

Cyngor Cyllido Addysg
Uwch Cymru
Higher Education Funding
Council for Wales

Cwrt Linden
Clos Ilex Llanisien
Caerdydd CF14 5DZ
Ffôn 029 2076 1861
Ffacs 029 2076 3163
www.hefcw.ac.uk

Linden Court
Ilex Close Llanishen
Cardiff CF14 5DZ
Tel 029 2076 1861
Fax 029 2076 3163
www.hefcw.ac.uk

hefcw

Cylchlythyr

Circular

Teaching Quality Information: outcomes and publication of the 2008 National Student Survey results

Date: 30 July 2008
Reference: W08/28HE
To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales
Heads of further education colleges in Wales
Response by: No response required
Contact: Name: Dr Cliona O'Neill
Telephone: 029 2068 2283
Email: cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk

This circular provides information on how to access your 2008 National Student Survey (NSS) results via the Unistats web-site, including previewing these results. It also details plans for the re-launch of the Ipsos MORI Dissemination web-site, which provides more detailed results to institutions and students' unions. It will be of interest to staff administrating the NSS and monitoring the results and to students' unions.

This document is available online, in large print, Braille, on CD and on audio CD and cassette. Should you or someone you know require this in an alternative format, please contact us on (029) 2068 2280 or email info@hefcw.ac.uk.

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Introduction

1. This circular provides information on how to access your 2008 National Student Survey (NSS) results via the Unistats web-site, including previewing these results. It also details plans for the re-launch of the Ipsos MORI Dissemination web-site, which provides more detailed results to institutions and students' unions. It will be of interest to staff administrating the NSS and monitoring the results and to students' unions.
2. The NSS has been running since 2005, and 2008 is its fourth year. Further background is detailed in **Annex A**.

NSS results for 2008

3. This year's NSS received another positive endorsement from students, with an overall response rate of 65 per cent and an overall satisfaction level of 83 per cent for higher education institutions (HEIs). We are encouraged by this achievement.
4. This continued high response rate will support potential students as they make choices about what and where to study. It also provides valuable management information to institutions to enable improvements in the student experience. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all who have worked to make this possible.

Publication of the 2008 results

5. During 2006 UCAS (the admissions service for universities and colleges) was appointed to redevelop the then Teaching Quality Information (TQI) website to make it more user-focused, following the outcomes of a review of the quality assurance framework in England (Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: phase two outcomes', HEFCE 2006/45). Following this the Unistats website (www.unistats.com) was launched in November 2007.
6. Since the launch of Unistats, UCAS has continued to undertake user testing to ensure that it remains fit for its primary purpose: to inform students and their advisers about what and where to study. The site has continued to develop, with new features being added to ensure that it continues to meet this objective.
7. Earlier this year HEFCE, on behalf of the other funding bodies, reappointed Ipsos MORI to maintain and develop the NSS Dissemination website. This site is important because it enables the identification of areas of good practice and improvement which will enhance the learning experience for future students. We welcome the changes that Ipsos MORI is implementing

on the site, following feedback from users, to make it more user-friendly. From this year it will be renamed the NSS Results website.

8. More details on how to preview the 2008 results via the Unistats site and about the launch of the NSS Results site are available at **Annex A**.

Inappropriate attempts to influence the NSS results

9. HEFCE, which co-ordinates the NSS on behalf of all the funding bodies, has received six allegations that institutions or staff members within institutions in England had sought to influence the outcomes of the 2008 NSS. These allegations are taken very seriously because of the need to ensure that the integrity, validity, and reliability of the NSS is maintained, given that it forms one of the key elements of the lighter-touch quality assurance arrangements that replaced subject review.
10. In one of these cases, Kingston University, HEFCE received unequivocal evidence that an inappropriate attempt to influence the outcomes of the 2008 NSS took place within the subject area of psychology. It has taken the decision that these data will not be published, because the integrity of the data has been called into question. It has investigated the other five cases and has not found or received sufficient unequivocal evidence of inappropriate attempts to influence the results and has therefore decided to publish these results.
11. For the 2009 survey the funding bodies will be providing strengthened guidance to institutions and students' unions to make it clear that, although it is appropriate to remind students that they should complete the NSS and consider their responses carefully, making an explicit link between the NSS, league tables and the perceived value of students' degrees is not acceptable. The guidance will also outline that, where the funding bodies receive unequivocal evidence that such inappropriate attempts to influence student responses or the results have taken place, we will take action which may include deciding not to publish the results whose validity and reliability has been called into question. We will write to you later this year with further details and Ipsos MORI will issue this guidance prior to the 2009 survey.

Plans for the 2009 NSS

12. In 2009 the NSS will be repeated in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and some institutions in Scotland, in collaboration with the National Union of Students. The survey will operate in the same way as the 2008 survey. We will write to institutions later this year with further details. Ipsos MORI has a contact database for the purposes of the NSS. If you are not the contact and should be, please e-mail nss@ipsos-mori.com.

Further information

13. For further information, contact Dr Cliona O'Neill (tel 029 2068 2283, email cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk).

Annex A Background

1. The publication of Teaching Quality Information (TQI) forms part of the quality assurance arrangements in Wales and incorporates the National Student Survey (NSS), the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) and Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) statistics. HEFCE's review of the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) in England¹, which incorporated an evaluation of TQI including the NSS, concluded that TQI can make a valuable contribution to student choice, but that improvements were needed to ensure this objective was achieved. In response, HEFCE² appointed UCAS to develop the Unistats web-site³, which was launched in November 2007 with the results of the 2007 NSS.
2. The 2008 NSS is now complete. Students studying higher education (HE) courses in further education colleges (FECs) in England have also been included in the NSS for 2008. Welsh students of HE in FE are not included separately.

Development of Unistats

3. The Unistats site was launched in November 2007 following the appointment of the higher education admissions body UCAS (with Hotcourses) to redevelop the previous TQI web-site and make it more user-focused, in response to the outcomes of the QAF review in England. The site has since undergone user testing to ensure it remains fit for purpose, and some changes have been made to its look and feel to ensure users can navigate through the site easily.
4. Although the site is being developed by UCAS it is completely separate from the UCAS 'course search' site⁴. However, users of the UCAS 'course search' site have the opportunity to view Unistats data when they are making decisions about higher education, to help them choose what and where to study. Currently a link to the home page of the Unistats site is available to users, however, this is being developed so that users of 'course search' are able to view relevant subject information for the institution to which they are interested in applying via Unistats.
5. The 2008 NSS results will be published on Unistats from September 2008. The exact date will be confirmed in due course. Institutions will have the

¹ 'Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: phase two outcomes', HEFCE 2006/45, available on the HEFCE web-site www.hefce.ac.uk under Publications.

² On behalf of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales, the Department for Employment and Learning in Northern Ireland and the Scottish Funding Council.

³ Unistats, www.unistats.com

⁴ UCAS, www.ucas.ac.uk

opportunity to preview the data before publication; further details are outlined in paragraph 9 below.

Changes to the Joint Academic Coding System – initial teacher training and geography

6. Following work conducted by the University of Bristol the TQI/NSS steering group (**Annex B**), taking advice from its technical sub-group (**Annex C**), decided to revise the treatment of geographical studies and initial teacher training in the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS) subject hierarchy used in presenting data on the Unistats site. The changes mean that two new subject groups have been created at the highest level in the hierarchy. The initial teacher training group now includes all students who are undertaking initial teacher training; previously their activity was split between teacher training and a subject specialism. The geographical studies group combines data from the physical geography and environmental science group with that from the human and social geography group. The treatment of all other subjects remains unchanged.

Publication of HE in FEC NSS results on Unistats

7. Following discussions with our Learning and Teaching Committee, it was agreed that the results for students in Wales studying on HE programmes franchised from a HEI will continue to be published against the HEI at which the students are registered. It was also agreed that students of directly funded HE in FE programmes in Wales would not be included in the NSS. This decision was taken because the numbers studying HE in FE are small, and are therefore unlikely to reach the thresholds for publication.
8. In 2008 students studying directly funded HE courses in FECs in England were invited to take part in the NSS, and students studying on HE programmes franchised from a HE will be identified separately on the Unistats site.

Institutions' ability to preview data via Unistats

9. In addition to the public access site, UCAS has developed the Content Management System for Unistats. From late August you will be able to preview your data and all institutions' NSS results, as it will appear on Unistats, via this Content Management System. You will also be able to preview your 2006/07 DLHE data. The data will be available in spreadsheet format and sector-wide average scores will also be provided. UCAS will provide further details to its contacts in due course.
10. All data will be provided under embargo until the data is publicly available via the Unistats web-site. The timetable is outlined below:

Late August	You will be able to preview your own NSS results. You will be able to preview all institutions' 2008 NSS results. You will be able to preview the 2006/07 DLHE data.
Early September	Full public release.

Access to additional data

11. In addition to the data available via the Unistats web-site, you will be able to access more detailed results of the NSS, including students' comments, via the Ipsos MORI NSS Results web-site.
12. The data will be available at subject level three in the JACS subject hierarchy and will include the 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 NSS results, enabling institutions and students' unions to compare results over the four years. The site will be available from late August 2008 and has been redeveloped to make it more user-friendly and to support institutions using the site to identify areas of good practice and areas for improvement. Ipsos MORI has undertaken user testing to ensure the site remains fit for purpose. Over the coming three academic years Ipsos MORI will continue to develop the site to enhance usability and encourage increased usage.
13. In 2007 we provided guidance to institutions regarding the distinction between the data that are published for the purposes of informing student choice and the data available on the NSS Results web-site. This guidance has been updated for the 2008 results and is available at **Annex D**.
14. The additional data will be available via the NSS Results web-site from late August 2008. To access this site institutions and students' unions will require a password. Ipsos MORI will send the password to its current list of contacts for the site. If you have not received a password by 31 August 2008, please e-mail nss@ipsos-mori.com.

2009 NSS and Unistats

15. The NSS will be repeated in 2009 across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and some institutions in Scotland, in collaboration with the National Union of Students. Ipsos MORI will continue to manage the survey process and the 2009 NSS will have a similar format and timetable to the 2008 survey. As in 2008, the 2009 results will be published on the Unistats site. We will write to you later this year with further details.

Annex B

Membership of the Teaching Quality Information/National Student Survey steering group

Members

Professor Michael Arthur	Vice-Chancellor, University of Leeds (Chair)
Jane Artess	Research Manager, Higher Education Careers Service Unit
Robert Burgess	Vice-Chancellor, University of Leicester
Alan Davidson	Director of Quality Assurance, University of Dundee
John Ennis	Programme Director Education and Quality, Skills for Health
Martin Furner	Head of Initial Teacher Training data collection, Training and Development Agency for Schools
Siobhan Greenan	Policy Adviser, Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland
Karen Jones	Policy Adviser, Higher Education Wales
John Last	Deputy Principal, Arts Institute at Bournemouth
Gerard Madill	Policy Adviser, Universities Scotland
David McParlin	Academic Secretary, University of Wales, Aberystwyth
Jim Mutton	Principal, Loughborough College, and Chair of the Higher Education in Further Education Colleges steering group
Mandy Nelson	Head of Information Unit, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
Beatrice Ollerenshaw	Director of Academic Services, University of Sunderland
Cliona O'Neill	Senior Learning & Teaching Manager, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
Hannah Pudner	Student Feedback Co-ordinator, National Union of Students
Richard Puttock	Head of Data and Management Information, HEFCE
Paul Ramsden	Chief Executive, Higher Education Academy
Professor Robin Sibson	Chief Executive, Higher Education Statistics Agency
Wes Streeting	Vice President, Education, National Union of Students
Lesley Sutherland	Assistant Director of Learning Policy & Strategy, Scottish Funding Council
Sian Taylor	Manager, National Union of Students Wales
Richard Blackwell	Head of Learning and Teaching, HEFCE

Observers

Helen Bowles
Viv Stern

Policy Adviser, GuildHE
Policy Adviser, Universities UK

Secretariat

Louisa Baker
Chris Taylor
Natalie Waters

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HEFCE

Annex C

Membership of the Teaching Quality Information Technical Group

Members

Richard Puttock (Chair) HEFCE	Head of Data and Management Information,
Gordon Anderson Council	Senior Statistics Officer, Scottish Funding
Catherine Benfield	Head of Operations Development, Higher Education Statistics Agency
Hannah Falvey	Senior Manager: Statistics and Funding, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales
Sue Deeley	Head of Data and Statistics, UCAS
Mandy Nelson	Head of Information Unit, Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
Jonathan Waller	Director of Information and Analysis, Higher Education Statistics Agency

Observers

Claire Singer	Project Manager, UCAS
Thomas Paterson	Project Manager, Hotcourses

Annex D

Guidance regarding use of additional (unpublished) data from the National Student Survey

Purpose

1. This guidance sets out the principles institutions should follow when using the additional (unpublished) data submitted by their own students in the 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 National Student Survey (NSS).
2. Ipsos MORI will make available a range of data, some of which will not be published on the Unistats site. These unpublished data include:
 - students' anonymised comments;
 - data that fall below the 'reliability threshold' used on the Unistats web-site (data are only published where there is at least a 50 per cent response rate and at least 23 responses).
3. The purpose of this guidance is to:
 - a. explain the distinction between NSS data that are published on the Unistats web-site for the purposes of informing student choice, and more detailed data that are made available to inform institutions and students' unions;
 - b. offer guidance on the process for responding to requests for such information under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA) and the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA).

Guidance for institutions and students' unions on the use of additional (unpublished) data

4. The additional data are being made available solely for internal purposes to help with enhancement processes, for example to inform and help identify improvement activities in relation to quality management. Institutions and students' unions should be aware that:
 - a. they should not disseminate the additional data to third parties, for example in publicity or marketing materials;
 - b. in the case of enquiries under the FOIA and FOISA in relation to the anonymous quantitative data, institutions and students' unions are encouraged to consult HEFCE, who will act on behalf of all the funding bodies, when considering whether to disclose information;
 - c. in the case of enquiries under the FOIA and FOISA in relation to the anonymised qualitative data (individual student comments), institutions and students' unions may wish to consider whether these are exempt under FOIA section 40(2) or FOISA section 38(2). In our view

disclosure of this information may be in breach of the first principle of data protection (see paragraphs 7 and 8 below).

5. All staff and student representatives with access to the additional data should be aware of this guidance note.
6. Institutions and students' unions may, should they wish, share the data on the NSS Results web-site with the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education as part of the institutional review process.

Enquiries under the FOIA and FOISA

7. If requests are made under the FOIA and FOISA for any additional quantitative data not published on the Unistats web-site, HEFCE (which will own and hold all such data on behalf of all the funding bodies), institutions and students' unions (who will have access to data about their own students) will need to consider whether or not to disclose the data. HEFCE does not publish data which are below the reliability threshold⁵ for publication because they may misinform student choice. If institutions decide to disclose this information they may wish to put the response in context by making reference to HEFCE's policy.
8. If requests are made under the FOIA and FOISA for any additional qualitative data (the anonymised individual student comments) not published on the Unistats web-site, we would encourage you to consider whether section 40 of the FOIA (on personal information) and section 38 of the FOISA should be used to protect information which is the personal data of a third party. Sections 40 and 38 allow for such information to be withheld where its disclosure would be a breach any of the data protection principles. Students were informed through the privacy statement on the survey that their comments would be made available to institutions and students' unions for the purpose of feedback. Students would not have reasonably expected that their comments would be made available more widely than this. Therefore releasing this information could be in breach of the first principle of data protection (fairness and lawfulness).

Copyright and Rights in Databases Regulations

9. HEFCE⁶ wishes to exercise its right to prevent unauthorised extraction and/or re-utilisation of the whole or a substantial part of the NSS database. This right is described in Statutory Instrument 1997, No 3032 (The Copyright and Rights in Databases Regulations 1997). The other UK higher education

⁵ The 'reliability threshold' is a 50 percent response rate and at least 23 students responding.

⁶ On behalf of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales and the Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland

funding bodies have unlimited access to the database for their own purposes. Ipsos MORI may freely use the database only while under contract to HEFCE in connection with the NSS. Institutions and named students' unions should only use the database for the purposes described. HEFCE reserves the right to take action available to it under the regulations in respect of any infringements of these guidelines.

Process

10. Access to the additional data will be via a password-protected web-site operated by Ipsos MORI. No previously issued passwords will remain valid. Ipsos MORI will be providing access to the 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 NSS data. Ipsos MORI has an existing contact list for the purposes of the NSS Results web-site. If you have not received a password, please e-mail nss@ipsos-mori.com. This contact may share the password with appropriate individuals within the institution, but they should ensure that these individuals are also aware of this guidance. Ipsos MORI will contact these individuals directly by e-mail during August 2008 with details.
11. These guidelines will also appear when users log in to the web-site.

List of abbreviations

DLHE	Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (survey)
FEC	Further education college
FOIA	The Freedom of Information Act 2000
FOISA	The Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002
HE	Higher education
HEI	Higher education institution
HESA	Higher Education Statistics Agency
JACS	Joint Academic Coding System
NSS	National Student Survey
QAF	Quality Assurance Framework
TQI	Teaching Quality Information
UCAS	The admissions body for UK universities and colleges