

Cylchlythyr | Circular

Review of information about learning and teaching, and the student experience: Summary of responses to consultation on changes to the National Student Survey, Unistats and information provided by institutions

Date: 19 July 2016
Reference: W16/25HE
To: Governing bodies and Heads of regulated institutions in Wales
Other parties with an interest in public information about higher education
Response by: No response required
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This provides the outcomes of the consultation carried out in circular [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](#). It summarises the analysis of the responses received and the decisions taken as a result. It also sets out next steps.

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Introduction

1. This provides the outcomes of the consultation carried out in circular [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](#). It summarises the analysis of the responses received and the decisions taken as a result. It also sets out next steps.

Background

2. Circular [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](#) provided a link to a joint consultation by the funding bodies on proposed changes to public information. The joint '[Consultation on changes to the National Student Survey, Unistats and information provided by institutions](#)' was published on HEFCE's website, and was based on the findings of stage one of a two-stage review of information about learning, teaching and the student experience.

Summary of consultation outcomes

3. To inform this review, a research programme and testing of the National Student Survey (NSS) and Unistats was carried out. The research reports, published by HEFCE on behalf of the funding bodies, can be read at www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/roiconsult/ra/.
4. The consultation proposed changes to Unistats and the Key Information Set (KIS) for 2017; information published by institutions on courses for 2017; changes to the NSS for 2017; and further potential changes to information after 2017.
5. The consultation was published in October 2015 and closed on 4 December. During this period consultation events were held in Cardiff, Edinburgh and London.
6. We received 205 responses to the consultation. The analysis of responses indicated broad support for the following three sets of proposals, although there was not unanimous support for all specific changes within these proposals:
 - To maintain and improve the Unistats site and to develop guidance on the course information to be provided through institutions' own websites from 2017;
 - To update the NSS, the better to inform student decision-making, to improve learning and teaching, and to support quality assessment from 2017;

- To develop more detailed proposals on qualitative feedback, feedback from students currently excluded from the NSS, and feedback from taught postgraduate students.
7. We have adjusted our proposed implementation plans to take account of where we did not receive strong support, specifically in relation to the removal of some questions from the NSS.
 8. Following an analysis of responses and endorsement by the UK-wide Higher Education Public Information Steering Group (HEPISG), the decisions arising from the consultation were agreed by the Boards and Councils of the funding bodies in March 2016.
 9. Implementation of these decisions may be affected by subsequent policy developments including the HE White Paper, the development of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) in England and the UK Higher Education and Research Bill. We made clear in the consultation that there could be an imperative for further changes, but both our evidence base and responses to the consultation indicate that we need to make changes now to ensure that Unistats and the NSS remain fit for purpose. The four funding bodies have agreed that the changes set out in this document are consonant with student information needs and government ambitions in this area, but will continue to work closely with the four UK governments to consider further developments beyond 2017. We are also taking steps to ensure that changes to the NSS do not hamper the availability of time-series data for its future use in the TEF and that the design of the successor to the Unistats website allows for the publication of TEF outcomes.
 10. We are now preparing for the new NSS in 2017 and for changes to Unistats and KIS arising from the consultation. We have recently published a consultation on proposed changes to KIS data collection for 2017. We will announce final survey questions for the NSS 2017 in September 2016, following the completion of piloting and testing of the new NSS questions informed by responses to the consultation. HEFCE has published a [more detailed summary of the consultation outcomes](#) on behalf of all the funders.

Summary of decisions and next steps

<p>Changes to Unistats, the Key Information Set, and information published by institutions for 2017</p>	<p>The UK HE funding bodies will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proceed with the removal of detailed information about course delivery from Unistats. • Redesign the Unistats site to provide greater support for students in making decisions. • Develop clear good practice guidance for institutions on information provision for their own websites with the involvement of the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA), NUS and sector representatives.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advise institutions of requirements relating to the way information is presented in October 2016 for implementation by the end of August 2017. • Position the expectations of consumer law around information provision, as expressed in the CMA's guidance, within the baseline regulatory requirements monitored through the new quality assessment operating system in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. The current quality assessment arrangements for information provision will continue in Scotland. • Transfer the responsibility for publication of tuition fee information to institutions, provide guidance on good practice in presenting it, and require institutions to provide a link to relevant fee information from the new site. • Develop a strategy to increase awareness of the successor to Unistats among prospective students and their advisers as part of our implementation plan for the new website.
Changes to the NSS for 2017	<p>The UK HE funding bodies will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply explicit criteria to NSS survey questions from 2017 onwards, subject to periodic review and with advice from HEPISG. • Complete and assess the results of the 2016 NSS pilot and cognitive testing to inform final decisions on survey questions by the funding bodies, with advice from HEPISG. • Announce the final survey questions for NSS 2017 in September 2016. • Include new questions on student engagement, and complete testing to inform decisions on question wording. • Reword questions on learning resources for piloting and cognitive testing, and develop related optional banks using feedback from the consultation. • Test amended questions on assessment and feedback, and cognitively test the types of feedback considered by survey respondents. • Retain the NSS question on marking criteria (Q5) for the pilot to inform a final decision on the proposed removal of duplicative questions. • Remove questions on personal development for the pilot, and explore capturing this information through the optional bank and the revised Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey. • Test a revised students' union survey question as part of the 'student voice' bank in the pilot to inform a final decision.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake further work with institutions and NUS to formalise a joint decision-making process in relation to NSS optional banks. • Undertake further research and testing to develop future optional banks, and increase their uptake and usefulness.
Other proposals for implementation beyond 2017	<p>The UK HE funding bodies will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conduct further work on the need for and types of qualitative information that prospective students and their advisers would use, to inform potential proposals for future consultation. • Develop proposals to extend coverage of the NSS, to include students studying top-up courses and courses of one full-time equivalent in length in the first instance. • Carry out further research to develop proposals for a national postgraduate taught (PGT) survey, ensuring robustness and avoiding duplication with existing surveys, notably the Higher Education Academy's postgraduate taught experience survey (PTES).

Further information / responses to

11. For further information, contact Dr Cliona O'Neill (tel 029 2068 2283; email cliona.oneill@hefcw.ac.uk).

Assessing the impact of our policies

12. The funders have carried equality impact assessment (EIA) screening to help safeguard against discrimination and promote equality.