

Circular

ACCESS TO THE 2007 NATIONAL STUDENT SURVEY RESULTS AND LAUNCH OF THE UNISTATS WEBSITE

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To: Heads of higher education institutions in Wales

Summary: This letter provides information on how to access the 2007 National Student Survey (NSS) results. It also details plans for the launch of the new 'Unistats' site, which replaces the existing Teaching Quality Information (TQI) website.

Response by: None required

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1. This letter provides information to institutions on how to access their 2007 National Student Survey (NSS) results. It also details plans for the launch of the new 'Unistats' site, which replaces the existing Teaching Quality Information (TQI) website.
2. The National Student Survey (NSS) is now in its third year. This year's NSS received a very positive endorsement from students, with a 60 per cent response rate and 81 per cent overall satisfaction. As a result there will be more data published than ever before, which will support potential students to make choices about what and where to study. We would like to take this opportunity to thank all who have worked to make this possible.

Publication of the results

3. The NSS results are published on the Teaching Quality Information (TQI) website. However, from this summer the site will change. Following the recommendations of the Quality Assurance Framework review group (QAFRG) in England (HEFCE 2006/45 'review of the Quality Assurance Framework: phase two outcomes') a UCAS-Hotcourses consortium was appointed to redevelop the site to be more user-focused. As a result, the consortium has developed a site that delivers more functions for applicants and students along with a new brand and visual identity for the site. It also has a new name: from this summer it will be called 'Unistats', with the strapline 'from universities and colleges in the UK'. The strapline will be translated on the Welsh version of the website.



4. The results of the 2007 NSS will be published on this new site, together with other TQI data. More details, including arrangements to preview the 2007 NSS results, are at **Annex A**.
5. The new site will also reflect feedback that resulted from HEFCW's and HEFCE's 2006 consultation (see HEFCW Circular W07/15HE: Development of TQI and the NSS: Outcomes of Consultation). Following the outcomes of this consultation, the steering group (see **Annex B** for membership) sought further advice regarding what the publication threshold should be set at for the NSS results. The Expert Threshold Group (see **Annex C** for membership) recommended that the threshold should be set at 50 per cent response rate and at least 23 students responding. More details are available at **Annex A**.
6. HEFCW's Council has agreed the participation of Wales in the 2008 National Student Survey and beyond, subject to review of the frequency of the survey. Therefore, in 2008 the NSS will be repeated in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and some institutions in Scotland, in collaboration with the National Union of Students. Ipsos MORI has been appointed to undertake the 2008 survey, which will operate in the same way as the 2007 survey. We will write to institutions later this year with further details. Ipsos MORI has a contact database for the purposes of the NSS. Any amendments to the NSS contact(s) should be made via the NSS Email Helpline (nss@ipsos-mori.com).
7. If you have any queries regarding this letter please contact Dr Cliona O'Neill on 02920 682283 or cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk

Background

1. The publication of Teaching Quality Information (TQI) incorporates the National Student Survey (NSS), the Destination of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE) and HESA statistics. These data are currently published on the TQI website. The Quality Assurance Framework was recently reviewed by the QAFRG in England and included an evaluation of the TQI, including the NSS (HEFCE 2006/45: Review of the Quality Assurance Framework: phase two outcomes). The review concluded that these initiatives could make a valuable contribution to student choice, but that improvements were needed to ensure they achieved this objective. A UCAS-Hotcourses consortium was appointed to redevelop the TQI website to be more user focused, including a new 'brand' and 'identity'.
2. In addition – and in response to the QAFRG recommendation to make the site more user-focused – HEFCW and HEFCE sought views on proposals for the development of both the TQI site and the NSS (see HEFCW Circular W06/49HE). The outcomes were published earlier this year (see HEFCW Circular W07/15HE). The TQI/NSS steering group sought further advice from an expert group of statisticians regarding the publication threshold for the NSS results, and consulted the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) regarding the inclusion of data on ethnicity, disability and widening participation. In addition, the group has revised the publication threshold for the HESA-derived data. The final decisions of the group are outlined in paragraphs 7 to 14 below.
3. The 2007 NSS is now complete. The final response rate was 60 per cent, and 81 per cent of students were satisfied with the quality of their courses. This letter outlines how institutions will be able to access the results of the 2007 NSS.

Launch of the new Unistats site

4. A UCAS-Hotcourses consortium was appointed in October 2006 to re-develop the TQI website, following the recommendation of the QAFRG in England that the site should be more user-focused. Since its appointment the consortium has been developing a 'public access site' and has tested designs with users, which is essential to ensure the site is fit for purpose. In addition it has developed a new brand and identity for the site, which will be renamed 'Unistats: from universities and colleges in the UK' from summer 2007. This was tested with potential users, who overwhelmingly identified the name with the purpose of the site, and was endorsed by the TQI/NSS steering group (see **Annex B** for membership).
5. Although the site is being developed by a UCAS-Hotcourses consortium, it is completely separate from the UCAS 'apply' site. However, users of the UCAS 'apply' site will have the opportunity to view Unistats data when they are making decisions about higher education, to help them make choices about what and where to study.
6. The new site will be launched to the public in early August 2007. The exact date will be confirmed in due course. The Unistats site will reflect the outcomes of the consultation (see Circular W07/15HE), including the TQI/NSS steering group's final decision on the publication threshold for the NSS results, the outcomes of the advice from the ECU regarding the inclusion of data on ethnicity, disability and widening participation, and the group's decision concerning the publication threshold of the HESA derived data (see paragraphs 7 to 14 below).

Publication threshold for the HESA-derived data

7. Currently the HESA-derived data are only published where one of the categories of data in the table has a number of students that rounds to five or more. The TQI technical group considered that this could present misleading information because tables with very small numbers could have a single category that rounds to five or more, and hence imply that all students were in that category, when in fact this was not the case. Therefore, it recommended to the TQI/NSS steering group that tables should only be shown where the number of students is 22.5 or more.

As the NSS has always been operated as a headcount, rather than full person equivalents, this means that a minimum of 23 students responding is required for publication of data.

8. This recommendation has been endorsed by the TQI/NSS steering group and will be implemented on the revised site this summer.

Lowering the NSS publication threshold for the Unistats site

9. We consulted the sector during 2006 (see Circular W06/49HE), as did HEFCE, regarding the proposal to reduce the threshold for publishing NSS results to a 40 per cent response rate, and 20 students responding (from the current minimum of 50 per cent and 30 students); this was supported by 76 per cent of HEFCE respondents and was broadly supported by Welsh respondents. However, a number of respondents suggested a threshold of 50 per cent response rate and 20 respondents, on the basis that this would still require the majority of students to have informed the data and hence prevent a minority view prevailing.
10. The TQI/NSS steering group considered these options and sought advice from an expert group of statisticians (see **Annex C** for membership). This group considered the evidence already produced and conducted some further analysis of the impact of lowering the threshold.
11. The group recommended that the percentage element should not be changed until further work is completed to analyse the non-response bias in the data. Therefore the percentage element of the threshold will, for the short term, remain at 50 per cent. Further work will be completed this year to analyse the non-response bias.
12. In relation to the 'number of students required for publication' (the numerical element of the threshold), the group recommended that this could be reduced if confidence intervals were implemented on the Unistats site. Therefore, the group undertook further work to determine the calculation for the confidence intervals and analysed the consistency of the data between the two years. In addition, UCAS developed the presentation of these and tested them with users to ensure they were fit for purpose.
13. Following confirmation of the calculation of the confidence interval, that there is consistency between the two data sets and the outcomes of the user testing, which confirmed that users can interpret the information, the group recommended that the numerical threshold on the site should be at least 23 students responding.
14. These recommendations have been endorsed by the TQI/NSS steering group and will be implemented on the revised site this summer. The group also agreed that the changes should be applied retrospectively.

Student profile data for the Unistats site

15. A number of respondents suggested that data should also be included on, for example, students' ethnicity, proportions of disabled students, and the percentage from low participation neighbourhoods and state schools. The TQI/NSS steering group expressed concerns about how these data could be used to inform student choice. Therefore, the group sought advice from the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU), which expressed the same concerns. The TQI/NSS steering group considered ECU's advice and agreed that, given the tight timescale and advanced stage of web development for this year's re-launch of the site, these data should not be published at this point. This will give UCAS the opportunity to undertake user testing to see how users might use such data to inform their choices of what and where to study. In addition, the issue can be explored further with ECU.
16. HEFCE will hold a press conference in early August to launch the Unistats site, which will be followed by a media campaign. HEFCW will issue a press release in relation to the Welsh data to coincide with the launch. UCAS's publicity will be aimed primarily at applicants and their advisers, to help inform student choices for the 2008 entry into HE. In addition to the media publicity campaign for the launch, UCAS and Hotcourses are incorporating materials regarding

Unistats into their other relevant publications, distributing materials to careers advisers, and will build links to other relevant websites.

HEI preview of Unistats

17. In addition to the public access site, UCAS has been developing the content management system (CMS) for Unistats. This 'back end' of the website has been tested with the 'Backend User Group' (see **Annex D** for membership), to ensure it is fit for purpose. From early July, institutions will be able to preview their data, as it will appear on Unistats, via the CMS. In addition they will also be able to preview their own 2007 NSS results, under embargo until the site is publicly launched.
18. From late July institutions will be able to preview all institutions' 2007 NSS results as they will appear on Unistats, via the CMS, and under embargo until the site is publicly launched. The data will also be available in spreadsheet format to assist with the preparation of commentaries. Sector-wide average scores will also be made available. UCAS will provide details to their contacts in due course. Institutions will also be able to preview their 2005/06 Destinations of Leavers of Higher Education (DLHE) data. The timetable is outlined below:

Early July	CMS goes live and institutions can preview historic data and their own 2007 NSS results, as they will appear on the Unistats site. This will be under embargo until the public launch of the site.
Late July	Institutions will be able to preview all institutions' 2007 NSS results, as they will appear on the Unistats site. They will also have access to the 2005/06 DLHE data. In addition the data will be available in spreadsheet format and sector-wide average scores will also be provided. This will be under embargo until the public launch of the site.
Early August	Full public launch.

19. Given the site is currently under development, there will be some minor changes between the preview that institutions will have and the final publicly launched site. However, these are minor changes and will not affect institutions' ability to preview the data.

Access to additional data

20. In addition to the information on the Unistats site, more detailed results from the 2007 NSS will be available for institutions and student unions, for their internal purposes, via the Ipsos MORI NSS dissemination website. This will be at subject level three in the JACS subject hierarchy and will include the anonymised qualitative comments, which will not be published on the Unistats site. The Ipsos MORI site will include the 2005, 2006 and 2007 NSS results, enabling institutions and student unions to compare results over the three years. The inclusion of data at subject level three will be applied retrospectively to previous years' data.
21. Ipsos MORI has worked with the Higher Education Academy and the National Union of Students (NUS) to identify ways of improving the dissemination site. The Higher Education Academy published a report outlining its recommendations (see www.heacademy.ac.uk/nss.htm), and these are being implemented in the design of the dissemination site, which will be published during late August. Ipsos MORI will convene a Dissemination Site Working Group to test the dissemination site and ensure it is fit for purpose. This further work on the dissemination site is intended to improve usability of the data and therefore enable institutions and student unions to identify areas for improvement and good practice.

Accessing these results

22. Previously HEFCE, on behalf of the other funding councils, has asked institutions and student unions to sign an agreement, which outlined the distinction between the data that are published for the purposes of informing student choice and the data available on the dissemination website. However, the interpretation of the Freedom of Information Act and guidance from the Information Commissioner has evolved, and institutions are now being provided with guidance rather than being requested to formally sign an agreement. We are writing separately to students' unions about this; unions will be provided access to the same data as higher education institutions, and will be provided with the same guidelines. This guidance is available at **Annex E**.
23. The additional data and students' comments will be available online via the NSS dissemination website from late August 2006. 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 2007, please contact the NSS Email Helpline nss@ipsos-mori.com.

2008 NSS and Unistats

24. The outcomes of the QAFRG in England (see HEFCE 2006/45) recommended that the NSS should continue for the foreseeable future. At its meeting in March 2007, HEFCW's Council agreed the recommendation of its Learning and Teaching Committee that Wales should continue to participate in the National Student Survey in 2008 and beyond, subject to the frequency of the survey being reviewed by the UK TQI/NSS Steering Group to ensure that the optimum frequency be agreed.
25. Ipsos MORI has been appointed to undertake the 2008 NSS. The survey will operate in the same way as the 2007 survey, and we will write to institutions later this year with further details.
26. As with the 2007 NSS results, the 2008 results will be published on the Unistats site. Following its launch of the site this August, UCAS will continue to develop the site over the coming months, to ensure it remains fit for purpose. Institutions will be able to preview significant changes to the site prior to its public release.

Membership of the TQI/NSS steering group**Members**

Professor Michael Arthur	Vice-Chancellor, University of Leeds (Chair)
Jane Artess	Research Manager, HE Careers Service Unit
Professor 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, Teaching and Development Agency for Schools
Siobhan Greenan	Policy Adviser, DEL
Karen Jones	Policy Adviser, Higher Education Wales
John Last	Deputy Principal, Arts Institute, Bournemouth
Gerard Madill	Policy Adviser, Universities Scotland
David McParlin	Academic Secretary, University of Wales, Aberystwyth
Jim Mutton	Principal, Loughborough College, and Chair of the HE in FECs steering group
Mandy Nelson	Head of Information Unit, QAA
Beatrice Ollerenshaw	Director of Academic Services, Sunderland University and Chair of the BUG group
Cliona O'Neill	Senior Learning & Teaching Manager, HEFCW
Hannah Pudner	Student Feedback Co-ordinator, NUS
Richard Puttock	Analyst, HEFCE
Professor Paul Ramsden	Chief Executive, Higher Education Academy
Professor Robin Sibson	Chief Executive, HESA
Wes Streeting	Vice President, Education, NUS
Lesley Sutherland	Assistant Director of Learning Policy & Strategy Scottish Funding Council
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Observers

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Expert Threshold Group

Members

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David Jones	Deputy Academic Registrar, University of Aberdeen
Lesley Munro	Academic Secretary, Edge Hill University
Anne Ruston	Director of the Academic Quality, University of Birmingham
Kathy Sherlock	Head of Registry, University of Huddersfield
Daniel Tiplady	Welsh Language Scheme Coordinator, University of Wales Institute, Cardiff
Iain Wolloff	Vice-Principal, Farnborough College of Technology
Carol Wurbacher	Quality Support Information Co-ordinator, Liverpool John Moores University

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 and 2007 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 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:
 - explain the distinction between NSS data that are published on the Unistats site for the purposes of informing student choice; and more detailed data that are made available to inform institutions and student unions.
 - 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 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 to identify improvement activities in relation to quality management:
 - a. Institutions should not actively 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 are encouraged to consult HEFCE, 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 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 paragraph 6 below).
 - d. All staff with access to the additional data should be aware of this guidance note.

Enquiries under the FOIA and FOISA

5. If requests are made under the FOIA and FOISA for any additional quantitative data not published on the Unistats website, both HEFCE (which will own and hold all such data and will act on behalf of the other funding councils), and institutions (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 threshold 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.
6. If requests are made under the FOIA and FOISA for any additional qualitative data (the anonymised individual student comments) not published on the Unistats website, 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. Section 40 and 38 allow for such information to be withheld where its disclosure would be a breach of data protection principles on fairness and lawfulness. Students were informed through the privacy statement on the survey that their comments would be made available to institutions and student 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

7. HEFCE, on behalf of the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) Northern Ireland, 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 HE 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 student 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

8. Access to the additional data will be via a password-protected website operated by Ipsos MORI. All previously issued passwords will no longer be valid. Ipsos MORI will be providing access to the 2005, 2006 and 2007 NSS data. Ipsos MORI has an existing contact list for the purposes of the dissemination website. If the contact for your institution has not received their password by 31 August, please contact the NSS Email Helpline nss@ipsos-mori.com. The contact may share the password with appropriate individuals within the institution, however, they should ensure that these individuals are also aware of this guidance. Ipsos MORI will contact these individuals directly by e-mail during August 2007 with details.
9. These guidelines will also appear when users log in to the website.