Review of the National Student Survey

Dr Cliona O’Neill
Overview

• Background
• Update on the soft consultation on the NSS and next steps for the revised NSS
• How to get engagement with NSS questions by good quality students.
• Discussion on the uses and abuses of the NSS
Background

The National Student Survey:

• Began in 2004/5
• Gives eligible final-year undergraduate students a chance to feedback anonymously on their teaching and learning experiences across 23 areas (and optional banks)
• Funded from a range of sources (mainly UK HE Funding Bodies)
• UK-wide; co-ordinated by HEFCE
• Promoted by institutions/Student Unions
• Delivered by IPSOS Mori & TexunaTechnologies
• Undertaken by students on courses of more than 1 FTE only
Update: Review of the NSS

To explore:

- The purposes now and for the future
- Effectiveness of current NSS in meeting them
- How NSS might change to meet purposes more effectively

2 pieces of work:

- Review of the NSS
- Analysis of NSS results (9 years + 10 years)
Key findings

- The survey is valid and valued by stakeholders for three key purposes:
  - Quality assurance, student choice and quality enhancement
- No major changes to timing or focus - on academic experience
  - Preserve strengths and address weaknesses
- Criteria proposed for all questions in main survey
- Student engagement should be piloted
- Some questions updated or could be deleted
- The survey remains robust
- Proposed negatively worded questions – to address yea-saying
- Explore practical barriers for short courses to be included
- Difference between Q22 results split by a variety of student and course characteristics
Other areas

- Review optional banks
- Review NSS publication thresholds
- Pop up guidance – on scales and avoid yea-saying
- Exit questionnaires for non completers
- Develop an app and phase out postal questionnaire
- Code of practice on reporting results
- Review Q23
- Piloting personal development questions
Proposed Criteria

- Something HE providers can influence
- Focus on the academic experience and especially L&T
- Applicable across all types of providers, modes, disciplines, countries in the UK
- Cover measurable and valid issues
- Meaningful and useful to students and stakeholders
- Produce results that are unambiguous
- Address issues of enduring importance in UK HE rather than transient policy interests
- Meet at least one of the three key purposes of the NSS.
Student engagement questions

• 3 areas proposed for testing/piloting

• Academic Challenge/reflective or integrative learning
  – My course has challenged me to achieve my best
  – My course has encouraged me to apply what I have learned to practical problems or new situations

• Student Voice
  – Staff appear to value the feedback given by students

• Learning community/collaborative learning
  – I feel part of a group of students and staff committed to learning
  – I have had opportunities to work with other students on my course
Revisions to existing questions

Updating for currency
• Q16: library
• Q17: IT
• Q18: specialised equipment

Avoid unhelpful behaviours
• Q7 Feedback on my work is prompt
• Q8 Detailed feedback

Potential deletions to avoid increase in length
• Q2/3 teaching enthusiastic/interesting
• Q8/9 feedback (correlated)
• Q13/14/15 management
Negatively worded questions

- Data analysis shows 1/20 answer same response for every question (usually positively)

- Much higher than would be expected statistically

- Suggest inclusion of negatively worded questions to test if responses are unconsidered.
## Update: Response to recommendations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recommendation</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Acceptance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Use selection criteria for new and existing questions for the core National Student Survey, including that the survey should focus on the academic experience, especially learning and teaching.</td>
<td>Partially accept</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
| 2              | Introduce questions on student engagement for testing and piloting:  
- Academic challenge and reflective and integrative learning (four questions)  
- The learning community and collaborative learning (three questions)  
- Feedback and the student voice (four questions) | Accept |
| 3              | No questions about hours of teaching contact or learning time - consider alternative means for addressing these issues. | Accept |
| 4              | No questions on student finance or environmental sustainability. | Accept |
| 5              | No questions solely for the purpose of international benchmarking | Accept |
| 6              | Revise question on student unions | Accept |
| 7              | Trial alternative personal development questions | Accept |
| 8              | Suggest deleting overlapping questions (one of each pair) after the piloting:  
- Q13 / Q14 (organisation and management)  
- Q8 / Q9 (feedback). | Partially accept |
| 9              | Retain questions that are highly correlated until after the pilot. | Accept |
| 10             | Carry out cognitive testing and piloting of new questions before finalising the survey, and consider the impact on institutions’ behaviour. | Accept |
| 11             | Piloting to include three blocks of new questions; options for merging these can be investigated following the testing. | Accept |
| 12             | Remove from the optional banks any questions added to the main survey, and delete little-used questions. | Partially accept |
| 13             | Do not automatically apply strict criteria to the optional bank questions and do not place results in public domain | Accept recommendation and test in cognitive testing phases. |
| 14             | Consider whether any additional optional banks of questions are needed. | Accept |
| 15             | Retain current open text questions | Accept |
| 16             | Retain option of institution-specific questions | Accept |
| 17             | See whether practical barriers against inclusion of students on short courses can be overcome. | Accept |
| 18             | Consider more sophisticated exit surveys for non-completers | Accept |
| 19             | Development of an ‘app’ to allow users to complete and view results. | Partially accept |
| 20             | Consider phasing out the postal questionnaire. | Partially accept |
| 21             | Presentation of results should continue to be benchmarked, to address the presentation challenges of | Accept |
Update: Timeline

• July 2014 – published
  – Review of the National Student Survey
• October to December 2014 - Phase one cognitive testing
• January to April 2015 - Wider testing of questionnaire
• May to June 2015 - analysis of wider testing data
• May to June 2015 - Second phase cognitive testing
• October 2015 - Consultation published
• February 2016 - Outcomes from consultation published
• Spring 2016 - Potential pilot of final questionnaire
• Summer 2016 - Awarding of contract for new NSS
• January 2017 - New survey starts
Students not currently in the NSS

- Students studying 1 FTE or less not included
  - Foundation degree top up years
  - Short courses

- Practical barriers for their inclusion
  - Timing

- Explore how we can give them a voice
  - Separate survey?
Engagement with NSS questions by good quality students

- Cognitive testing
- Student engagement questions
- Consultation
- Maintaining high response rates (71%)
- Working with NUS
- Piloting
- HEPISG
Uses of the NSS

• Uses:
  • Quality assurance
  • Student choice
  • Quality enhancement
• Compare similar courses at different institutions
• Key Information Sets
Abuses of the NSS

- Comparing different subjects (at the same or different institutions)
- Using data without referring to the benchmarks
- Press
- League tables
- Marketing
Questions?

Thank you