reliable and at a detailed level. A high response rate will be needed for this hence a range of survey methods including telephoning will be used.

The conduct of the NSS will be centralised as far as possible, so that it is seen to be independent, and to minimise the burden on HEIs. While multiple attempts to contact students will be necessary, the survey will avoid the possibility of students feeling intruded upon. Students will be able to opt-out at any stage in the process, and the survey will be carefully managed so that once a student has responded at any stage, no further contact will be made. We will aim for a response rate near to 60 per cent, so that results can be published at subject level, for each institution. Users of the TQI web-site will be able to generate comparisons between selected provision, using a 'basket' approach. Results will not be available on the site if the data fall below a certain 'reliability threshold'.

During the autumn, a range of reporting formats will be tested with users, and, following some consultation seminars in January 2005, decisions about reporting methods will be taken. A steering group has been established to oversee and advise on the 2005 (and any subsequent NSS's). A HEFCW officer will be a member of this group which will meet monthly throughout the process.

The outcomes of the NSS will be presented on the HERO TQI website. An agreement will be entered into between HERO and HEFCE (acting for the four funding bodies in this case), for the management of the HERO TQI website and its development. Separately the Open University has been contracted by HEFCE, again acting for the four funding bodies to design and evaluate 'mock-ups' of the presentation of NSS data as well as formats for the exchange of NSS data, leading to policy and technical recommendations.

The NSS Agency, Ipsos UK, will be contracted by HEFCE for one year only, with the possibility of, but no guarantee of, extension (as we do not yet know whether the survey will be repeated annually or biennially, or whether requirements may change substantially in other ways after 2005). The funding bodies have committed support to HERO for the TQI website for a three-year period in the first instance.

NSS 2005: IN WALES

HEFCE will manage the entire NSS 2005 process in Wales on behalf of HEFCW. The HEFCE approach, as outlined in the attached Circular will apply to all HEIs in Wales, with the following key features in relation to bilingualism:

- a. all students in Wales will receive postal questionnaires bilingually. Ipsos UK has previous expertise in undertaking bilingual surveys;
- b. a Welsh medium web-site will be available for online completion of the questionnaire;
- c. the entire communications process will be available bilingually in Wales (including emails, covering letters, reminder postcards, telephone follow-ups, interviews etc). To enable this, there is an additional field in the spreadsheet for HEIs in Wales to identify students who have a known preference for communicating in Welsh;
- d. Ipsos UK will undertake all branding and promotion campaigns for the NSS 2005 bilingually in Wales, and have previous experience in this area;
- e. all students in Wales will be able to access the outcomes of the NSS 2005 relating to institutions in Wales through separate English and Welsh medium areas of the HERO TQI web-site. Welsh translations will not be available for provision or institutions in England and Northern Ireland. The facility to undertake institutional comparisons through the medium of Welsh will be restricted to information about HEIs in Wales;
- f. HEIs in Wales will have the opportunity to publish, bilingually, on the TQI site an optional qualitative commentary on the results of the NSS. HEIs should link from this to their own site, as with other parts of TQI, to any further information that is relevant.

NEXT STEPS

Institutions in Wales are advised to adhere to the timetable outlined in the HEFCE Circular, in particular:

- ❑ Nominating a main contact for liaison with Ipsos UK, by completing the form at Annex D of the HEFCE Circular, and returning it by **Friday 22 October 2004**.
- ❑ Completing the forms attached to the HEFCE Circular at Annex E by **Tuesday 30 November 2004** to book places at the January 2005 consultation events on NSS reporting methods.

Your institutional commitment and support for the first National student Survey is appreciated.

Yours sincerely

PROFESSOR PHIL GUMMETT
CHIEF EXECUTIVE