

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 (<https://unistats.ac.uk/>) to help prospective students make choices about study, and are also used in the Teaching Excellence and Students Outcomes Framework (TEF) 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:

- a. Explicit or implicit instruction on the type of responses students should make, including the provision of standard or example responses.
- b. How the survey is presented to students by providers, other students and student organisations or other parties, including drawing attention, explicitly or implicitly, to the consequences of negative responses, for example, with regard to:
 - i. conflation with other surveys undertaken by providers, whether internal or external
 - ii. league tables, the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) or Quality Assessment processes

- iii. employers' perceptions of positive and negative outcomes.
- c. Instruction on how the response scale is understood by third parties.
- d. Encouraging students to avoid a particular point on the response scale.
- e. Failure to ensure that methods to encourage participation in the survey, such as campaigns, the use of promotional materials (either explicitly or implicitly) or incentivisation methods (such as prize draws), do not bias responses. Providers are advised to reference the Ipsos MORI guidance for information on managing the successful promotion of the survey.
- f. Holding compulsory sessions at which the NSS must be completed.

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@officeforstudents.org.uk.

Concerns may be raised at any time, but it is helpful if they are brought to the OfS'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.