

# Cylchlythyr | Circular

## The National Student Survey 2020

**Date:** 24 October 2019  
**Reference:** W19/35HE  
**To:** Governing bodies and heads of regulated and/or funded institutions in Wales  
Student representative bodies in Wales  
Other parties with an interest in public information  
**Response by:** 28 November 2019  
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This circular sets out the arrangements for NSS 2020 and the action required from all participating universities, colleges and other higher education providers by **28 November 2019**. Providers are asked to:

- provide up-to-date contact details;
- submit survey options, including start week, optional bank questions and provider-specific questions;
- check the sample list of students to be included in the survey (the 'target list') and provide students' contact details.

The circular also provides information on a pilot of excluded students.

If you require this document in an alternative accessible format, please email [info@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:info@hefcw.ac.uk).



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## Introduction

1. This circular sets out the arrangements for NSS 2020 and the action required from all participating universities, colleges and other higher education providers by **28 November 2019**. Providers are asked to:
  - provide up-to-date contact details;
  - submit survey options, including start week, optional bank questions and provider-specific questions;
  - check the sample list of students to be included in the survey (the 'target list') and provide students' contact details.
2. The circular also provides information on a pilot of excluded students.

## Background

3. The NSS is a UK-wide survey undertaken by final year higher education students to give feedback on their course.
4. The National Student Survey (NSS) is managed by the Office for Students (OfS) on behalf of the UK funding and regulatory bodies – the Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland), the Scottish Funding Council and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales. The survey provides information for prospective students to help them find the right course for them. It also provides valuable information for stakeholders and policymakers.
5. The survey is a key component of the quality assurance and wider regulatory landscape in UK higher education and participation in the survey is compulsory for the following providers:
  - In England, all providers registered with and regulated by the OfS will be expected to participate in the NSS as an ongoing condition of registration;
  - In Northern Ireland, NSS participation is a condition of funding as set out in the financial memoranda between universities and the Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland). Further education colleges in Northern Ireland take part in the NSS to meet the requirements of the Revised Operating Model for Quality Assurance;
  - In Scotland, participation is a condition of the Scottish Funding Council's funding for higher education providers;
  - In Wales, all regulated and/or funded providers are expected to participate in the NSS to ensure that the views of the diverse student body are represented, in line with their statutory responsibility to help safeguard against discrimination and promote equality, with the outcomes informing HEFCW's regulatory responsibilities.
6. The 2020 survey will use the same main questionnaire as in [2019](#) and will be delivered across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland.

7. The Intentions after Graduation Survey (IAGS) survey has been discontinued and will no longer be collected.

### **The 2020 survey**

8. Ipsos MORI administers the survey on behalf of the UK regulatory and funding bodies. They are responsible for contacting students, promoting the survey and providing cleaned data funders/ regulators. As part of its role, Ipsos MORI will liaise directly with providers regarding survey administration and will support the running of the survey by:
  - offering guidance on the specifics of the survey programme, such as selecting optional questions;
  - supplying NSS branded marketing materials and advising providers on the production of their own materials;
  - facilitating provider incentive schemes to encourage students to take part in the survey.
9. Providers will be invited to select one of five weeks when Ipsos MORI can launch the survey to their students. There will be no communication from Ipsos MORI with students outside of the timing agreed with individual providers.
10. Ipsos MORI will issue a comprehensive guidance document 'Preparing for the National Student Survey 2020' for all participating providers on 24 October 2019. The guidance should be read in conjunction with this publication.
11. For 2020, Texuna Technologies will provide the results dissemination portal on behalf of the OfS and funding bodies. The results portal allows providers to access additional, unpublished elements of their data, including open text comments, data from the additional bank of questions, provider-specific questions, and data below publication thresholds. Texuna Technologies also provide a dedicated NSS service desk to support providers in accessing their data and responding to queries.
12. Texuna Technologies will contact providers' NSS contacts in spring 2020 to confirm:
  - user and login details;
  - the details of publication of NSS 2020 results on the portal.

### **Actions for providers**

13. All participating providers are asked to review and (where necessary) update their relevant NSS provider contact details by **28 November 2019**. The information should be supplied using the 'My Details' form on the [NSS extranet](#). Ipsos Mori issued login details for the NSS extranet to the nominated main and secondary NSS institutional contacts in the week commencing 14 October 2019.

14. All participating providers should also submit their completed 'My Survey Options' form by **28 November 2019** through the [NSS extranet](#). This form asks for providers' preferences on their survey start week, optional questions and details of any prize draws.
15. All providers should populate their NSS 2020 sample templates with the requested contact details for all students on their target list; this is a list of all students eligible for NSS 2020 based on the student data submitted in 2018-19. Details should be supplied by **28 November 2019** via the 'Upload Sample Data' section of the [NSS extranet](#).
16. Instructions on how to supply this information are included in the NSS 2020 set up guide which will be issued to provider contacts by Ipsos MORI on **24 October 2019** and is also available on the NSS extranet. The guidance includes information regarding survey administration and key responsibilities and dates.

### **Optional banks**

17. As has been the practice in previous years, providers will be able to choose up to six banks of optional questions. The choice of optional bank questions should be agreed with their student representative body (students' union, association or guild). Further information about this will be provided in the guidance from Ipsos MORI on 24 October 2019.

### **NHS questions**

18. Students of NHS subjects in all countries in the UK are required to answer an additional set of NHS-specific questions about their placement.

### **Degree apprenticeship questions**

19. Students who are on degree apprenticeships will automatically be included in the NSS if they meet the standard eligibility criteria (ie that they are in their final year of a first degree).
20. In 2019 we continued the pilot of degree apprenticeship questions in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, involving an additional set of questions as part of the main survey, to inform future approaches to surveying degree apprentices. These additional questions for final year degree apprentices were designed to incorporate those elements of the ESFA survey which are not currently addressed in the existing NSS.
21. From 2020 the degree apprenticeship questions will be a permanent part of the NSS. The degree apprenticeship questions will continue to be available to complete online only. The data will continue to be treated as

research data to inform future approaches and will not be published at institutional level. It is anticipated that a review of the survey questions and the use of data will be carried out following NSS 2020.

### **Inappropriate influence on the survey**

22. The OfS, on behalf of all the UK funders and regulators, manages the process to address any concerns that students have been inappropriately influenced in their completion of the NSS. To maintain integrity of the NSS data, it is important to ensure that students who complete the survey have not been influenced by their provider, or any other parties, to respond in a way that does not reflect their true opinion.
23. Before fieldwork takes place, we undertake an annual review of the process we adopt to respond to allegations. This is to ensure that the process is fit for purpose and to make any improvements to the process and guidance for providers and students. This allegations procedure<sup>1</sup> is intended to be read in conjunction with the good practice guide, issued by Ipsos MORI, which explains what constitutes inappropriate influence and how to avoid this when encouraging student participation. We urge providers to ensure all staff who are responsible for the running of the survey are familiar with Ipsos MORI's good practice guide and seek advice where needed from Ipsos MORI or OfS on their approach to avoiding inappropriate influence.

### **Piloting of excluded students**

24. Currently, students on courses of one-year full time equivalent (FTE) or less are excluded from participation in the NSS. The UK funding and regulatory bodies will be undertaking development work to understand the feasibility of extending the NSS to final year students who are currently excluded. This includes students on top-up courses and courses of one-year FTE in length.
25. The first stage of expanding the NSS through pilot work with students previously excluded from the NSS population will be undertaken in 2020. Central to this development activity will be a pilot of the main survey with eligible students.
26. The aims of this pilot are to:
  - test and evaluate the administrative processes required to include these students in the main survey;
  - understand how this group of students answer the survey and evaluate whether existing questions are relevant.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/c68e2add-7523-4feb-95e6-902d05cf7ac1/nss-allegations-procedure-2019.pdf](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/c68e2add-7523-4feb-95e6-902d05cf7ac1/nss-allegations-procedure-2019.pdf)

27. The pilot is available to universities and colleges who have students on eligible courses.
28. The pilot will follow the normal NSS timetable and processes. Eligible students will be able to complete the survey online and by phone once the survey is open and will receive all standard communications and reminders from the start week selected by universities and colleges.
29. It is anticipated that subject-level data and anonymised open text comments from the pilot at provider level will be made available to participating universities and colleges only, subject to existing data publication thresholds and checks for robustness. This data will be made available after the main dataset is published. Students included through the pilot will also be asked any provider-specific questions and optional banks questions submitted by the provider. Responses to these will also be shared, subject to publication thresholds and robustness criteria.
30. Universities and colleges that are interested in participating in the pilot should register interest with Ipsos MORI. This is open to providers with eligible students all over the UK, with the questions available in English and Welsh.

### **NSS 2020 Timetable**

31. The timetable will run as follows:
  - Fieldwork will take place between January and April 2020 and will be run by Ipsos MORI.
  - Results will be published in July 2020.
  - Results will be supplied to individual providers through a dissemination portal provided by Texuna Technologies.
  - Data will be published on the OfS website. All public data conforms to NSS publication thresholds (at least 10 student responses and a 50 per cent overall response rate). If no data is available for a particular course on which students were surveyed, the data did not meet publication thresholds. A lack of publishable data does not reflect on the quality of a course or a provider.
  - NSS results at course level will be published on the [Discover Uni](#) website.
32. HEFCW will provide a detailed timetable for publication of the data in April 2020.

### **Further information**

33. The active support of participating providers is crucial to ensuring the survey data is high quality, particularly in delivering high response rates. We encourage all providers and students' unions, associations and guilds

to draw on the resources available and to contact the OfS, Ipsos MORI or Texuna Technologies if they require additional support.

- Ipsos MORI ([nss@ipsos.com](mailto:nss@ipsos.com)): The running of the survey, including: preparing for and marketing the survey; student target lists; optional questions; incentive schemes; excluded students, pilot enrolment;
- Texuna Technologies ([nss@texunatech.com](mailto:nss@texunatech.com)): Providers' detailed results on the NSS data dissemination portal
- Office for Students ([nss@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:nss@officeforstudents.org.uk) / [nssallegations@officeforstudents.org.uk](mailto:nssallegations@officeforstudents.org.uk)): Areas such as NSS policy and development; use of results; allegations of inappropriate influence.
- HEFCW ([cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk](mailto:cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk)): any other queries relating to the operation of the NSS in Wales.

### **Assessing the impact of our policies**

34. OfS has conducted a risk assessment screening. As partners in the OfS-managed survey, we work with OfS to ensure that materials aimed at students are available in both Welsh and English in Wales. We will continue to assess the impact of the NSS on the Welsh language to ensure that students are able to fully participate in the NSS in their language of choice.