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Circular

Teaching Quality Information/National Student Survey 2010

Date: 27 October 2009
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To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales
Response by: 27 November 2009 to Ipsos MORI
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This circular provides information to higher education institutions (HEIs) on the plans for the 2010 National Student Survey (NSS). It also provides guidance on promoting the 2010 NSS.

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 to all higher education institutions (HEIs) on the plans for the 2010 National Student Survey (NSS). It also provides guidance on promoting the 2010 NSS. Action is required by all institutions.
2. Details of plans for the 2010 NSS and the action required of institutions are at **Annex A**.

Actions for HEIs and FEIs

3. All HEIs which need to should update their relevant NSS contact details. This information should be supplied to Ipsos MORI by Friday 27 November 2009 using the 'HEI & FEC Details' form, which is available on the Ipsos MORI NSS extranet at www.ipsos-mori.com/nss/extranet. FEIs with franchise HE provision will be invited separately via Fforwm to nominate a contact for the NSS.
4. All HEIs should populate their 2010 NSS target lists with the requested contact details for students on these lists and supply them to Ipsos MORI by **Friday 27 November 2009**. Ipsos MORI will provide details of how to do this securely to its institutional contacts in their 2010 Guidance document. A sample template will be provided by Ipsos MORI. HEIs will continue to provide the target lists and contact details for students of their franchise provision in FEIs.

Results of the 2009 NSS

5. The 2009 NSS was successfully completed earlier this year and the results have been published on the Unistats web-site, www.unistats.com. The results give an overwhelmingly positive endorsement of higher education in Wales and show that students have a high and sustained level of satisfaction with their experience of higher education. The overall satisfaction rate for Wales in 2009 was 83 per cent.
6. The total number of students who responded to the fifth annual NSS increased this year by over 3,000 to 223,363 students; this gives an overall response rate for the UK of 62 per cent. A total of 155 HEIs across the UK and 117 FECs in England took part.
7. In addition, and to help institutions identify areas for improvement and good practice, more detailed results are available to institutions and students' unions via the Ipsos MORI results site.

Analysis of the results

8. Following on from the work of Paula Surridge on the NSS results¹, HEFCE, on behalf of all the funders of the NSS, are planning to publish an annual NSS digest consisting of trends and analysis of the results. This digest will also highlight specific areas of interest such as part-time study.

NSS 2010

9. The NSS will be repeated in 2010 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 2010 NSS will have a similar format and timetable to the 2009 survey. Detailed guidance for HEIs is outlined in **Annex A**.
10. In Wales the results for students studying franchise higher education provision in FEIs will be presented by location of study for the first time. This mirrors the way in which this provision is presented in England. We hope to include directly funded higher education in FEIs in the 2011 NSS. This will depend on us being able to produce an appropriate data set for these students. Arrangements for this will be discussed separately with FEIs.
11. The survey questionnaire will remain the same for the 2010 NSS, so results can be directly compared to both the 2008 and 2009 surveys. Ipsos MORI will continue to run a centrally managed incentive scheme to encourage students to take part in the survey.
12. Ipsos MORI will liaise directly with its NSS contacts at institutions concerning further details of the 2010 NSS, options for timing, and for marketing materials. As with the 2009 survey, institutions will be able to select one of five starting weeks for their survey, between 11 January and 8 February 2010.
13. Following agreement from the Teaching Quality Information/NSS Steering Group last year, eligible students will be invited to participate in the Futuretrack survey at the end of the 2010 NSS. Futuretrack is a longitudinal (five-year), single-cohort tracking study of the entrants to higher education in 2006, being undertaken by the Institute for Employment Research at the University of Warwick on behalf of the Higher Education Careers Services Unit.
14. We would like to thank all those responsible for the continued success of the NSS. This success has enabled the completion of a valuable analysis of students' views of their higher education experience. It is therefore essential that we continue to work together to achieve high response rates to the 2010 and future surveys.

¹ Paula Surridge's three reports on the NSS 2005 – 2007 can be read on the HEFCE web-site under Publications/ Research & evaluation.

Further information / responses to

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

Annex A

Guidance on the 2010 NSS – for higher education institutions

1. The National Student Survey (NSS) will be repeated in 2010 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 2010 NSS will have a similar format and timetable to the 2009 survey.
2. Higher education institutions (HEIs) can access their target lists for the 2010 NSS, via the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data collection system. They should provide the requested contact details for students on these lists to Ipsos MORI by **Friday 27 November 2009**.
3. Additions to the target list are only admitted where students' course length has changed such that they are now expected to complete between 1 February 2010 and 31 January 2011 inclusive. Any such additions must be agreed by HEFCW prior to their submission to Ipsos MORI.
4. As in the 2009 NSS, students will be able to opt out when the institution asks if they wish to have their contact details passed on to the survey agency (Ipsos MORI) or at any stage during the survey process.

Students of NHS subjects

5. Students of NHS subjects took part in the full survey methodology in 2009 and this will continue in 2010. These students will be included in the NSS target lists generated by HESA, and institutions should populate these with the relevant student contact details and return them to Ipsos MORI in the usual way.
6. Students of NHS subjects undertake practice placements, so their experience of higher education is slightly different from that of most other students. Therefore, as in the 2009 NSS, these students will be asked additional questions covering their practice placements. The questions were approved by the Teaching Quality Information (TQI)/NSS Steering Group prior to their implementation for the 2008 survey and will be the same for the 2010 survey. These questions will appear as part of the 'standard' questionnaire; question 22 concerning 'overall satisfaction' will still be at the end.

Scope and coverage of the survey

Coverage

7. The coverage of the 2010 NSS is:

- a. All publicly funded HEIs in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and some institutions in Scotland.
 - b. All students in England studying on directly funded, prescribed higher education courses at further education institutions (FEIs) and at institutions that are members of a HEFCE-recognised funding consortium.
 - c. All full-time and part-time undergraduate students registered at these HEIs and FEIs, during their final year of study (or, for flexible programmes where the final year cannot be predicted, during their fourth year of study) with the following exceptions:
 - i. Students on programmes that do not lead to undergraduate qualifications or credits.
 - ii. Students on a course lasting one year or one full-time equivalent (FTE) or less.
 - iii. Any students who were eligible in the 2009 NSS (whether or not they responded) and who remain at the same institution.
 - iv. Any students who we expect to have completed less than one FTE since they were last surveyed by the end of academic year 2009/10.
8. Students are included in the 2010 survey population if we expect them to complete between 1 February 2010 and 31 January 2011 inclusive.
9. As a change to the 2010 survey, it will not be possible to add extra students to the NSS target list. The one exception to this is where the length of a student's course has decreased after an institution has submitted its HESA return, so that they now finish their course within the dates stipulated in paragraph 8 and meet the eligibility criteria more generally for the survey. If you wish to add students to the target list, please contact Ipsos MORI at nss@ipsos.com prior to submitting your sample, stating (i) the number of extra students you wish to add, and (ii) how they meet the criteria above, with any supporting information you consider relevant. Once extra students are added to the target list it is not possible to remove them.
10. Currently, taught postgraduates are not included in the NSS. This may change in the future, but it is unlikely that the NSS, designed for undergraduates, could simply be extended to postgraduates without significant adaptation in terms of the questionnaire design, administrative methodology, timing and reporting methods.

Reasons for excluding individuals from the survey

11. Since the survey began, we have enabled institutions to exclude students from the target population and will continue to do so for the 2010 NSS. Therefore, the following may be excluded from the survey:
- a. Students who are deceased;

- b. Students with serious health difficulties (including mental health difficulties) where seeking a response may be distressing for the student;
 - c. Students who, having been informed that their contact details will be passed onto the survey agency (Ipsos MORI) for the purposes of the NSS, request that they do not wish to be contacted.
12. As in the 2009 NSS, institutions should code all excluded students on their sample submission as category c (regardless of whether they meet criteria a, b or c above) and institutions should not provide contact details for these students.
 13. If an HEI identifies an error after it has submitted data to HESA but then wishes to remove students, we require it to submit a revised return to HESA that generates a revised target list. HESA will apply a charge of 20 per cent of the institution's annual subscription to meet the costs of processing this change.
 14. Where a student is excluded from the NSS, the institution will need to record this using code c and return this instead of the student's contact details to Ipsos MORI. To enable us to monitor exclusions and verify their consistent application, institutions should retain evidence to support exclusions. Where a student asks that their details are not passed on, we would expect institutions to retain evidence of this request. If the number of such requests at any HEI is so high as to affect our ability to conduct the survey successfully, we will discuss this with the institution.
 15. Although some students may withdraw in their final year, they will have had a significant interaction with the institution; therefore their opinions could be valuable and should be included.
 16. It is only possible to exclude students from the target population using the reasons outlined above. However, these students should not be removed from the file although their contact details should not be supplied.

Process for supplying student contact data

17. Following submission of the HESA data, a target list of students to be included in the NSS will automatically be generated. The institution should then provide contact details, according to the standard template that will be supplied by Ipsos MORI, for all students on the list.
18. As in the 2009 NSS, students should be informed by the institution that their contact details may be passed on for the 2010 survey. For HEIs, text to explain this has been added to the model HESA student data collection notice.
19. If a student does not want their details passed on to Ipsos MORI for the purposes of the NSS, they can opt out of the survey by notifying the institution. Students will also be able to opt out during the survey process.

20. Institutions have the opportunity to define their own structure for receiving institutional feedback, through an optional field on the student target list to indicate the internal 'department code' for each student. This would be instead of, or in addition to, feedback using the structure of the Joint Academic Coding System (JACS). These codes, where provided, will be used solely for providing feedback to the institution.
21. Institutions should provide the requested contact details for students on these lists to Ipsos MORI by **Friday 27 November 2009**. Ipsos MORI will provide guidance to its contacts on how to supply these lists. We have achieved a high response rate for the survey so far and to ensure this continues it is important that institutions provide robust contact details to Ipsos MORI by this date.

Administration of the survey

22. As in previous years, the survey will be conducted during the 2010 spring term so that the results can be published in summer 2010, in time to inform the next cohort of applicants to higher education. To avoid concerns regarding impact on internal surveys, Ipsos MORI will continue to:
 - a. Independently brand the NSS, which clearly distinguishes the purpose of the NSS;
 - b. Centrally manage the survey's distribution, so that institutions are not involved in contacting students to complete the NSS.
23. The five week 'window' approach will continue, so institutions can choose to start the survey at a time which does not clash with examinations, which fits with term timetables, and so on. Institutions can select a week between 11 January and 8 February 2010 for the survey to start. Ipsos MORI will conduct the survey at each institution using a set sequence of e-mail, postal and telephone surveying. This will take up to eight weeks at each institution (although there may be a need for some targeted follow-up during and beyond this time to increase response rates).
24. We wish to avoid extending this window because that could jeopardise publication of the results in time for them to be useful for the next cohort of students. However, we will consider individual requests for a short extension, where the activities of students during the window make it impractical to conduct the survey at that time. Any institution that wishes to make a case for an extension should contact Ipsos MORI by **Friday 27 November 2009**.

Branding and awareness raising

25. As in previous years, Ipsos MORI will produce promotional materials for institutions and students' unions to distribute locally. However, if institutions and/or students' unions wish to use the NSS branding to develop their own marketing material, they can do so, and should discuss this with Ipsos MORI. Ipsos MORI will offer advice on good practice as well as guidelines to

ensure a reasonable degree of consistency across the sector. When it contacts institutions, Ipsos MORI will discuss who in the institution is best placed to co-ordinate promotional activity.

26. As in the 2009 NSS, Ipsos MORI will manage an incentive scheme for institutions that wish to take part. This is a centrally managed scheme that enables institutions to provide an incentive to students to complete the NSS. For example, some institutions provided printer credits for students who completed the survey online.

Questionnaire distribution

27. Ipsos MORI manages the NSS centrally. There are three methods of data collection: by e-mail, post and telephone. This is also the sequence in which students are contacted. Ipsos MORI operates a live, open-access web-site, so that students can log in and complete the survey (this is in addition to the option to respond by following the link in a personalised e-mail). The aim of that site is to verify the identity of students at the point of logging in; once students have completed the survey, they will be automatically removed from the target list and not contacted further. To enable this, and to enable efficient working of the survey more generally, institutions should adhere to the deadline for supplying student contact details.
28. Although there are three methods of data collection, we are committed to increasing the online response rate and so reducing the amount of telephone contact. We have had some success in achieving this since the 2005 survey; however telephoning remains an important element of the survey and will continue, and we expect institutions to provide students landline and mobile telephone numbers where possible.
29. In order to monitor responses and to process data for analysis and reporting, we link all responses to students' HESA or known student identifier. Postal questionnaires will be personalised and include the student identifier. Telephone interviewers will have automatic access to identifiers. Once students have completed the survey, they will be removed from the target list and not contacted further.
30. Throughout the process Ipsos MORI will send reminders to students who have not responded.
31. Response rates will be continuously monitored during the process, by institution and by JACS-based subject area. During the telephone stage, response rates will be reviewed and some areas may be identified for additional, targeted follow-up activity, to bring response up to a sufficient level to report results. This additional activity would involve reminders by e-mail, SMS and post.
32. At any stage during the survey process students are able to opt out of the survey and will not be contacted again. To do this, students will need to provide their date of birth to verify their identity.

33. Regardless of what the publication threshold is set at for the NSS, the TQI/NSS Steering Group agreed that the survey should continue to aim for a 50 per cent response rate for each institution and subject combination. However, we aim for an overall response rate of higher than 50 per cent, and follow-up activity will be directed at those areas below this level. The completeness and accuracy of students' contact data, as supplied by institutions, will be a significant factor in the survey's ability to achieve this.

Publication of 2010 NSS results

34. The main purpose of the NSS is to provide information to help potential students and their advisers make choices about higher education. Therefore all results that meet the publication threshold will be published on the Unistats web-site, www.unistats.com, in summer 2010.
35. The publication threshold for NSS results on the Unistats web-site is currently a 50 per cent response rate with at least 23 students responding. In addition we will make more detailed data available to institutions to help them to identify good practice and make improvements to the student experience. This is currently undertaken by Ipsos MORI via its results web-site, www.ipsos-mori.com/nss/results