

Cylchlythyr | Circular

A new National Student Survey for 2017

Date: 28 September 2016
Reference: W16/32HE
To: Governing bodies and Heads of regulated institutions in Wales
Other parties with an interest in public information about higher education
Response by: 28 November 2016
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This circular announces arrangements for the 2017 National Student Survey (NSS), and the action required from all institutions by **Monday 28 November 2016**. This includes:

- providing up to date institutional contact details
- checking the sample list of students to be included in the survey (the “target list”) and providing students’ contact details.

If you require this document in an alternative accessible format, please email info@hefcw.ac.uk.



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Introduction

1. This circular announces arrangements for the 2017 National Student Survey (NSS), and the action required from all institutions by **Monday 28 November 2016**. This includes:
 - providing up to date institutional contact details;
 - checking the sample list of students to be included in the survey (the “target list”) and providing students’ contact details.
2. For the 2017 survey the UK higher education (HE) funding bodies are introducing substantial changes to the survey questionnaire based on the outcomes of the Review of Information (www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/Year/2016/201615/) that were published in August.
3. Ipsos MORI will continue to run the survey on our behalf, and provide support to institutions in managing and promoting the survey.
4. Detailed guidance relating to the 2017 NSS and the action requested is attached.

Actions for all institutions

5. All regulated institutions are asked to review, and update if necessary, their relevant NSS institutional contact details. The information should be supplied to Ipsos MORI no later than **Monday 28 November 2016** using the ‘My Details’ form, available on the Ipsos MORI NSS extranet or www.ipsos-mori.com/nss/extranet). This is a password-protected site, and Ipsos MORI has sent login details to the nominated main and secondary NSS contacts.
6. All institutions should populate their 2017 NSS sample templates with the requested contact details for students on their target list (this is a list of all students eligible for 2017 NSS based on the 2015/16 student data submitted). Details should be supplied to Ipsos MORI by **Monday 28 November 2016** via the ‘Upload Sample Data’ section of the Ipsos MORI NSS extranet.
7. Instructions on how to supply this information are included in the NSS 2017 ‘Guidance for institutions and students’ unions’, which will be sent to institutional contacts on **Wednesday 26 October 2016** and will also be available on the Ipsos MORI NSS extranet. The guidance includes information regarding survey administration, appropriate promotion of the survey and key responsibilities and dates.

NSS 2017

8. For 2017, we are introducing substantial changes to the survey questionnaire, based on outcomes of the funding bodies’ Review of

Information consultation ([W15/22HE: Review of information about learning and teaching and the student experience: consultation on changes to the National Student Survey, Unistats and information provided by institutions](#)) and an extensive testing programme. These are the first major changes to the survey since its introduction in 2005. While this will inevitably interrupt trend data, changes are needed now to ensure the survey remains fit for purpose. The final list of questions for the survey are provided as **Annex A** to this circular. This includes nine new questions on student engagement, updated questions on assessment and feedback and learning resources, removal and transfer of personal development questions to the optional question banks, and removal of two duplicative questions to ensure the survey remains short¹. The open text boxes and the current scale for responses will continue to be used. Further details on the new survey are given below and in **Annex B**.

9. The NSS will be administered across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. It will run to a similar timetable to the 2016 survey, with fieldwork taking place between January and April 2017, and results published in August 2017. Data will be provided at a detailed level to institutions through a dissemination site, and will be published by HEFCE on its web-site, on behalf of all the funders, and on a revised Unistats site in September 2017. Further information about publication on Unistats, including changes we are making to the presentation of NSS, is available in Circular [W16/31HE: Summary of the outcomes of the consultation on detailed changes to the Key Information Set data collection for 2017 and approaches to presenting data on the successor to the Unistats website](#) and at www.hefce.ac.uk/it/unikis/consultations/. We expect to provide a detailed timetable for publication in April 2017.
10. The UK funding bodies have appointed Ipsos MORI to continue to manage the survey for a period of up to four years (2017-2020). Its role is to administer the survey and return data to the funding bodies and to provide support to institutions, including resources to help promote the survey. This includes facilitating a centrally managed incentive scheme on behalf of institutions to encourage students to take part in the survey.
11. Ipsos MORI will liaise directly with NSS contacts at institutions on how the 2017 NSS will be run. This will include selecting optional questions, incentive schemes and marketing materials. As with the 2016 survey, institutions will also be able to select one of five starting weeks for their survey.
12. All providers in Wales pay for the administration of the survey. In 2017 this will be done via the sector agency agreement. HEFCW also contributes to the costs of administering the survey.

¹ The two questions that have been removed are: 'Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching' and 'Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand'.

13. While the survey is managed by Ipsos Mori and the funding bodies, the active support of providers and student unions is vital in ensuring the data is robust and of high quality, particularly in delivering high response rates. As is clear from the Review of Information, the NSS is instrumental in giving students a voice in their education, enabling prospective students to make choices about their future, supporting providers to enhance the quality of their courses, and ensuring wider public accountability.
14. In England the NUS is considering whether to seek to disrupt the survey in 2017, given the link between the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and fees. We are not aware of any such plans in Wales, as there is currently no fee increase planned as a result of TEF outcomes. However, any disruption to the survey in other countries of the UK will impact on the robustness of the data for the UK as a whole, including benchmarking. In the past the funding bodies have consistently worked productively with NUS on the NSS, and we are in close contact with them to understand their position. Whatever decision is ultimately taken, we will continue to work on behalf of students and other stakeholders who rely on the survey to ensure the NSS continues to be a success. This will include:
 - a. Ensuring students have factual information about the survey and its uses when contacted by Ipsos MORI
 - b. Support for providers who may want guidance on promotional activity.
 - c. Communication with students' unions about their role in agreeing the optional banks and importance of their choosing these with institutions.
 - d. Working directly with students' unions to enable them to access and use NSS data.
15. In addition, we will be retaining in the main survey a question on the role of students' unions (on academic representation) within the main survey (see **Annex A**).
16. We encourage all providers and students' unions to draw on the resources available and to contact Ipsos Mori or HEFCE if they require additional support.
17. Further information for HEIs and FEIs is available at **Annexes C and D** respectively.

Optional banks

18. For the new 2017 survey the current optional banks will remain, with adjustments to address overlap with the new student engagement questions and the addition of an optional personal development bank (which comprises the three personal development questions which are currently in the main survey) and potentially a students' union optional bank, which we are developing with NUS.
19. As agreed through our consultation, from 2017 onwards we expect institutions to agree their choice of optional bank questions with their

student representative body (student union, guild or association). Further information about this will be provided by Ipsos Mori.

20. In the autumn, and in line with the outcome of the Review of Information, we will work with the sector and students to explore the inclusion of new optional banks from NSS 2018 onwards. This may include, among others, redeveloped questions on personal development, on employability, entrepreneurship and careers, as well as on support for specific student learning needs and on wellbeing.

Intentions after Graduation Survey (IAGS)

21. We will continue to run the Intentions after Graduation Survey as a follow-on survey to the NSS. The IAGS provides valuable information to the sector and to policymakers about student progression, including to postgraduate study. The costs of the IAGS will be covered by the funding bodies. On completing the NSS, students completing first degree programmes will be invited to take part in a separate 'click-through' survey asking them about their intentions after graduation. This will be offered to online respondents only.

Reviewing the impact of NSS 2017

22. The new NSS has undergone extensive testing and piloting, and we intend to review the impact of the new survey on providers and students. The outcome from this work will inform whether any revisions to the survey are required for NSS 2018, including if any additional support and guidance is required for students or HE providers.

Further information

23. For further information, contact Dr Cliona O'Neill (tel 029 2085 9731, email cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk), or Kate Hamilton-Border (tel 0117 931 7183, email k.hamilton-border@hefce.ac.uk).

Annex A – Final list of NSS 2017 questions

Questions which are unchanged from 2016 are marked with an asterisk.

The teaching on my course

1. Staff are good at explaining things*
2. Staff have made the subject interesting*
3. The course is intellectually stimulating*
4. My course has challenged me to achieve my best work [new]

Learning opportunities [new section]

5. My course has provided me with opportunities to explore ideas or concepts in depth
6. My course has provided me with opportunities to bring information and ideas together from different topics
7. My course has provided me with opportunities to apply what I have learnt

Assessment and feedback

8. The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance*
9. Marking and assessment has been fair [amended]
10. Feedback on my work has been timely [amended]
11. I have received helpful comments on my work [amended]

Academic support

12. I have been able to contact staff when I needed to*
13. I have received sufficient advice and guidance in relation to my course [amended]
14. Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices on my course [amended]

Organisation and management

15. The course is well organised and running smoothly*
16. The timetable works efficiently for me [amended]
17. Any changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively*

Learning resources

18. The IT resources and facilities provided have supported my learning well [amended]
19. The library resources (e.g. books, online services and learning spaces) have supported my learning well [amended]
20. I have been able to access course-specific resources (e.g. equipment, facilities, software, collections) when I needed to [amended]

Learning community [new section]

21. I feel part of a community of staff and students
22. I have had the right opportunities to work with other students as part of my course

Student voice [new section]

23. I have had the right opportunities to provide feedback on my course
 24. Staff value students' views and opinions about the course
 25. It is clear how students' feedback on the course has been acted on
 26. The Students' Union (Association or Guild) effectively represents students' academic interests
27. Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course*

Annex B: Review of the NSS

1. The new questionnaire for 2017 has been developed through a three-year research programme undertaken by UK HE funding bodies as part of the **Review of Information about learning and teaching and the student experience**. The review culminated in a consultation in October 2015, which set out proposals for new criteria for questions in the main survey, changes to the main survey and to the optional banks and questionnaire, and also asked for views on further changes that could be made after 2017 to capture feedback from students not currently included in the survey. The consultation outcomes were published in August 2016 (www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/roiconsult/). This work has been overseen by the Higher Education Public Information Steering Group. Details of the full review programme can be downloaded from www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/roiconsult/about/.
2. In our August 2016 consultation outcomes publication we noted that the final wording of the NSS questionnaire and format would be based on post-consultation testing and piloting. This included a **pilot survey** from January-April 2016 (with approximately 27,000 responses) informed by feedback from the consultation. We also commissioned pre- and post-pilot **cognitive testing** undertaken by IFF Research which concluded in July 2016. IFF's work included testing alternative survey formats to address the phenomenon of acquiescence bias identified in the review². The analysis of the pilot testing and report from IFF are due to be published shortly on the HEFCE website.
3. We used the findings of these reports to produce the list of NSS 2017 questions that are at **Annex A**, and these were endorsed by HEPISG. With the exception of the students' union question (the current Question 23 in the survey) where no consensus emerged in the research (as detailed below), all questions tested well post-pilot with only minor changes suggested by the consultants.

Students' union question

4. In the consultation we originally proposed removing the students' union question³ from the main survey, because it did not fit the proposed NSS

² Acquiescence bias is a survey phenomenon where respondents provide the same response to every question. It is common in surveys like the NSS which ask for responses to positive statements. Our consultation noted we would use changes to the survey format to encourage students to provide considered responses, and that we would not include negative questions which can over-complicate the survey and counter-productively increase acquiescence bias (see Review of Information consultation <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2015/201524/>).

³ The current question is 'Thinking of all the services, including support, activities and academic representation provided by the students' union (association or guild) at your institution, to what extent do you agree with the following statement: I am satisfied with the Students' Union (Association or Guild) at my institution'.

criteria as it was not about the academic experience and did not test well. The proposal did not receive a clear mandate: nearly half agreed or strongly agreed, just over a third disagreed or strongly disagreed and about a fifth neither agreed nor disagreed. We therefore tested an alternative question in the piloting and post-pilot testing: 'Students' academic interests on my course are effectively represented by the students' union (association or guild)'.

5. The cognitive testing and pilot analysis found that the students' union question is the only question within the survey which appears to yield challenges for students: some are uncertain about what is meant by the term 'academic interests', and some do not associate the role of the students' union with its support for social life and wider support services. As this question had strong support from NUS as a driver for improving students' unions' performance in this area, we sought advice from HEPISG, which on balance gave support to retaining the question in the main survey and that it should be kept under close review. A previously tested version of the students' union question, as requested by NUS, will therefore be included in NSS 2017 under the new 'Student voice' section (see **Annex A**).

Survey interface

6. We plan to change the interface for the survey on all formats (desktop, mobile and tablet computers) to maximise student engagement and encourage considered responses. Building on the findings of the IFF report, the final interface for the 2017 survey (the layout and format for different platforms, such as mobile and tablet) will be agreed based on prior testing and with advice from Ipsos MORI.

Other work

7. As noted in the consultation outcomes publication, during 2016/17 we will be developing proposals to capture feedback from students not currently included in the NSS, with an initial focus on one year courses and top-up programmes.
8. We are also developing proposals in relation to a feedback survey for taught postgraduate students, building on the feedback we received in the consultation and earlier research.

Annex C: Guidance on the 2017 National Student Survey for higher education institutions

1. The National Student Survey (NSS) will be carried out in 2017 across institutions in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Ipsos MORI will continue to manage the survey process, and the 2017 NSS will have a similar timetable to the 2016 survey. This annex provides guidance specifically for higher education institutions (HEIs).
2. The responsibilities of institutions in the successful management of the NSS are:
 - Timely submission of the HESA Student Record and AP student records (normally in September/October 2016);
 - Checking the target list generated by HESA and submitting any additions and deletions to the list to HEFCE for approval (December 2016/January 2017);
 - Timely submission of student contact details when requested by Ipsos Mori (November 2016);
 - Engagement with all guidance and requests issued by HEFCE⁴, HESA, the surveying agency and Texuna Technologies Ltd and attending training and events run by the above;
 - Submitting survey preferences to Ipsos Mori including timing of the survey and their choice of optional bank questions which should be made in conjunction with their students union, association or guild;
 - Promotion of the survey at their institution, ensuring all activities meet the guidelines on avoiding inappropriate influence and funding bodies'/HESA Code of Practice on data; (www.hesa.ac.uk/about/regulation/provider-info/code-of-practice).
 - Monitor response rates via information provided by Ipsos MORI and if necessary undertake additional promotional activity to encourage students to complete the survey (during the surveying period January 2017 to May 2017);
 - Access the responses and results of the survey via the dedicated results website (July/August 2017), HEFCE website (benchmark data) and Unistats site (for students).
3. HEIs can access their target lists for the 2017 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 **Monday 28 November 2016**. Further details can be found in the NSS 2017 'Guidance for institutions and students' unions', which will be sent to institutional contacts by Ipsos MORI on **Wednesday 26 October 2016**. The guidance document is also available on the NSS extranet, <https://portal.ipsos.com/sites/NSS/> or www.ipsos-mori.com/nss/extranet. Additions to or removals from the target list are only admitted under specific circumstances, details of which are provided in the guidance. Any such requests for additions or removals must be submitted to Ipsos MORI

⁴ On behalf of all the funding bodies

and agreed by HEFCE prior to their inclusion in or removal from the final target list. If approved, we will inform the institution and make the amendment to the target list.

4. As in the 2016 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.
5. As in the 2016 NSS, and to make the survey more useful, institutions may choose up to a maximum of six banks of optional questions, one of which can be selected by student unions, if they wish, as noted in Circular [W11/27HE: Key Information Sets: Outcomes of consultation and next steps](#). They may also include up to two additional questions specific to the institution. Institutions are asked to agree their questions and question banks with their student union and should submit these to Ipsos MORI. Results of the optional banks of questions are for internal use only, and are therefore not published.

Scope and coverage of the survey

Coverage

6. The following institutions are covered by the NSS 2017.
 - a. All HEIs in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland;
 - b. Alternative providers in England with specific course designation for new students in 2016/17, who completed a HESA return for 2015/16;
 - c. Regulated further education institutions (FEIs), or those which have directly funded prescribed higher education provision⁵.
7. All full-time and part-time undergraduate students registered at participating HEIs, FEIs and alternative providers are eligible to undertake the NSS during their final year of study (or, for flexible programmes where the final year cannot be predicted, after they are expected to have undertaken more than one full-time equivalent (FTE) year and not before their third year of study) with the following exceptions:
 - a. Students on programmes that do not lead to undergraduate qualifications or credits;
 - b. Students on a course lasting one year or one FTE, or less.
 - c. Any students who were eligible in the 2016 NSS (whether or not they responded) and who remain at the same institution;
 - d. Any students who we expect to have completed one FTE or less since they were last surveyed by the end of academic year 2016/17.
8. Students are included in the 2017 survey population if they are expected to complete between 1 February 2017 and 31 January 2018 inclusive.

⁵ Franchise provision is handled through the franchising HEI

9. As was the case for the 2016 survey, it will be possible to add or remove students to the NSS target list in exceptional circumstances, for example if the length of a student's course has decreased after an institution has submitted its HESA return. The full criteria are set out in the guidance provided by Ipsos MORI. If a provider desires to add or remove students, they can contact Ipsos MORI at nss@ipsos.com or through the NSS Extranet, stating:
- the number of extra students they wish to add;
 - the students' HESA Unique Student Identifiers (HUSIDs) and the NUMHUS for each student, how they meet the criteria in paragraph 6 with any relevant supporting information;
 - the reason that the student now meets the criteria from paragraph 6, including the specific field changes from the student return;
 - for each student, the name of the course they are studying.
- All additions and removals will be reviewed by HEFCE and further details will be requested if required.
10. Taught postgraduates are not included in the NSS.

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 2017 NSS. Therefore, the following are to 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 on to the survey agency (Ipsos MORI) for the purposes of the NSS, state that they do not wish to be contacted (students will also be able to opt out during the survey process).
12. These are the only grounds on which students may be excluded from the target population. If the institution feels that students are incorrectly included in the target population due to errors in the data, then these should be submitted as removal requests, using the process in paragraph 9.
13. As in the 2016 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.
14. If a provider 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.

15. To enable us to monitor exclusions and verify their consistent application, institutions should retain evidence to support them. Where a student asks that their details are not passed on, we will expect institutions to retain evidence of this request. If the number of such requests at any institution is so high as to affect our ability to conduct the survey successfully, we will discuss this with the institution.
16. Students should not be removed from the file even when their contact details are not supplied.
17. Although some students may withdraw in their final year, they will have had significant interaction with the institution, so their opinions are valuable and should be included.

Process for supplying student contact data

18. 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.
19. As in the 2016 NSS, students should be informed by the institution that their contact details may be passed on. For HEIs, text has been added to the model HESA student data collection notice to explain this.
20. Institutions have the opportunity to define their own structure for receiving institutional feedback, through one of two optional fields 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 **Monday 28 November 2016**. 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 complete and robust contact details by this date.

Administration of the survey

22. As in previous years, the 2017 survey will be conducted during the spring term so that the results can be published in summer 2017, 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:
 - brand the NSS independently, which clearly distinguishes its purpose
 - manage the survey's distribution centrally, so that institutions are not involved in contacting students to complete the NSS.

23. The five-week 'window' will operate again, so institutions can choose to start the survey at a time that does not clash with examinations, fits with term timetables and so on. Institutions may select a week between 9 January and 6 February 2017 for the survey to start.
24. Ipsos MORI will conduct the survey at each institution using a set sequence of email 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). Ipsos MORI will deploy the survey modes tactically to personalise the survey to students and institutions, and thus help increase online responses and reduce survey costs.
25. We wish to avoid extending this window, as this could jeopardise publication of the results on the successor to Unistats for each course in time for them to be useful for the next cohort of applicants. 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 during that time. Any institution that wishes to make a case for an extension should contact Ipsos MORI by **Monday 28 November 2016**.

Branding and awareness-raising

26. Comprehensive guidance on the NSS 2017, including guidelines on appropriate promotion of the survey, will be available from the Ipsos MORI NSS extranet. It is important that this guidance is adhered to and any queries raised with Ipsos MORI. The funding bodies treat seriously any breaches of this guidance and may investigate and take action where there is evidence of a breach. The processes we adopt can be found at <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning.and.teaching/NSS/Ensuring%20the%20integrity%20of%20NSS%20data.pdf>.
27. As in previous years, Ipsos MORI will produce promotional materials for institutions and students' unions to distribute locally. However, if an institution or students' union wishes to use the NSS branding to develop its own marketing material, it may do so and should discuss this with Ipsos MORI. Ipsos MORI will advise on good practice and offer 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 coordinate promotional activity.
28. As in the 2016 NSS, Ipsos MORI will manage incentive schemes in which institutions may take part. These are centrally managed schemes that enable institutions to provide incentives to students to complete the NSS. For example, some institutions provided printer credits for students who completed the survey online.

29. As in the 2016 NSS, students on flexible programmes will receive tailored communication that more accurately reflects their participation in higher education.

Questionnaire distribution

30. Ipsos MORI manages the NSS centrally. There are two methods of data collection: online, and telephone. Ipsos MORI operates a live, open-access website, where students can log in and complete the survey (this is in addition to the option to respond by following the link in a personalised email). The aim of the site is to verify the identity of students at the point of logging in; once students have completed the survey and their response is validated, they will be automatically removed from the target list and not contacted again. To enable this, and to enable efficient working of the survey more generally, institutions should adhere to the deadline for supplying student contact details.
31. Although there are two 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, phoning remains an important element of the survey and will continue, so we expect institutions to provide students' landline and mobile telephone numbers where available.
32. To monitor responses and to process data for analysis and reporting, we link all responses to students' HESA numbers or known student identifiers. 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 again.
33. Throughout the process Ipsos MORI will send reminders to students who have not responded.
34. Response rates, by institution and by JACS-based subject area, will be monitored continuously during the process. During the telephone stage, response rates will be reviewed and some areas may be identified for additional targeted follow-up activity, to bring responses up to a sufficient level to report results. This additional activity will involve reminders by email and text message.
35. At any stage during the survey process students may opt out of the survey and will not be contacted again. To do this, students will need to verify their identity by providing some data such as their date of birth.
36. Ipsos MORI will follow up with students and institutions where response rates look as if they will be below those that can be published (see paragraph 38). 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 2017 NSS results

37. A major purpose of the NSS is to provide information to help potential students and their advisers make choices about higher education (it also has an important function in enhancement, by helping institutions to identify areas that students have concerns about). **All results that meet the publication threshold will therefore be published on a revised Unistats website, <http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/>, in summer 2017.** Further information about the changes we are making to Unistats can be found at <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/it/roiconsult/>.
38. The current publication threshold for NSS results is a 50 per cent response rate with at least 10 students responding.
39. Alongside Unistats data is also published on the HEFCE web-site. This includes benchmarking data.
40. We will make more detailed data available to institutions to help them to identify good practice and improve the student experience. This is currently undertaken by Texunatech via its results website, <https://nss.texunatech.com>.

Annex D: Guidance on the 2017 National Student Survey for further education institutions

1. The National Student Survey (NSS) will be carried out in 2017 across institutions in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Ipsos MORI will continue to manage the survey process, and the 2017 NSS will have a similar timetable to the 2016 survey. This annex provides guidance specifically for further education institutions (FEIs) for validated HE provision.
2. The responsibilities of institutions in the successful management of the NSS are:
 - Liaising with HEFCW to generate a target list (see paragraph 3 below) (October 2016/November 2017);
 - Timely submission of student contact details when requested by Ipsos Mori (November 2016);
 - Engagement with all guidance and requests issued by HEFCW, HEFCE⁶, the surveying agency and Texuna Technologies Ltd and attending training and events run by the above;
 - Submitting survey preferences to Ipsos Mori including timing of the survey and their choice of optional bank questions which should be made in conjunction with their student representative group or body
 - Promotion of the survey at their institution, ensuring all activities meet the guidelines on avoiding inappropriate influence;
 - Monitor response rates via information provided by Ipsos MORI and if necessary undertake additional promotional activity to encourage students to complete the survey (during the surveying period January 2017 to May 2017);
 - Access the responses and results of the survey via the dedicated results website (July/August 2017), HEFCE website (benchmark data) and Unistats site (for students).
3. Guidance on extracting the NSS target list of students eligible to be surveyed from the Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) will shortly be issued by HEFCW to data contacts at FE institutions with directly funded HE provision in Wales. For further information, please contact hestats@hefcw.ac.uk. Once the target list has been agreed FE institutions should then provide the requested contact details for students on these lists to Ipsos MORI by **Monday 28 November 2016**. Further details can be found in the NSS 2017 'Guidance for institutions and students' unions', which will be sent to institutional contacts by Ipsos MORI on **Wednesday 26 October 2016**. The guidance document is also available on the NSS extranet, <https://portal.ipsos.com/sites/NSS/> or www.ipsos-mori.com/nss/extranet. Additions to the target list are only admitted where a student's course length has changed such that they are now expected to complete between 1 February 2016 and 31 January

⁶ On behalf of all the funding bodies

2017 inclusive. Any such additions must be submitted to Ipsos MORI and agreed by HEFCW prior to their inclusion in the final target list.

4. As in the 2016 NSS, and to make the survey more useful, institutions may choose up to a maximum of six banks of optional questions, one of which can be selected by student unions, if they wish, as noted in Circular [W11/27HE: Key Information Sets: Outcomes of consultation and next steps](#). They may also include up to two additional questions specific to the institution. Institutions are asked to agree their questions and question banks with their student union and should submit these to Ipsos MORI. Results of the optional banks of questions are for internal use only, and are therefore not published.
5. As in the 2016 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. Institutions are asked to work with students' unions in nominating banks of questions for inclusion. Institutions should submit these to Ipsos MORI.

Scope and coverage of the survey

Coverage

6. The following institutions are covered by the NSS 2016.
 - a. All HEIs in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland;
 - b. Alternative providers in England with specific course designation for new students in 2016/17, who completed a HESA return for 2015/16;
 - c. Regulated further education institutions (FEIs), or those which have directly funded prescribed higher education provision⁷.
7. All full-time and part-time undergraduate students registered at participating HEIs, FEIs and alternative providers are eligible to undertake the NSS during their final year of study (or, for flexible programmes where the final year cannot be predicted, after they are expected to have undertaken more than one full-time equivalent (FTE) year and not before their third year of study) with the following exceptions:
 - a. Students on programmes that do not lead to undergraduate qualifications or credits;
 - b. Students on a course lasting one year or one FTE, or less;
 - c. Any students who were eligible in the 2016 NSS (whether or not they responded) and who remain at the same institution;
 - d. Any students who we expect to have completed one FTE or less since they were last surveyed by the end of academic year 2016/17.

⁷ Franchise provision is handled through the franchising HEI

8. Students are included in the 2017 survey population if they are expected to complete between 1 February 2017 and 31 January 2018 inclusive.
9. FE institutions have the opportunity to add or remove students from the target list during liaison with HEFCW to generate the list (see paragraph 3 above), therefore it should be unlikely that any students should be added or removed from the list on submission to Ipsos MORI. However, as was the case for the 2016 survey, it will be possible to add or remove students to the NSS target list in exceptional circumstances, for example if the length of a student's course has decreased after an institution has agreed its target list with HEFCW. The full criteria are set out in the guidance provided by Ipsos MORI. If a provider desires to add or remove students, they can contact Ipsos MORI at nss@ipsos.com or through the NSS Extranet, stating:
 - the number of extra students to be added;
 - the students' Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR) Learner identifier with provider (LEARN_ID);
 - for each student, how they meet the criteria in paragraph 6, with any relevant supporting information including the specific changes to the field values that were returned to the LLWR;
 - for each student, the name of the course they are studying.
10. All additions and removals will be reviewed by HEFCE and further details will be requested if required.
11. Taught postgraduates are not included in the NSS.

Reasons for excluding individuals from the survey

12. Since the survey began, we have enabled institutions to exclude students from the target population and will continue to do so for the 2017 NSS. Therefore, the following are to 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, state that they do not wish to be contacted.These are the only grounds on which students may be excluded from the target population. If the institution feels that students are incorrectly included in the target population due to errors in the data, then these should be submitted as removal requests, using the process in paragraph 8.
13. As in the 2016 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.

14. If an FEI identifies an error after it has agreed the target list with HEFCW, but then wishes to remove students, it will need to explain to HEFCE the nature of the error, the students affected, and provide an explanation of how it will ensure the error does not occur again. HEFCE⁸ will then decide whether these students should be removed from the target list.
15. To enable us to monitor exclusions and verify their consistent application, FEIs should retain evidence to support them. Where a student asks that their details are not passed on, we will expect institutions to retain evidence of this request. If the number of such requests at any FEI is so high as to affect our ability to conduct the survey successfully, we will discuss this with the institution.
16. Students should not be removed from the file even though their contact details are not supplied.
17. Although some students may withdraw in their final year, they will have had significant interaction with the institution, so their opinions are valuable and should be included.

Process for supplying student contact data

18. HEFCW will shortly issue guidance on generating the target list (see paragraph 3 above). Once this list has been agreed, 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.
19. For FEIs the standard collection notice already covers the use of student contact details in general surveys. However, given the nature and importance of the NSS, if they wish, they can include specific wording regarding the NSS. Suggested wording is at **Annex E**.
20. Institutions have the opportunity to define their own structure for receiving institutional feedback, through one of two optional fields 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 **Monday 28 November 2016**. Ipsos MORI will provide guidance to its contacts on how to supply these lists. We have achieved a relatively 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.

⁸ On behalf of all the funders

Administration of the survey

22. The survey will be conducted during the 2017 spring term so that the results can be published in summer 2017, 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:
 - brand the NSS independently, which clearly distinguishes its purpose
 - manage the survey's distribution centrally, so that institutions are not involved in contacting students to complete the NSS.
23. The five-week 'window' will operate again, so institutions can choose to start the survey at a time that does not clash with examinations, fits with term timetables and so on. Institutions may select a week between 9 January and 6 February 2017.
24. Ipsos MORI will conduct the survey at each Institution using a sequence of email 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). Ipsos MORI will deploy the survey modes tactically to personalise the survey to students and institutions, and thus help increase online responses and reduce survey costs.
25. We wish to avoid extending this window, as this could jeopardise publication of the results on the successor to Unistats for each course in time for them to be useful for the next cohort of applicants. 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 during that time. Any institution that wishes to make a case for an extension should contact Ipsos MORI by **Monday 28 November 2016**.

Branding and awareness-raising

26. Comprehensive guidance on the NSS 2017, including guidelines on appropriate promotion of the survey, is available from the Ipsos MORI NSS extranet. It is important that this guidance is adhered to and any queries raised with Ipsos MORI.
27. As in previous years, Ipsos MORI will produce promotional materials for institutions and students' unions to distribute locally. However, if an institution or students' union wishes to use the NSS branding to develop its own marketing material, it may do so and should discuss this with Ipsos MORI. Ipsos MORI will advise on good practice and offer 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 coordinate promotional activity.

28. As in the 2016 NSS, Ipsos MORI will manage incentive schemes in which institutions may take part. These are centrally managed schemes that enable institutions to provide incentives to students to complete the NSS. For example, some institutions provided printer credits for students who completed the survey online.

Questionnaire distribution

29. Ipsos MORI manages the NSS centrally. There are two methods of data collection: online, and telephone. Ipsos MORI operates a live, open-access website, 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 email). The aim of the site is to verify the identity of students at the point of logging in; once students have completed the survey and their response is validated, they will be automatically removed from the target list and not contacted again. To enable this, and to enable efficient working of the survey more generally, institutions should adhere to the deadline for supplying student contact details.
30. Although there are two 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, phoning remains an important element of the survey and will continue, so we ask institutions to provide students' landline and mobile telephone numbers where available.
31. To monitor responses and to process data for analysis and reporting, we link all responses to students' LLWR learner reference number or known student identifiers. 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 again.
32. Throughout the process Ipsos MORI will send reminders to students who have not responded.
33. Response rates, by institution and by JACS-based subject area, will be monitored continuously during the process. During the telephone stage, response rates will be reviewed and some areas may be identified for additional, targeted follow-up activity, to bring responses up to a sufficient level to report results. This additional activity will involve reminders by email and text message.
34. At any stage during the survey process students may opt out of the survey and will not be contacted again. To do this, students will need to verify their identity by providing some data such as their date of birth.
35. Ipsos MORI will follow up with students and institutions where response rates are looking as if they will be below those that can be published (see paragraph 37). 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 2017 NSS results

36. A major purpose of the NSS is to provide information to help potential students and their advisers make choices about higher education (it also has an important function in enhancement, by helping institutions to identify areas that students have concerns about). All results that meet the publication threshold will therefore be published on the Unistats website <http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/>, in summer 2017.
37. The current publication threshold for NSS results is a 50 per cent response rate with at least 10 students responding.
38. Alongside Unistats, data is also published on the HEFCE web-site. This includes benchmarking data.
39. We will make more detailed data available to institutions to help them to identify good practice and improve the student experience. This is currently undertaken by Texunatech via its results website, <https://nss.texunatech.com>.

Annex E: Suggested wording for further education institutions to invite eligible students to take part in the National Student Survey

1. We are committed to encouraging and helping institutions to improve the response rate among students studying higher education in further education institutions. Where the proportion of eligible students opting out is over 5 per cent, we expect institutions to contact such students to encourage them to participate in the survey. However, it is only fair that students who feel strongly should be able to opt out of completing the survey.
2. We therefore suggest the following wording.

You are invited to take part in the 2017 National Student Survey (NSS).

The NSS is an opportunity for students to give feedback on their academic experience, for example on issues such as teaching, academic support and learning resources. The results are published online and used to help future students to choose courses that best suit their needs and interests. The NSS is conducted across the UK, so that results can be compared nationally. As well as providing important information to prospective students, the results are used by the FEI to inform improvements and changes that will benefit students in the future. You can see the results of last year's survey at <http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/>.

The survey is conducted by Ipsos MORI, an independent market research agency, and has been run annually since 2005. Students studying on higher education courses run directly by FEIs are included. All students who are currently in their final year on such courses, and expect to complete their studies between 1 February 2017 and 31 January 2018, are eligible to take part. All survey responses are treated anonymously.

The survey (which can be taken online or by telephone) takes about ten minutes to complete. It is increasingly important in providing information to prospective students and to institutions. We very much hope that you will be willing to take part. Ipsos MORI will contact all eligible students in the 2017 spring term. However, if you would prefer not to be contacted, please let **xxxxx (contact name)** know by **xxxxx (date)**.