

National Student Survey

Inappropriate influence on survey results: A guide for students

What is the National Student Survey?

The National Student Survey (NSS) is an independent survey that gathers undergraduate students' opinions on the quality of their courses. The NSS is run once a year by Ipsos MORI on behalf of the higher education funding bodies in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. The results are published on the Unistats website to help prospective students make choices about study, and are also used in the Teaching Excellence Framework to assess universities and colleges. High response rates to the NSS ensure that institutions and students' unions can use the survey to identify areas of good practice and where they need to improve.

What is inappropriate influence?

Institutions are encouraged to promote the NSS to ensure as many students participate as possible. However, they are given strict guidelines regarding the promotion and delivery of the survey, to ensure they do not influence the results either intentionally or unintentionally.

Inappropriate influence is defined as **'any activity which may encourage students to reflect anything other than their true opinion of their experiences during their course in their NSS responses'**.

Inappropriate influence can happen through email, face-to-face sessions, institution-designed materials and activities, through student-to-student communications, communications issued by student organisations, and communications undertaken by universities and colleges.

Whatever the form, content or nature of the communication, individuals deliberately seeking to encourage students' responses to the survey in a way that does not reflect the students' own opinion is deemed inappropriate influence.

Please see below for examples of possible inappropriate influences:

- Overly explicit instruction on how to complete the survey
- Promoting the survey as part of an overall campaign to promote the university or college
- Linking the NSS to league tables, job prospects, and the perceived value of students' degrees in a way that could influence students
- Compulsory sessions for students to complete the NSS (completion of the NSS is completely voluntary and sessions should always be optional)
- Being taken through the survey on an individual basis: Staff should not stand or sit beside students when they are completing the survey.

What should I do if I have a concern?

Inappropriate influence is determined by how the influence is perceived by the student, not how it was intended to be understood. If you have a concern, email nssallegations@hefce.ac.uk. Concerns may be raised at any time, but it is helpful if they are brought to HEFCE's attention as early as possible so that timely action can be taken.

All concerns will be considered by the funding bodies, and investigated if there is sufficient information. If there is evidence of inappropriate influence, whether intentional or unintentional, action will be taken, including potentially removing data from the National Student Survey dataset.