

Annex A

2006 TQI update and 2006 NSS outcomes

TQI update

1. The main output from the 2006 NSS is the results on the TQI site, intended to inform applicants and their advisers. The work to address some of the issues raised by site users (completed by the Open University, OU, and Ipsos MORI) is currently under way for the summer 2006 survey. This will more clearly flag up features of the site, improve navigation, make the NSS more visible throughout and simplify the text. A report of findings from the OU research, including a survey of careers advisers, will be published on the HEFCE web-site during the autumn.
2. The same 'reliability threshold' as applied in 2005 on the TQI site will apply for the 2006 survey. Data will only appear on the site for any given subject at any given HEI where more than 30 responses were received, and the response rate was at least 50 per cent. However, the 2006 TQI update will be able to provide more coverage of results, by aggregating 2005 and 2006 NSS results where the 2006 data alone do not meet the reliability threshold.
3. For users, data will appear in the following order:
 - the first and optimum outcome is to show 2006 NSS data at the level of the 41 subjects
 - if this is unavailable, 2005 and 2006 NSS data will be combined at the 41-subject level, where the combined results meet the reliability threshold (50 per cent response rate and more than 30 responses)
 - if this is unavailable, the site will show 2006 NSS data at the 19-subject level.
 - if this is unavailable, it will show 2006 NSS data at whole-institution level.

An explanation for users will be provided, so it is clear what data they are viewing.

4. We are planning to consult during the autumn to look at how data can be aggregated on the TQI site in the future, to maximise the availability of data at an appropriate level of subject detail. We will also consult on whether the reliability threshold for the TQI web-site should be lowered, resulting in more coverage for users.

Preview of results

5. Institutions will be able to preview their own data from the beginning of August, as it will appear on the TQI web-site. This will enable institutions to prepare a commentary on their NSS results, if they wish to do so. The commentary can be published on the site, to explain the context of an institution's results and any response to them.
6. We recognise the difficulties in preparing commentaries without access to other institutions' results, as they appear on the TQI web-site. Therefore, we will make all the TQI and NSS data available as spreadsheets approximately one week before publication on the TQI site. This will be via the HEFCE extranet, and we will provide institutions with logins and passwords shortly.

NSS dissemination web-site

7. In addition to the information on the TQI site, more detailed results from the 2006 NSS will be available for institutions and student unions, for their internal purposes, via the Ipsos MORI NSS dissemination web-site. As in 2005, this will be at a finer level of subject detail and include the anonymised qualitative comments, which will not be published on the TQI site. The site will include the 2005 and 2006 NSS results, enabling institutions and student unions to compare results over the two years.
8. To access this additional data, please sign the form at Annex B and return it to Ipsos MORI by 25 August 2006. We publish data on the TQI site only if it meets the reliability threshold, to ensure that it is robust enough to inform student choice; however, we believe it is useful to make more detailed data available to institutions and student unions for internal purposes. The purpose of the agreement in Annex B is to maintain this distinction¹. (We are writing separately to student unions about this; unions will be provided access to the same data as HEIs, on the same terms.)
9. The agreement has changed since last year because both the interpretation of the Freedom of Information Act and the guidance from the Information Commissioner have evolved, and we no longer believe there is a strong case to withhold quantitative data under section 43 of the Act (which covers commercial interests). However, in relation to the qualitative data (anonymised student comments) institutions should not release

¹ We exercise our right under the Copyright and Rights in Databases Regulations 1997 to restrict the rights of users of the NSS data on the NSS dissemination web-site to the specific purposes described in the signed agreement. We reserve the right to take action available to us under the regulations in respect of any infringements of this agreement.

this information as we consider it would be in breach of the first principle of data protection, more details are provided in Annex B.

10. The additional data and students' comments will be available online via the NSS dissemination web-site from late August 2006. All institutions and student unions that have returned a signed agreement will be provided with passwords to access the 2005 and 2006 information.
11. Ipsos MORI is currently working with the HEA and the National Union of Students to identify ways of improving the NSS dissemination web-site. Changes to the site will develop over time, with phased implementation.

Developing the TQI web-site

12. The purpose of the TQI web-site is to provide information to potential students and their advisers on what and where to study, and it should be aimed at this audience. Therefore, we are re-commissioning the site to make it more user focused in terms of presentation, branding and marketing. It will be relaunched in summer 2007 with publicity aimed at applicants and their advisers.
13. Potential changes resulting from the review, and the re-commissioning process, are likely to involve a transition for institutions, in terms of preparing and uploading their qualitative reports. At this stage, we have agreed the following:
 - the content management system of the TQI web-site currently enables institutions to upload qualitative information onto the site, such as external examiner summaries and commentaries on data. This facility will be terminated by 31 December 2006;
 - at the same point, the public TQI site will be 'frozen'. It will be maintained from that point on, but no further changes will be made to the site, and institutions will not be able to edit their reports;
 - a new public site will be launched in summer 2007, incorporating any changes resulting from the review of the quality assurance framework;
 - a new content management system will be provided from March 2007, to enable institutions to upload material to the new public site. The new system will also reflect changes resulting from the framework review.

Further details of the implications for institutions will be provided in October.

Developing the NSS

14. The NSS will be repeated in 2007 across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and some institutions in Scotland, in collaboration with the National Union of Students. Analysis of the trends between years will then be conducted. Prior to this, a decision will be taken on the frequency of the survey beyond 2007.

Timetable

15. The 2007 survey will have a similar format and timetable to the 2006 survey; we will publish arrangements later this year. Ipsos MORI (which conducts the survey on our behalf) is currently developing 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 this site is to verify the identity of students at the point of logging in. To enable this, and also to improve the efficiency of the survey more generally, institutions may be asked to supply student contact details earlier in November, and to adhere to the deadline for supplying the data. Student target lists will be available to institutions via the HESA collection system, when submitting their data. We will provide more details later this year.

Questionnaire

16. In September 2005 we published 'National Student Survey: an interim assessment of the 2005 questionnaire' (published on the web at www.hefce.ac.uk under Publications/R&D reports). This confirmed that the questionnaire is robust, and did not indicate that any particular changes were necessary to improve its reliability. While we envisage making improvements over time, at this stage there are two significant advantages to keeping the questionnaire stable:
 - results from 2005, 2006 and 2007 will be directly comparable, so changes in students' views between these years can be identified;
 - we can combine the data over these three years, in order to publish results for more specific areas of provision (that would not otherwise meet the reliability threshold).
17. We will therefore use the same questionnaire for the 2007 NSS. However, we will wish to explore how the survey can be made more useful to institutions.

Methodology

18. The 2007 NSS will continue to have three methods of data collection: e-mail, post and telephone. This is also the sequence in which the survey will be completed. The

analysis of the 2005 NSS results suggests that students who are telephoned are more likely to be from an ethnic minority and/or have a disability. So we will continue to use this method, though we are committed to increasing the online response rate and so reducing the amount of telephone contact. Ipsos MORI and the NUS are working together to develop good practice to support both institutions and student unions to increase the online response rate over time. The guidance will be disseminated during the autumn in preparation for the 2007 NSS.

Analysis of the NSS results

19. During 2005 we commissioned the University of Bristol to analyse the results of the 2005 NSS. Its findings will be published on our web-site during the autumn. The analysis investigates the range of student, institution and course characteristics that influence students' feedback ratings, both across the sector and by subject. It will also identify specific institutions and their results, in some cases in a form different to that published on the TQI site, and in some cases with results that fall below the reliability threshold that is applied on the TQI site. We will release the report under embargo to institutions before it is published. Further details of these arrangements will be provided during the summer.
20. We have also commissioned the University of Bristol to analyse the 2006 results and the trends between years. We expect to publish the findings during spring 2007.