



Ipsos MORI  
Social Research Institute



October 2017



# The National Student Survey

## Good Practice Guide



**Marketing  
and  
Promoting  
the National  
Student  
Survey 2018  
(short  
version)**

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# I. Introduction

In order for NSS data to be made publicly available to prospective students, each institution needs to achieve a minimum of 10 respondents and 50% response rate from the students eligible at overall institution level and by each JACS Level 3 subject.

To achieve these thresholds, all institutions are encouraged to promote the NSS to optimise survey participation among eligible students. Local marketing and promotion are essential to ensuring good **response rates**.

Institutions can devise their own internal NSS marketing materials and/or use those supplied by Ipsos MORI to promote the survey. Although local promotion is supported, please note that the marketing guidelines in this Good Practice Guide must be adhered to and all eligible students must be given every opportunity to give honest feedback on their experience.

This Good Practice Guide provides guidelines and instructions on promoting the NSS 2018 within institutions, including details on inappropriate influence and how to avoid this when encouraging student participation. It also outlines the marketing package that will be issued to institutions, and advice for institutions. Please take the time to familiarise yourself with these guidelines, particularly the information on inappropriate influence. Allegations of inappropriate influence are taken very seriously by HEFCE and may result in the suppression of data for the affected course/subject when the NSS results are published.

Should you have any questions regarding the content of this guide or wish to discuss your NSS marketing and promotion more generally, please contact Ipsos MORI on 020 8861 8110 or email [nss@ipsos.com](mailto:nss@ipsos.com).



## II. Promoting the NSS

The following sections outline the NSS promotional guidelines and provide supporting materials to help plan the institution's marketing and promotional activity, specifically:

- HEFCE's<sup>1</sup> guidelines for institutions' own marketing campaigns and inappropriate influence
- Guidelines on using the 2018 Ipsos MORI produced marketing materials
- Guidelines for prize draws
- A Social media toolkit containing advice on the best ways to use social media to promote the survey
- Ideas for planning your NSS communications around the Ipsos MORI fieldwork schedule
- Tips and tricks for boosting your response rates

Please note that all information contained in this document and the Ipsos MORI marketing materials will be available from Ipsos MORI.

### Why should institutions promote the NSS?

Findings of the NSS are made publicly available to prospective students to help them make informed decisions about what and where to study. Results are also used widely by institutions to enhance the student experience.

The purpose of the NSS promotional campaign is to raise awareness of the survey amongst eligible students so that the institution can achieve good response rates. For results to be published, the threshold of **both 10 respondents and 50% response rate** must be met overall and by each JACS Level 3 subject. Data must reach the required threshold in order to be made publically available to prospective students. Aggregated results that meet the threshold are made publically available via the [HEFCE](#) and [Unistats](#) websites and detailed results are made available to institutions in the summer of each year. Good response rates ensure that institutions can benefit from robust data that can help identify areas of good practice and improvement.

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<sup>1</sup> In partnership with the relevant funding partners

Institutions are invited to engage with the eligible students and wherever possible to try to encourage completion of the survey online at [www.thestudentsurvey.com](http://www.thestudentsurvey.com). Please ensure you refer to these guidelines.

## 1. HEFCE's Guidance for Promoting the Survey

Institutions are encouraged to promote the NSS internally and are permitted to create their own internal marketing materials and activities to promote the survey to eligible students. This section outlines HEFCE's<sup>2</sup> guidelines for internal campaigns. Before any activity is put into practice, the following guidance should be considered.

This guidance is for anyone who is involved in the planning and delivery of the communication for the NSS. Institutions are asked to ensure that all members of staff involved in NSS communications are briefed on the following guidelines, including lecturers/tutors. By adhering to the guidelines, institutions will minimise the potential for inappropriate influence. This will safeguard the integrity of the data and avoid subject/institutional data suppressions, should it be proven that students were inappropriately influenced in their responses.

This section outlines the guidelines for creating internal marketing campaigns, including:

- The rules regarding inappropriate influence;
- Restrictions relating to embedding your NSS campaign into your broader institutional campaign; and
- Information relating to the national NSS brand and adaption of the Ipsos MORI produced materials.

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<sup>2</sup> In partnership with the relevant funding partners

## 2. Institutions' Own Marketing Campaigns

Institutions can create their own marketing campaigns, however, the campaign must be standalone and reaffirm the values of the NSS clearly reflecting the NSS as an independent survey that seeks to gather honest opinions.

### Q1. Can institutions embed their NSS campaign in their broader institutional promotions?

In the past, some institutions have combined the promotion of the NSS with their own institutional campaigns, in order for the survey to benefit from existing campaign channels and identities. In light of experience, HEFCE (in partnership with the other funding partners) advise that institutions **are not** to embed their NSS marketing activity in broader institutional promotional activity, for example 'Pride' and 'I Love' campaigns.

The reasons why institutions are not permitted to embed their NSS campaign into broader institutional campaigns are as follows:

- It is important that the NSS is treated as an independent social research survey; this requires clarity of purpose and assurance that risk of bias is minimised. As a result, marketing campaigns should focus on the survey rather than the institution.
- Institutional campaigns are generally designed to encourage those it targets to respond positively with regards to the institution. In this context, HEFCE is not assured that a clear division can be made between the positive institutional messages in this type of campaign and the required neutrality of NSS materials.
- Students and institutions have raised concerns about embedded campaigns and inappropriate influence.
- If an institution does not comply with this guidance and it is brought to the attention of the funding bodies, the allegation will be investigated as potential inappropriate influence.

## Q2. Do institutional campaigns need to include anything from the Ipsos MORI supplied marketing materials?

Wherever possible, internal promotions should complement the NSS branding and Ipsos MORI's poster campaign.

**All internal marketing campaigns should include:**

- The NSS logo – please ensure the updated logo is used on any institutional materials (available from the Ipsos MORI); where any materials make use of the old NSS logo, they will be asked to replace it
- The survey web address [www.thestudentsurvey.com](http://www.thestudentsurvey.com) (or portal address to redirect to this site)
- The relevant funders and Ipsos MORI logos

Institutions have a responsibility to ensure that the message around the NSS is clearly communicated to their eligible students. If customised text is used, it should:

- Aim to encourage students to voice their opinion (what they liked and did not like about their student experience);
- State the purpose of the NSS and the target audience (mainly final year undergraduates);
- Encourage students to complete the survey and invite honest feedback;
- Not influence responses inappropriately; and
- Inform students that the survey is run by Ipsos MORI, an independent research agency.

Please also note that the NSS has a strict policy of not making any references to commercial brands. Promotion of the NSS must not include any defamatory, offensive, political or unlawful content.



### 3. Inappropriate influence

Institutions are encouraged to communicate with their students to engage them in the survey. They have a responsibility to ensure that their students are encouraged to give honest feedback on their learning experience. Communications and/or institutional marketing materials must not attempt to sway the opinion of students in any way.

#### Q1. What is inappropriate influence?

HEFCE (in partnership with the relevant funding partners) defines inappropriate influence 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 emerge in several ways, for example:

- Explicitly instructing students on how to complete the survey, such as explaining the meanings of questions or the NSS scale. The questions and scale are self-explanatory and students should be left to interpret these in a way they see fit. Institutions are not permitted to recommend that students respond in a certain way, e.g. 'I recommend that you select agree or mostly agree', or misrepresent the scale to students, i.e. defining the 'neither agree nor disagree' as a negative response.
- Linking the NSS to league tables, job prospects and the perceived value of students' degrees. Institutions are **not** permitted to tell students that if their courses do not achieve good satisfaction scores, this will make their degrees look bad to future employers.
- Arranging compulsory sessions for students to complete the NSS. Completion of the NSS, while beneficial to institutions, is completely voluntary for students. While arranging completion sessions is allowed, institutions should not enforce them nor make students feel there may be consequences should they not attend.
- Taking students through the survey on an individual basis. Institutions should not stand or sit beside students when they are completing the survey, or take them through their responses question-by-questions. Students should be given due privacy so they can respond with honesty.
- Comparing the NSS scale to other scales with different purposes, i.e. assignment marking schemes.

This is not an exhaustive list and institutions should be alert to other possible types of inappropriate influence.



## Q2. What questions should my institution consider to help avoid inappropriate influence in our NSS campaign?

When promoting the survey, institutions should take into consideration whether the campaign could inappropriately influence the type of responses participants may give. HEFCE (in partnership with the relevant funding partners) expect institutions to have processes in place to ensure that all staff (both academic and professional services) have engaged with the guidance and that measures are in place to prevent inappropriate influence throughout their NSS activities. They advise that institutions should consider the following when developing marketing materials:

- The campaign should not influence the results of the survey but rather should boost response rates;
- The campaign should promote the survey, **not** the institution;
- The campaign should be a 'call to action' for students and should encourage all eligible students to participate, whatever their opinion of the institution or course;
- The campaign should not be interpreted by a student or an external person as an attempt to influence the answers they might give; and

With regards to direct communications with students (e.g. emails to eligible students or lecture shout outs), institutions should ensure that all those responsible for communicating with students regarding the NSS are aware of the key messages, the purpose of the research and the particular guidance on inappropriate influence. Annex 1 is a document to circulate for this purpose. Key tutors and staff should be wary of their tone when discussing the survey and asking students to complete it. They should always give them privacy if completing in class; tutors and staff should **not** take students through the survey or complete on their behalf.

If there is any uncertainty about any of these items, please speak to the survey manager at the institution or to the person who deals with the institutional data submissions, who should be able to provide further guidance regarding 'influence' in student surveys.

### Q3. What could the consequences of inappropriate influence be for my institution?

Where a concern or allegation is raised, it will be investigated by HEFCE. If an investigation were to find that promotional activities and/or marketing materials had resulted in inappropriate influence, whether intentional or unintentional, the integrity of the NSS data could be called into question. HEFCE (in partnership with the relevant funding partners) could take action to suppress the affected NSS data for the institution. This would mean that no NSS results would be published for the affected courses at the institution in the specific year, nor would it be available to use in marketing activities, learning enhancement work or inclusion on Unistats, HEFCE's website etc. More information on the HEFCE concerns process, and how they deal with allegations of inappropriate influence, can be found in their guidance 'Ensuring the integrity of National Student Survey data: Reporting and investigating concerns about institutional data quality, including attempts to influence results inappropriately'; this guidance can be read in full [here](#). HEFCE and the UK funding bodies will update this guidance in due course.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding these issues, please do not hesitate to contact us at 020 8861 8110 or [nss@ipsos.com](mailto:nss@ipsos.com).

## III. NSS National Marketing Campaign

### 1. NSS 2018 Campaign

Institutions will be sent an NSS marketing pack by Ipsos MORI to help institutions promote the NSS. It is not compulsory to use the marketing materials provided, however we encourage selecting them in support of other marketing efforts.

The following section outlines the materials and support available to institutions to help promote the NSS. All the materials detailed here are made available from Ipsos MORI. This section includes:

- Items provided by Ipsos MORI for 2018
- General promotional guidance
- Supporting tools, such as social media advice
- Communications advice
- How to use response rate updates/reports
- Examples of good practice from institutions

#### 1.1. Ipsos MORI marketing packages

In order to receive hard copy marketing materials and promotional tools, please state the type of materials required ... Please ensure you provide detailed information of whom and where materials should be delivered to. See **Chapter IV** of the NSS Set up Guidance for more details.

Promotional materials must be ordered with Ipsos MORI by **Monday 27 November 2017** and will be delivered to the nominated addressee by **mid-December 2017** (Ipsos MORI will confirm the date).

#### i) Posters

Institutions can request NSS posters... Posters should be displayed in prominent positions of the institution's buildings where there is a lot of student traffic.

Please note that the poster design is different each year. The 2018 design has been developed by Ipsos MORI ... in consultation with students.

Institutions are permitted to request the poster design files from Ipsos MORI to adapt the poster for their own institution. However, they are only permitted to add an institutional logo and/or institution-specific text ... Any adaptations of the poster have to be approved by Ipsos MORI and HEFCE.

## **ii) Flyers**

Flyers are provided ... and institutions should request these in the marketing choices form Ipsos MORI.

The flyers can be made available/handed out.

## **iii) Electronic items**

Ipsos MORI will also provide institutions with a range of electronic marketing materials. Listed contacts will be notified when the materials are available.

Please download these items from Ipsos MORI.

A guide to using and installing electronic items is provided with the materials.

## **iv) NSS Video and YouTube Channel**

A short advert and video will be available for institutions. The animation is linked to the poster design and conveys the key messages of the NSS and how students can complete the survey.

Please note that Ipsos MORI manages a dedicated NSS YouTube channel 'TheStudentSurvey': <https://www.youtube.com/user/thestudentsurvey>. If you have your own NSS videos and advertisements, please send the URL to Ipsos MORI and we will upload it to the NSS channel.

In accordance with the Welsh Language Act, all videos and advertisements will be translated into Welsh.

## **v) Logo template**

We will also provide other promotional templates for institutions who would like to print/create additional marketing materials themselves.

The NSS approved logos and QR codes will be available.

If you have any queries about using these items, or require any additional posters or flyers during fieldwork, please contact the NSS Helpline at [nss@ipsos.com](mailto:nss@ipsos.com).

## vi) Supporting materials

Ipsos MORI will also provide template examples of popular communications.

## 2. Promotional Guidelines

Promotion of the NSS at a localised level is key to achieving the required response rates. Good response rates ensure that NSS data can be made available to prospective students and institutions to support student choice and quality enhancement.

Although Ipsos MORI can communicate with non-responsive students and encourage participation, institutions are in the prime position to raise awareness of the survey, convey its importance and encourage participation. All internal marketing activities should aim to raise awareness of the NSS amongst mostly final year undergraduate students (and directed at eligible students only where possible) encouraging students to give honest and anonymous feedback on their course experience. Please ensure that all staff directly involved with the NSS, and those who will be actively encouraging student participation, are familiar with the rules and regulations of promoting the survey. In particular, they must be provided the [HEFCE guidelines](#) on inappropriate influence and the guidance in Annex 1, so they are made aware of what they can and cannot do when encouraging completion, and what the consequences may be if inappropriate influence is discovered.

It is recommended that institutions utilise the national promotional materials provided by Ipsos MORI to promote the NSS. However, institutions are also encouraged to develop their own marketing and communication plans: promotion of the survey through internal web portals, direct email communications and word-of-mouth. Nevertheless, institutions should review the Ipsos MORI communications schedule to ensure that internal communications have the maximum impact.

The timing of promotional activity is important and will be dependent on the institutions... Spreading the word about the NSS, and ensuring students are aware it is coming, is an ongoing process...

### Q1. When should we display promotional materials?

It is recommended to display promotional materials around your institution before the launch of the survey. This is to ensure it is visible to students and fresh in their minds ... The survey website will remain live until **30 April 2018**. Please continue to display the materials until this date.

## 2.1. Creating your own promotional materials

Institutions can create internal promotional materials. If you do decide to create your own artwork, please ensure that the guidelines in Chapter II are adhered to.

In summary:

- The National Student Survey (NSS) marketing campaigns must not be embedded into broader institutional campaigns.
- The key message of internal marketing must be to encourage students to give their honest opinion and make it clear that the NSS is an independent survey.
- Marketing campaigns and images must be balanced and must not be seen as attempting to influence responses, or self-promoting the institution. For example, 'I love my institution' or 'My institution is the best' taglines are not permitted.
- Materials should promote online completion at [www.thestudentsurvey.com](http://www.thestudentsurvey.com).
- The NSS logo, funder logos and Ipsos MORI logos should be present. Please contact [nss@ipsos.com](mailto:nss@ipsos.com) if you require the artwork.

Customised text should:

- Aim to encourage students to voice their opinions (what they liked **and** did not like about their student experience).
- State the purpose of the NSS and the target audience (mainly final year undergraduates).
- Encourage students to complete the survey and only invite honest feedback.
- Not attempt to influence responses inappropriately.
- Inform students that the survey is run by Ipsos MORI, an independent research agency, on behalf of all HE funding bodies.

## Using the new NSS logo

The NSS logo was updated in 2017. Any materials that are created by institutions to promote the NSS should include the **official NSS logo** and branding and be in line with the images used across the NSS campaign. **Please do not use the old logo. All iterations of the old NSS logo should be removed from institutions' websites and promotional materials.** English and Welsh versions of the logo are available from Ipsos MORI.

## Quick response (QR) code

A QR code will be included in all hard copy promotional materials. Students with access to mobile devices can scan the image and be redirected to [www.thestudentsurvey.com](http://www.thestudentsurvey.com) to complete the online survey. The QR code will be available to download from Ipsos MORI. We would encourage institutions to use the QR code on all hard copy materials that they create internally.

## Q1 What is the process for adapting the Ipsos MORI provided marketing materials?

Institutions are permitted to adapt the Ipsos MORI supplied marketing materials, however, restrictions apply. You are permitted to add the institution's logo and promotional text to the poster design. However, the fundamental content of the poster cannot be adapted and the ratios of the NSS and funder logos cannot be changed. Institutions wishing to adapt the national campaign will need to request the design files from Ipsos MORI. All amended artwork must be sent to [nss@ipsos.com](mailto:nss@ipsos.com) for approval to ensure that it remains brand compliant.

## Q2 What method of completion should we promote to our students?

It is highly desirable that as many students as possible complete the survey online. The survey can be completed via desktop computers or by mobile devices (e.g. smartphones and tablets). Therefore, in communications and marketing materials, we recommend advertising online completion. Institutions can direct students via institutional portals to the survey web address.

The survey website [www.thestudentsurvey.com](http://www.thestudentsurvey.com) goes live on **Monday 8 January 2018**. Regardless of your institution's chosen start week, **ALL** eligible students can complete the survey from this date. However, we recommend advertising the website in line with the chosen survey start week. This year, initial email invitations will be sent on the Thursday of each start week, so institutions have the first few days of the week to launch their own promotional activities as they wish.



Please note that students can also complete the survey via the telephone. If students do have a preferred method of contact, they can select their preference online ([www.thestudentsurvey.com](http://www.thestudentsurvey.com)) or can contact the Ipsos MORI student helpline at [thestudentsurvey@ipsos.com](mailto:thestudentsurvey@ipsos.com).

## 2.2. Planning your communication schedule

Ipsos MORI operates a strict communication plan. The dates when Ipsos MORI will communicate with your students are in accordance with the institution's chosen survey start week. The following section provides guidance on how the institution can plan communications in line with the Ipsos MORI survey schedule.

### One week before survey launch date

Send pre-emptive emails to eligible students only, outlining:

- That they will receive an invitation email from Ipsos MORI containing a unique link to the survey (on which dates depending on your institution's survey start week);
- The importance of the NSS;
- If offered, outline the details of the prize draw.

This email should be signed from either an individual known to them or a senior representative (e.g. Pro-Vice-Chancellor).

Ensure that the I.T. department/contact is aware that institutional email accounts will be receiving emails...

### Survey period

- Email invitations from Ipsos MORI will arrive in student inboxes ...
- Arrange dedicated sessions with eligible students ...
- Promote the NSS
- Reminders
- Telephone interviews
- Institutions' specific communication

Please note that these guidelines should only be used as a guide to help plan or enhance the communications. It is not intended to replace existing communication plans.

### **Inappropriate influence reminder**

It is appropriate to remind students that they should complete the NSS and that they should consider their responses carefully. However, encouraging students to reflect in their answers anything other than their genuine perceptions of their experience, such as making any link between the NSS, league tables and the perceived value of students' degrees, is not acceptable. Please see more details in Chapter II.

## **3. Prize Draws**

One way of promoting the NSS to eligible students is to communicate any prize draw on offer... Should the institution wish to offer a prize draw, they should adhere to the following guidance. All prize draws, run internally, should follow the MRS Guidelines.

### **3.1. Guidelines**

It is up to institutions to promote the NSS locally. Institutions may organise prize draws if they wish to do so. Ipsos MORI is able to publicise institutions' prize draws...

Please note that details of prize draws will only be available to students who complete the survey **online**. Students who are invited by email to take part in the survey are informed of the prize draw offered by the institution in their invitations. Students should be made aware that there is no link between how they respond and their chances of winning a prize. Completion of the survey cannot be a condition to entering the online prize draw as all eligible students have an equal chance of winning. Please see the MRS guidelines on incentives and prize draws for more information.

## 3.2. Opting in to a prize draw

If the institution opts to offer a prize draw, Ipsos MORI will randomly select prize draw winners within two weeks after the closing date on behalf of each participating institution. All students, including non-respondents, can enter the prize draw.

Please note that winners can only be selected from institutions as a whole. It is not possible to offer a prize that is only open to a specific cohort of students, e.g. a specific department or college. Ipsos MORI is unable to facilitate bespoke prize scenarios while fulfilling its MRS and legal obligations.

If you choose to run a tailored or multi-prize draw scheme, please ensure that the institution is able to administer these and that they comply with the law and adhere to the MRS guidelines. It is a requirement to clearly advertise the prize draw in any correspondence with students and clearly communicate how and when prize winners will be drawn.

**Regarding the notification and announcement dates, please allow ... date for us to draw the winners.**

If the institution wishes to run a prize draw for the NSS 2018, Ipsos MORI will assist in this process.

*While the conduct of prize draws is the responsibility of the institution, we want to ensure that these are in accordance with the MRS code of conduct. A copy of the MRS Guidelines is available from Ipsos MORI. Please make sure that you are familiar with the guidelines and act in accordance with these.*

The prize draw is the responsibility of the institution and should comply with the relevant legislation.

## 4. Social Media

This section outlines some **social media strategies** that institutions can use to encourage participation in the National Student Survey. It aims to provide an overview of social media and to present ideas that may be of use. It is not intended to replace any social media plans that institutions may already have in place. The ideas outlined here would work better as part of a larger promotional campaign to encourage participation.

## 4.1. Creating a buzz through social media

Social media sites or apps are an effective way to ‘spread the word’ about an activity, event or project.

The marketing guidelines and rules on inappropriate influence also apply to social media posts, so please ensure that all involved in promoting the survey on social media are aware of what they can and cannot do, as well as the consequences of inappropriate posts.

Some institutions have dedicated **YouTube** channels and they may wish to create their own NSS videos to inform students of the purpose of the NSS and how to complete it. **YouTube** videos and links can be embedded into other social networking sites, such as **Twitter** and **Facebook**, as well as on institutional websites/portals and shared amongst eligible students. You could try to develop a “fun” video that students would be encouraged to share. Remember to share your videos with the official [NSS YouTube Channel](#) by sending the link to [nss@ipsos.com](mailto:nss@ipsos.com).

**Facebook** is a useful way to ‘spread the word’ about the NSS among final year students. Some institutions host their own internal campaigns or use the theme of the Ipsos MORI campaign to raise awareness and engage students with the NSS. You could create a **Facebook** photo album to post pictures or video clips of activities that are happening on your campus. You could also create posts based on how NSS results have been used to make improvements at your institution.

A recent feature added to **Facebook** allows users to post live videos across the site. Institutions can make use of this by broadcasting live streams of NSS-themed events or sessions; students can watch these streams online and comment/react to the feed.



Departments, SUs and NSS champions with their own **Facebook** page can also promote general NSS

activity, such as announcing the launch of the survey, offering details about dedicated completion sessions, sharing response rate updates, and publicising giveaways. In particular, institutions can create awareness of the survey through competitions on Facebook, encouraging students to use the different functionalities of the site in



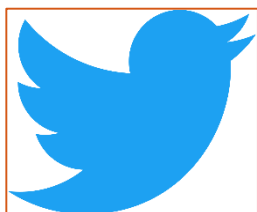
order to win a particular prize. For example, if you embed an ‘enter the survey’ button as a post, which will take students to [www.thestudentsurvey.com](http://www.thestudentsurvey.com), students who share it will be entered into a prize draw. You can also make use of the Facebook reaction feature where students can use one of the reaction faces (Like, Love, Wow, Angry and Sad) to engage with your posts. You could donate money to charity for

every 'like' and 'love' received, or award prizes to students under each reaction. Please find more information in the competition and prize draws section below.

**Twitter** is another popular Social Media website that allows users to post their thoughts in the form of 'tweets' in a maximum of 140 characters. They are specifically short and therefore present a challenge in ensuring that the right information is relayed effectively.

In 2017, Ipsos MORI monitored the public tweets relating to the NSS. Tweets about the NSS regularly included direct links to the survey or served as 'calls to action' to encourage students to complete the survey. Tweets are also used by students or union reps to promote their completion of the survey or to publicise previous results and subsequent changes made at institutions.

Institutions can post photo cards on their Twitter accounts in the form of images, which when clicked by students, open to more detailed information about the survey. This can be used to spread the word about response rates, dedicated sessions, how long students have left to complete the survey, when they will be contacted by Ipsos MORI, incentives, the nature of the survey, why it's important, details of any NSS related events, the impact of results and results more widely.



A key aspect of **Twitter** communication is ensuring that you are sending a succinct message and encouraging the message to trend. Try making use of the hashtag functionality - using the “#” symbol followed by a key word. This can be your NSS campaign title, the survey or just a word that summarises the message, for example #HaveYourSay.

Remember that **Twitter** is a social dialogue – so respond to students and remember to retweet messages that others make. When doing so:

- **Use the 80/20 principle.**  
80% of your Tweets should focus on driving interactions with your followers, such as Retweets, replies, and favourites. Once you've built some rapport, you can mix in tweets that get followers to take actions, such as participating in the NSS.

Remember to use as many visual elements as possible to provide an uplift in engagements:

- **Photos** average a 35% boost in Retweets
  - You can include animations as well which can tell a story
  - YouTube videos (and SlideShares) show natively within the app
- Other **videos** get a 28% boost in Retweets



- **Quotes** get a 19% boost in Retweets<sup>3</sup>

To further boost the presence of the NSS on Twitter, Ipsos MORI has an official NSS Twitter account to retweet your social media postings and create some unique social media content to interact with eligible students.

**Smartphone apps.** Making use of some of the most popular smartphone apps to promote the NSS would ensure that messages are reaching them through as many means as possible.

**Instagram** is a social networking app that allows users to share pictures and videos with others, and to other social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. Institutions can link their Instagram accounts with their Twitter and Facebook pages so any pictures or videos posted on the app are shared across other social media websites as well, ensuring a wide spread of the message.

Institutions can post pictures or videos of their NSS campaigns in action alongside their custom hashtag campaigns, e.g. #NSS2018, etc. They can also implement NSS Instagram booths across campuses where students can take photos for their institutions' **Instagram** accounts – these can then be shared across the linked social media accounts to spread the word or added to their **Instagram** 'stories', a function similar to the Snapchat story feature detailed below.

**Snapchat** is also a popular smartphone app that institutions can use to 'spread the word' about the NSS. The app allows users to post pictures and videos for a temporary amount of time. When this time is up, they are removed.



A function of the app that makes this useful for promoting the NSS is the 'My Story' area. Institutions can take pictures and videos of their promotional campaigns and compile them into one chronological storyline, their 'NSS Story'. Each snap added to the storyline lasts for 24 hours, allowing institutions to document each day of their campaign from start to finish. The custom geofilter function could be used to create an NSS-themed filter to use over any photos or videos taken after dedicated sessions or specific areas on campus where students complete the survey.

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<sup>3</sup> [https://blog.twitter.com/official/en\\_us/a/2014/what-fuels-a-tweets-engagement.html](https://blog.twitter.com/official/en_us/a/2014/what-fuels-a-tweets-engagement.html)

## 4.2. Competitions and prize draws

This section outlines some of the key messages that institutions could use via social media to promote the survey and boost response rates.

### i) Create a challenge

Institutions could use social media as an avenue to create an internal or external competition to boost response rates.

### ii) Promote institutional prize draws and competitions

Many institutions organise prize draws to encourage eligible students to enter the survey. Prizes are a useful thing to communicate via social media sources.

Promote the prize draws that have been identified to the Ipsos MORI team to encourage students to complete the survey online, as well as internal rewards and prizes to help boost response rates.

You can also communicate the outcome of the prize draws, once fieldwork has closed or the winners have been drawn.

## 4.3. Top tips for social media

Social media can be a useful tool for promoting the NSS to students as well as making future students aware of the impact of the survey. We advise that any social media strategies are planned in line with wider promotional activities within institutions and adhere to the NSS promotional guidelines set by HEFCE (in partnership with the relevant funding partners) to avoid any attempts of inappropriate influence, whether intentional or not.



## IV. Improving Response Rates

In order for NSS results to be published, a threshold of 10 respondents and 50% response rate has to be met.

These thresholds are set by UK Higher Education funding bodies for the purpose of ensuring that the survey data published is useful to the participating institutions. Thresholds are applied to ensure that there are enough responses to preserve individuals' anonymity. Data not meeting these thresholds can therefore not be published.

Ipsos MORI will follow up with providers where response rates look as if they will be below those that can be published. The funding bodies reserve the right to agree changes to the survey period with individual providers at risk of not meeting the publication threshold. HEFCE will publish information on its website about its approach and the actions it may take by January 2018. The completeness and accuracy of students' contact data, as supplied by providers, will be a significant factor in achieving a publishable level of responses.

This briefing sheet provides an overview of some of the measures employed by institutions to improve their annual response rates.

### Email Communication

Electronic communication has been identified by respondents and institutions as an important way to promote the NSS fieldwork.

Send introductory emails ahead of fieldwork to students to forewarn them that the survey will be coming and to look out for their email invitations. These emails should include a link to the survey website [www.thestudentsurvey.com](http://www.thestudentsurvey.com) so students can find out more.

### Redirecting to the NSS Website

Some institutions have established a pre-survey webpage, which can be branded locally and helps them to manage their own incentives more effectively. These micro-sites link directly to the survey, and provide some background information and details about any incentives.

## Promotional Materials

Institutions use a range of promotional tools and methods to improve awareness of the survey and to encourage eligible students to participate. These include:

**Using Ipsos MORI prepared promotional materials.** Displaying official NSS branded promotional materials around the institution.

**Creating institution-specific marketing materials.** Some institutions prefer to create their own institutional branded posters, flyers, banners and screensavers. Others employ innovative promotional ideas such as NSS stickers on food labels, catering cards to be displayed on tables in cafes, bars, etc. and NSS branded clothing for representatives to wear on campus. Internal promotional materials must adhere to HEFCE's guidelines.

## Internal communication and PR

### Engaging Student Bodies and Representatives

In the past few years, many institutions with a student union, association or guild (SU) identified the role of the Students' Union as important to the promotion of the NSS. SU support can give the NSS a student-friendly face and can run alongside your institution's main campaign, giving a student-led and student-focused approach. Furthermore, they identify that early engagement of the SU and involving them in planning can prove beneficial.

However, if your institution has a students' union, association or guild, you will need to establish if they are supporting the NSS this year to be able to rely on their support.

**Creating a buzz.**

**Targeting promotion.**

**Communicating with students.**

**NSS ambassadors.**

**Student events.**

**Social media.**

## Incentives

A range of institutions offer incentives to encourage students to complete the NSS. The most common items offered in the past included:

- Cash prizes
- High street vouchers – e.g. Amazon, book tokens, entertainment, shopping and travel
- Smartphones and tablets such as iPads and Kindles
- Graduation packages, e.g. gown hire, photo packages, champagne reception
- University Ball Tickets
- Vouchers for free coffees or meal deals
- Print and photocopy credits

Some institutions identify that they work with the SU to identify the incentive that would be most appropriate for their students.

## The Power of Word of Mouth

Institutions recognise the importance of word of mouth promotion. This is achieved through SU representatives, department heads, administrators and/or tutors speaking directly with eligible students about the NSS.

## Dedicated Time to Complete the Survey

The majority of institutions provide dedicated time or space to final year students to complete the NSS. These sessions must be held in neutral environments, e.g. computer rooms or study centres. Staff must not oversee students' responses or make them feel that they must answer in a certain way. Please make staff aware of the rules and regulations surrounding inappropriate influence.

## Planning and Coordination

Many institutions have a formal procedure for ensuring that response rates meet publication thresholds.

**Dedicated NSS Operations Team and/or an NSS Steering Group**

**Communications planning.**

**Preparing for fieldwork.**

**Timetable for promotional activity.**

**Identification of key responsibilities.**

**Innovative ideas.**

**General awareness.**

**Contacting students.**

## 1. Communications checklist

Findings from the NSS 2017 suggest that contact from the institution plays a key role in boosting response rates. Around 37% of students completing the online survey (who answered the relevant question) identified that they heard about the NSS from a lecturer/member of staff and 34% followed a link from their University or College homepage/portal.

Many institutions have kindly shared with Ipsos MORI a number of initiatives that they have found to be helpful in encouraging students to respond to the survey.

# Annexes

## 1. Advice for Staff

### Q1. Why is it important for staff to promote the NSS?

Around 37% of online respondents (that responded to the optional marketing question at the end of the online NSS) identified that they were told about the survey by a lecturer/member of staff.

Institutional staff are often best placed to communicate the benefits and importance of the survey. Their objectivity is crucial because of the way the results will be used by prospective students, institutions, SUs and other stakeholders. The following guidance should be issued to staff to help them understand the nature of the NSS, what eligible students will be asked and to ensure that they do not inappropriately influence students in completing the survey.

In summary, staff should be clear on:

- Who is eligible to complete the survey
- The importance of the NSS results
- What the NSS is, why it is important and how the survey is administered
- The guidelines relating to the promotion of the NSS
- The rules regarding inappropriate influence

### Q2. Which students should I communicate with?

Staff should take care to ensure that they are only asking **eligible** students to complete the survey. They should work with the relevant departments within their institutions to clearly understand which of their students are on the NSS target list. They should understand the purpose of the NSS and clearly communicate to students that it is their opportunity to provide honest feedback.

### Q3. Who is eligible to complete the NSS?

All students studying on courses leading to undergraduate credits or qualifications (such as Bachelor's Degrees, Foundation Degrees and Higher Education Diplomas) will be surveyed in their expected final year of study.

In addition:

- Students on more flexible part-time programmes (whose final year cannot be easily predicted) will normally be surveyed during their fourth year of study.
- Students who have withdrawn from study during their final year will be included in the survey as their feedback is equally valuable.
- Students repeating their penultimate year in 2018 will be surveyed (NOT when they eventually progress to their final year), unless they are specifically submitted for removal.
- Students who have changed their course arrangements, but were originally expected to graduate in 2018, will be eligible this year and not when they eventually reach their final year, unless specifically submitted for removal.
- Students who were already surveyed in 2017 will not be surveyed in 2018, unless removed by HEFCE.

#### Q4. Why is it important to meet the threshold for publication of results?

In order for results to be made publically available on the HEFCE and Unistats website, a publication threshold of **a minimum of both 10 respondents and 50% response rate** has to be met.

NSS data remains an important tool for helping prospective students make decisions about what and where to study in the future. Staff should encourage eligible students to complete the NSS in an honest way.

**Please note that Ipsos MORI cannot provide the details of students that have/have not completed the survey.** Regular response rate reports are provided to institutions, which will identify response rates by courses, departments, subjects and survey methods.

#### Q5. What is being asked in the NSS?

The survey asks undergraduates to provide feedback on their courses in a nationally recognised format.

There are 27 questions, relating to the following aspects of the student learning experience:

- Teaching on my Course
- Learning Opportunities

- Assessment and Feedback
- Academic Support
- Organisation and Management
- Learning Resources
- Learning Community
- Student Voice
- Overall Satisfaction

Students are also given the opportunity to give positive and/or negative comments on their student learning experience as a whole.

## Q6. How can students access the NSS?

### Online

All students with a valid email address will be sent an email invitation to take part in the survey. This email will contain a personalised survey link - when clicked, students must enter their date of birth and this will take them directly into the survey.

Students can also go online to complete the survey directly at [www.thestudentsurvey.com](http://www.thestudentsurvey.com) between **8 January 2018** and **30 April 2018**

The online survey is mobile-friendly, so if accessed via a smartphone or tablet device, students will be automatically taken to the mobile version of the site.

Once a validated response has been received from a student, then they will receive an automated confirmation email and should not be contacted by Ipsos MORI again.



## What does the online survey look like?

The questions are all in the displayed format below with each one on a separate screen – this format applies to the core questions as well as the banks and additional questions.



## Telephone

From the third week of fieldwork, we will begin follow up calls to non-responding students for whom we have valid UK telephone numbers... Please note that we will telephone students to complete the survey – they cannot call us directly to complete the survey, but may arrange an appointment if they wish.

Students are called on the following days/times: Monday to Friday – 9am to 9pm, Saturday and Sunday – 10am to 7pm.

## Who should I contact if I have a query about the NSS?

Please liaise with the Main or Second NSS contacts at your institution to identify which students are included in the list of eligible students for the NSS 2018. You can also contact the NSS dedicated helpline at [nss@ipsos.com](mailto:nss@ipsos.com).

## **Q7. What should we do if we identify an eligible student that cannot access the online survey?**

Please send an email ...to [nss@ipsos.com](mailto:nss@ipsos.com) and we can check if they are in our database of eligible students.

The student can also contact us directly at [thestudentsurvey@ipsos.com](mailto:thestudentsurvey@ipsos.com) where we can check their eligibility.

## **Q8. How can we boost our response rates?**

There are a number of ways to promote the NSS ...

This guidance document contains a variety of ideas that can be communicated to staff to help them promote the NSS.

## Inappropriate influence

### Q. What is inappropriate influence and why is it important to ensure that there is no undue influence in promoting the NSS?

All those involved in the NSS should be aware of the guidelines regarding inappropriate influence. Staff can remind eligible students to complete the survey but they have a responsibility to ensure that their students are encouraged to give their honest feedback on their student experience in the NSS.

Students should not feel that they are being monitored or encouraged to answer the survey in a particular way.

Staff must not:

- Explicitly instruct students on how to complete the survey, such as explaining the meanings of questions or the NSS scale. The questions and scale are self-explanatory and students should be left to interpret these in a way they see fit. Institutions are not permitted to recommend that students respond in a certain way, e.g. 'I recommend that you select agree or mostly agree', or misrepresent the scale to students, i.e. defining the 'neither agree nor disagree' as a negative response.
- Link the NSS to league tables, job prospects and the perceived value of students' degrees. Institutions are **not** permitted to tell students that if their courses do not achieve good satisfaction scores, this will make their degrees look bad to future employers.
- Arrange compulsory sessions for students to complete the NSS. Completion of the NSS, while beneficial to institutions, is completely voluntary for students. While arranging completion sessions is allowed, institutions should not enforce them nor make students feel there may be consequences should they not attend.
- Take students through the survey on an individual basis. Institutions should not stand or sit beside students when they are completing the survey, or take them through their responses question-by-questions. Students should be given due privacy so they can respond with honesty.
- Compare the NSS scale to other scales with different purposes, i.e. assignment marking schemes.
- Look over students' shoulders when they complete the survey;

- Require students to provide evidence that they have completed the survey;
- Complete the survey on behalf of students.

**It is crucial that local survey promotion is neutral and that:**

- Students are targeted equally so that each eligible student is given a chance to express their views on their student experience;
- Students feel free to give honest feedback about their experiences without their responses being influenced by their institution;
- Students must not be encouraged to reflect in their answers anything other than genuine perceptions of their experience;
- Any promotional materials that are produced in addition to those provided by Ipsos MORI must be checked for suitability in accordance with NSS guidance. A senior member of staff should sign-off all materials before they are used.

Where a concern or allegation is raised, it will be investigated by HEFCE. If an investigation were to find that promotional activities and/or marketing materials had resulted in inappropriate influence, whether intentional or unintentional, the integrity of the NSS data could be called into question.

HEFCE (in partnership with the relevant funding partners) could take action to suppress the affected NSS data for the institution. This would mean that no NSS data would be published for the affected courses at the institution in the specific year and, as a result, it would not be available for marketing activities, learning enhancement work or inclusion on Unistats, the HEFCE website etc.

More information on the HEFCE concerns process, and how they deal with allegations of inappropriate influence, can be found in their guidance 'Ensuring the integrity of National Student Survey data: Reporting and investigating concerns about institutional data quality, including attempts to influence results inappropriately'; this guidance can be read in full [here](#).

## **Running dedicated sessions**

Staff should be encouraged to run dedicated sessions where time is set aside to allow eligible students to complete the survey. Students should be encouraged to give their honest opinion. Please note that staff should not be 'standing over students' while they are completing the survey. Staff should make it clear that they are there to provide support on technical issues and not to monitor responses.

## When should I hold dedicated NSS completion sessions?

Dedicated sessions can be held at any time during the survey fieldwork.

## Sending targeted emails

In sending emails to eligible students, staff should make it clear that the NSS provides an opportunity to give their feedback in an anonymous way. Staff should encourage completion online via [www.thestudentsurvey.com](http://www.thestudentsurvey.com) and acknowledge that the survey is independent of the institution.

Eligible students should not feel pressured to do the survey or told that by not responding or responding in a certain way will impact the value of their degrees.

## Can I send reminders to eligible students?

Sending targeted emails that invite students to complete the survey at [www.thestudentsurvey.com](http://www.thestudentsurvey.com) can be useful, however we would recommend against too many reminders as this may have an adverse effect. Staff should be aware of the impact of survey fatigue and time communications in a way that encourages participation rather than 'harass' students to complete the survey.

Please ensure that any emails sent to eligible students complement/coordinate with Ipsos MORI's and your institution's communication schedule. This helps to ensure that students are not over-contacted and that communications do not overlap with our activities. The email content should be signed off by a senior member of staff.

Please liaise with the Main NSS contact at your institution to ensure that emails are only being sent to eligible students.

## Prize Draws

### How does the prize draw process work?

You will be told if your institution is running a prize draw for all eligible students. If a prize draw is being run, you should communicate it to eligible students.

After the closing date, Ipsos MORI will draw the required number of winners at random and notify the necessary NSS contacts at your institution.

## Response rates

### Will I get updates on response rates during fieldwork?

Ipsos MORI issues regular response rates to institutions throughout the fieldwork. Your NSS Main and Second contacts will have access to these reports and will either issue them to relevant members of staff or be able to provide you with more information.

## 2. Bank of Optional Questions

### B1. Personal Development

1. The course has helped me to present myself with confidence.
2. My communication skills have improved.
3. As a result of the course, I feel confident in tackling unfamiliar problems.

### B2. Students' Union (Association or Guild)

1. The Students' Union (Association or Guild) had had a positive impact on my sense of belonging to the university or college.
2. The Students' Union (Association or Guild) has had a positive impact on the local community.
3. The Students' Union (Association or Guild) has helped me develop useful life skills.

### B3. Careers

1. As a result of my course, I believe that I have improved my career prospects.
2. Good advice is available for making career choices.
3. Good advice is available on further study opportunities.

### B4. Course Content and Structure

1. All of the compulsory modules are relevant to my course.
2. There is an appropriate range of options to choose from on my course.
3. The modules of my course form a coherent integrated whole.

### B5. Work Placements

Did your course involve any work placements?

- a. Yes (ask all questions in this section)
  - b. No (skip this section)
1. I received sufficient support and advice from my institution about the organisation of my placements.
  2. My placements were valuable in helping my learning.
  3. My placements have helped me to develop my skills in relation to my course.
  4. My placements have helped me to develop my general life skills.
  5. The taught part of my course was good preparation for my placements.

### B6. Social Opportunities

1. I have had plenty of opportunities to interact socially with other students.
2. I am satisfied with the range of clubs and societies on offer.



3. I am satisfied with the range of entertainment and social events on offer.

### **B7. Course Delivery**

1. Learning materials made available on my course have enhanced my learning.
2. The range and balance of approaches to teaching has helped me to learn.
3. The delivery of my course has been stimulating.
4. My learning has benefited from modules that are informed by current research.
5. Practical activities on my course have helped me to learn.

### **B8. The Physical Environment**

1. Security has been satisfactory when attending classes.
2. My institution provides an appropriate environment in which to learn.

### **B9. Welfare Resources and Facilities**

1. There is sufficient provision of welfare and student services to meet my needs.
2. When needed, the information and advice offered by welfare and student services has been helpful.

### **B10. Workload**

1. The workload on my course is manageable.
2. This course does not apply unnecessary pressure on me as a student.
3. The volume of work on my course means I can always complete it to my satisfaction.
4. I am generally given enough time to understand the things I have to learn.

### **B11. Assessment**

1. Teaching staff test what I have understood rather than what I have memorised.
2. Assessment methods employed in my course require an in-depth understanding of the course content.

### **B12. Learning Community**

1. I feel part of a group of students committed to learning.
2. I have been able to explore academic interests with other students.
3. I have learned to explore ideas confidently.
4. Within my course, I feel my suggestions and ideas are valued.
5. I feel part of an academic community in my college or university.

**B13. Intellectual Motivation**

1. I have found the course motivating.
2. The course has stimulated my interest in the field of study.
3. The course has stimulated my enthusiasm for further learning.

**B14. Entrepreneurial opportunities (NEW)**

1. If I was interested in starting my own business, I know where I could find support in my institution.
2. My Higher Education experience has helped me develop skills that could help me run my own business in future.
3. As a result of my Higher Education experience, I am more likely to consider running my own business in the future.

**B15. Employability and skills (NEW)**

1. My Higher Education experience has helped me plan for my future career.
2. My institution offered activities and resources designed to prepare me for the next step in my career.
3. The skills I have developed during my time in Higher Education will be useful for my future career.

**B16. Environmental sustainability (NEW)**

1. My institution encourages good environmental practice.
2. My course has encouraged me to think about environmental sustainability.
3. I have had opportunities to take part in activities supporting environmental sustainability.

**B17. Student safety (NEW)**

1. I feel safe to be myself at university/college.
2. My institution takes responsibility for my safety.

Please note that in nominating banks of NSS questions, institutions are advised to work with their partner institutions and students' unions, associations or guilds to ensure that their choices are taken into account.

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