

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

Reference: W05/55HE

Date: 13 October 2005

Response By: No response required

Further Information: Karen Jones (Tel 029

2068 2283, e-mail karen.jones@hefcw.ac.uk

## **NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY 2006**

I am writing to confirm the arrangements for the 2006 National Student Survey (NSS).

The 2005 NSS gave an overwhelmingly positive endorsement to higher education, and any organisation in the public or private sector would clearly be delighted with an overall satisfaction rating of 80 per cent. The high response rate was also very encouraging, and has ensured that the results are robust. I would like to thank all those who helped to make the 2005 NSS a success.

The results were published on the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) web-site ([www.tqi.ac.uk](http://www.tqi.ac.uk)) on 22 September, and more detailed results will be disseminated to institutions by Ipsos UK, to support them in identifying good practice and areas for improvement. Ipsos UK has invited its NSS contacts within institutions to a series of events in November and December 2005, to discuss how the information can be used for this purpose.

The NSS will be repeated in 2006 across Wales, England and Northern Ireland, in collaboration with the National Union of Students. This will establish a two-year dataset that can be used to identify changes in student opinion, and to report on smaller areas of provision by combining the data over the two years. Following the 2006 NSS, the frequency of the survey will be reviewed, to decide whether it should be repeated annually, biennially, or at some other frequency.

The key action for institutions is to provide student contact details to Ipsos UK, by **30 November 2005**. Contact data that are as complete and accurate as possible are crucial in enabling an institution to achieve a high response rate. Ipsos UK will be in touch with its NSS contacts shortly, to make the necessary arrangements.

The 2006 NSS will have a similar format and timetable to the 2005 survey. **Annex A** describes the changes we have made for 2006, and includes the timetable.

If you have any further queries about the NSS please contact Karen Jones (tel: 029 2068 2283, email: [Karen.jones@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:Karen.jones@hefcw.ac.uk)).

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Phil Gummatt". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**PHILIP GUMMETT**  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

## DETAILS OF THE 2006 NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY

1. Circular W04/66HE 'National Student Survey 2005: Next Steps' described the process for undertaking the survey in 2005. This will not change substantially for the 2006 survey; however we are making some changes, which are outlined here.

2. The changes are largely based on recommendations from a process review of the 2005 survey, undertaken by Ipsos UK. Its report, 'National Student Survey 2005: process audit', is available on the HEFCE website at [www.hefce.ac.uk](http://www.hefce.ac.uk) under Publications/R&D reports. Ipsos UK invited all its institutional and students' union contacts to provide feedback on the operation of the survey and to suggest improvements. It concluded that there was a broad level of satisfaction with the operation of the survey in 2005, but suggested some improvements to the process

### **Scope and coverage of the survey**

3. In 2006, the coverage will be as for 2005, but with the following additional categories of students excluded from the survey:

- any students who were included in the 2005 NSS (whether or not they responded), and who remain at the same institution
- students on a course lasting one year or less.

For the above reasons, students on one year 'top-up' courses from an intermediate qualification to a higher level qualification will not be included.

4. As in 2005, the survey in 2006 will not include students on NHS-funded or TTA-funded provision, or students registered at further education colleges. Students who are registered with an HEI, but taught at a further education college under a franchise arrangement, will continue to be included in the survey.

### **Process for supplying student contact data**

5. As in 2005, students should be informed by the institution that their contact details may be passed on for the 2006 survey. Text to explain this has been added to the model HESA student data collection notice. If a student does not want their details passed on for 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.)

6. The process for institutions to supply student contact data will be more integrated with the HESA data collection process than it was in 2005:

- a. When the institution commits its student data to HESA, a 'target list' (of students to be included in the NSS) will automatically be generated on the HESA collection system. (Note that the target list will be re-generated if the institution re-commits its data).

b. The institution is then asked to provide contact details, according to the standard template that will be supplied by Ipsos UK, for all students on the list.

c. Institutions are asked to return the complete dataset to Ipsos UK, **by 30 November 2005**.

### **Scope for institutions to exclude students from the survey**

7. As in 2005, the institution may exclude individual students who appear in the target list, for particular reasons. In each case, the institution should record the reason for exclusion instead of supplying the student's contact details. The following reasons for exclusion will remain the same as was the case in 2005:

- a (deceased)
- b (serious health difficulties)
- c (student has requested that their details are not passed on for the purposes of the NSS).

We do not expect to use category d (error in the institution's HESA data) in 2006, because any errors should be rectified through the HESA data collection process.

### **Questionnaire**

8. The interim assessment of the survey questionnaire by Ipsos UK confirmed that it is robust, and did not indicate that any particular changes were necessary to improve its reliability. While we envisage improvements to the questionnaire over time, at this stage there are two significant advantages to keeping the questionnaire stable:

- results from 2005 and 2006 would be directly comparable, so changes in students' views between these years can be identified
- we could combine the data over these two years, so we will be able to publish results for smaller areas of provision that did not meet the threshold criteria in 2005.

9. We will therefore use the same questionnaire for the 2006 NSS. However, we are intending to test some additional questions during 2006, for potential use in subsequent surveys.

### **Timing of the survey**

10. The timing of the 2006 NSS will be the same as in 2005, although the 'window' for starting the survey will change slightly. Institutions will be able to select a starting week between the week commencing 9 January and the week commencing 30 January. Ipsos UK will need all HEIs to choose their starting week, by **30 November 2005**. The overall timetable is set out below.

## **Awareness raising**

11. The process audit by Ipsos UK identified that the promotional materials could be improved; it is in the process of re-designing the materials. As in 2005, these will be distributed to institutions for local dissemination at the time of the survey. Ipsos UK will also provide guidance on local activities that could enhance the promotional effort.

12. We are also working closely with the National Union of Students to provide more support to students' unions, who can make an important contribution to raising students' awareness of the NSS.

## **Questionnaire distribution**

13. A variety of different methods will be used to conduct the survey, as for 2005. However, there will be a greater focus on encouraging online participation, as this is the most cost-effective approach. The process will be as follows:

Week 1-2 Ipsos UK will e-mail students with a link to the online questionnaire, inviting a response. A reminder e-mail will be sent a week later to those that have not responded. Any alternative e-mail addresses for those students will also be used.

Week 3 Paper questionnaires will be posted to students that have not responded online. A reply-paid envelope will be included. (No reminder postcards will be sent, as was the case in 2005.)

Weeks 4-8 Those who have not responded will be telephoned (using all available numbers, starting with landlines) until either contact is made or the numbers are discarded as being incorrect or unusable.

14. Ipsos UK will monitor response rates in each subject in each institution. Institutions will be able to access this information through the NSS extranet.

15. Where response rates remain below the publication thresholds, some additional targeted follow-up attempts may be made, for example at the start of the spring vacation, using students' 'home' contact details.

## **Results**

16. The 2006 NSS data will be published in a similar way to the 2005 NSS data. This will include publication of the results on the TQI site, with an added facility to aggregate the results for the two years of the survey (to enable reporting on smaller areas of provision). Other improvements to the site will be made following user feedback.

17. The results will again be made available in greater detail to institutions and students' unions, via the NSS dissemination site provided by Ipsos UK.

## Timetable

October 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• HEIs generate NSS target lists through the HESA data collection process</li><li>• Ipsos UK provides template for student contact data</li><li>• Ipsos UK develops promotional materials</li></ul>
November 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• HEIs provide student contact data (by 30 November)</li><li>• HEIs select start dates</li></ul>
December 2005	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Ipsos UK supplies HEIs with promotional materials</li></ul>
January to April 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• HEIs and students' unions distribute promotional materials locally (and undertake further promotional activity as appropriate)</li><li>• At agreed times, Ipsos UK surveys students using a sequence of methods, for a period of up to eight weeks</li></ul>
May to July 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Compilation and processing of data</li><li>• Preparation for publication and dissemination</li></ul>
August to September 2006	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Results published on TQI site</li><li>• More detailed results to provided to institutions via NSS dissemination site</li></ul>