

## Annex A: Guidance on the 2019 National Student Survey for higher education institutions and alternative providers

1. The National Student Survey (NSS) will be carried out in 2019 across providers in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland by the Office for Students (OfS) working on behalf of the UK higher education and funding regulatory bodies. Ipsos MORI will manage the survey process and Texuna Technologies will provide the dissemination portal services. The 2019 NSS will follow a similar timetable to the 2018 survey.
2. This annex provides guidance specifically for UK higher education institutions and participating alternative providers in England.
3. The responsibilities of providers in the successful management of the NSS are:
  - a. Timely submission of the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) Student Record and alternative provider student record. The final submission date is in October 2018 for higher education institutions and in November 2018 for alternative providers
  - b. Ensuring good data quality by checking the NSS report (the target list) generated by HESA. Requests for any necessary changes which cannot be resolved by correcting the student data may be directed to Ipsos MORI for approval by the OfS or the relevant funding body within the period December 2018 to February 2019
  - c. Timely submission of student contact details when requested by Ipsos MORI (November 2018)
  - d. Engagement with all guidance and requests issued by the OfS, higher education funding bodies, HESA, Ipsos MORI and Texuna Technologies, and attending training and events run by them
  - e. Submitting survey preferences to Ipsos MORI. This includes timing of the survey and the choice of optional bank questions. Optional bank choices should be made in conjunction with the relevant student representative body (students' union, association or guild)
  - f. Promotion of the survey to students, ensuring all activities meet the guidelines on avoiding inappropriate influence provided by Ipsos MORI and the UK funding bodies' [code of practice for higher education data collections](#)
  - g. Where appropriate, if advised by Ipsos Mori that response rates are low, undertake additional promotional activity to encourage students to complete the survey (during the surveying period January 2019 to April 2019)
  - h. Access the responses and results of the survey via Texuna Technologies' dedicated results facility (July/August 2019), Office for Students website (including benchmarked data) and Unistats site (for students).

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4. Higher education providers can access their target lists for the 2019 NSS via the HESA data collection system. They should provide the requested contact details for students on these lists to Ipsos MORI by **Wednesday 28 November 2018**. Further details can be found in the NSS 2019 'Guidance for providers and Students' Unions', sent to institutional contacts by Ipsos MORI. The guidance document is also available on the NSS extranet.
5. Additions to or removals from the target list are admitted only under specific circumstances, details of which are provided in the guidance. Any such requests for additions or removals must be submitted to Ipsos MORI and agreed by the OfS or relevant funding body prior to their inclusion in or removal from the final target list. If approved, the OfS will inform the provider and make the amendment to the target list.
6. Students are able to opt out when the provider asks if they wish to have their contact details passed on to the survey agency (Ipsos MORI) or at any stage during the survey process.
7. Providers may choose up to six banks of optional questions, and may include up to two additional questions specific to the provider. Providers are asked to agree with students' unions their choice of optional banks of questions for inclusion. Providers should submit their choice of optional banks and additional questions to Ipsos MORI.

## Scope and coverage of the survey

### Coverage

8. The following providers are covered by the 2019 NSS:
  - a. All universities and other higher education institutions in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland
  - b. Other higher education providers in England with specific course designation for new students in 2018-19 who completed a HESA return for 2017-18
  - c. Further education colleges in England and Wales, where there are students on directly funded prescribed higher education courses
  - d. All further education colleges in Northern Ireland.
9. All full-time and part-time undergraduate students registered at participating providers are eligible to undertake the NSS during their final year of study (or, for flexible programmes where the final year cannot be predicted, after they are expected to have undertaken more than one full-time equivalent and not before their third year of study) with the following exceptions:
  - a. Students on programmes that do not lead to undergraduate qualifications or credits
  - b. Students on a course lasting one year or one full-time equivalent, or less

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- c. Any students who were surveyed in the 2018 NSS (whether or not they responded) and who remain at the same provider
  - d. Any students who we expect to have completed one full-time equivalent or less since they were last surveyed by the end of academic year 2018-19.
10. Students are included in the 2019 survey population if they are expected to complete between 1 February 2019 and 31 January 2020 inclusive.
  11. It is possible to add or remove students from the NSS target list in exceptional circumstances, for example if the length of a student's course has decreased after a provider has submitted its HESA return. The full criteria are set out in the guidance provided by Ipsos MORI.
  12. Providers will be able to make requests to add or remove students to or from the NSS population once the target list has been finalised by the OfS. Requests for changes can be made from:
    - early December for higher education institutions
    - early January for alternative providers.

Requests should be submitted as soon as possible after these dates to ensure they can be processed prior to, or early in, the survey period. All requests must be made through the [NSS extranet](#) and should be made in a single file, including the required level of detail. The OfS or relevant funding body will review all requests for additions and removals and may request further details from providers where necessary. Submitting requests as early as possible and responding to queries in a timely manner will help expedite the process. It may be necessary for the OfS to prioritise approvals by survey start week but we will endeavour to action all requests prior to the survey start date.

13. With the exception of students on enhanced first degrees, postgraduates are not included in the NSS.

### Reasons for excluding individuals from the survey

14. We enable providers to exclude specific groups of students from the target population. These are:
  - a. Students who are deceased
  - b. Students with serious health difficulties (including mental health difficulties) where seeking a response may be distressing for the student
  - c. Students who, having been informed that their contact details will be passed on to the survey agency (Ipsos MORI) for the purposes of the NSS, state that they do not wish to be contacted (students will also be able to opt out during the survey process).
15. These are the only grounds on which students may be excluded from the target population. If the provider feels that students are incorrectly included in the target

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population owing to errors in the data, then these should be submitted as removal requests, using the process in paragraph 12.

16. Providers should code all excluded students on their sample submission as category 'C' (regardless of whether they meet criteria a, b or c in paragraph 14) and providers should not provide contact details for these students.
17. If a provider identifies an error after it has submitted data to HESA but then wishes to remove students, we may require the provider to submit a revised return to HESA that generates a revised target list where we believe the errors are widespread and material. HESA will apply a charge of 20 per cent of the provider's annual subscription to meet the costs of processing this change.
18. To enable us to monitor exclusions and verify their consistent application, providers should retain evidence to support them. Where a student asks that their details are not passed on, we will expect providers to retain evidence of this request. If the number of such requests at any provider is so high as to affect our ability to conduct the survey successfully, we will discuss this with the provider.
19. Students should not be removed from the student data file supplied by Ipsos MORI even when their contact details are not supplied.
20. Although some students may withdraw in their final year, they will have had significant interaction with the provider, so their opinions are valuable and should be included.

### Process for supplying student contact data

21. Following submission of the HESA data, a target list of students to be included in the NSS will automatically be generated. The provider should then provide contact details, according to the standard template that will be supplied by Ipsos MORI, for all students on the list.
22. Students should be informed by the provider that their contact details may be passed on. For higher education intuitions and alternative providers, text has been added to the model HESA student data collection notice to explain this.
23. Providers have the opportunity to define their own structure for receiving their own NSS data, through one of two optional fields on the sample file to indicate the internal 'department code' for each student. These codes, where provided, will be used solely for providing feedback to the provider.
24. Providers should submit the requested contact details for students on these lists to Ipsos MORI by **Wednesday 28 November 2018**. Ipsos MORI will provide guidance to its contacts on how to supply these lists as part of the NSS guidance document. The NSS achieves a high response rate, and to ensure this continues it is important that providers submit complete and robust contact details to Ipsos MORI by this date.

## Administration of the survey

25. The 2019 survey will be conducted during the spring term so that the results can be published in summer 2019. To avoid concerns regarding impact on internal surveys, Ipsos MORI will continue to:
  - brand the NSS independently, which clearly distinguishes its purpose
  - manage the survey's distribution centrally, so that providers are not involved in contacting students to complete the NSS.
26. A five-week 'window' will operate, so providers can choose to start the survey at a time that fits with term timetables and does not clash with examinations. Providers may select a week between 7 January and 4 February 2019 for the survey to start. There will be no communication with students by Ipsos MORI outside of the timing agreed with each provider.
27. Ipsos MORI will conduct the survey at each provider using a set sequence of email and telephone surveying. This will take up to eight weeks at each provider, although there may be a need for some targeted follow-up during and beyond this time to increase response rates. Ipsos MORI will deploy the survey modes tactically to personalise the survey to students and providers, and help increase online responses and reduce survey costs.
28. The five-week window is in place to ensure that results can be published in time for prospective students to make informed choices. However, we will consider individual requests for a short extension, where the activities of students make it impractical to conduct the survey during that time. Any provider that wishes to make a case for an extension should contact Ipsos MORI by **Wednesday 28 November 2018**.

## Branding and awareness-raising

29. Comprehensive guidance on NSS 2019, including guidelines on appropriate promotion of the survey, will be available from the Ipsos MORI NSS extranet. It is important that this guidance is adhered to and any queries raised with Ipsos MORI. The funding bodies treat seriously any breaches of this guidance, and may investigate and take action where there is evidence of a breach. We undertake an annual review of the process we adopt to respond to allegations and will publish an updated process in December 2018 before fieldwork takes place. This guidance procedure is intended to be read in conjunction with the Good Practice Guidance issued by Ipsos MORI. We would urge providers to ensure all staff who are responsible for the running of the survey are familiar with Ipsos MORI's guidance and seek advice where needed on their approach to avoiding inappropriate influence.
30. Ipsos MORI will produce promotional materials for providers and students' unions to distribute locally. If a provider or students' union wishes to use the NSS branding to develop its own marketing material, it may do so and should discuss this with Ipsos MORI who will advise on good practice and offer guidelines to ensure a reasonable

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degree of consistency across the sector. When it contacts providers, Ipsos MORI will discuss who in the provider is best placed to coordinate promotional activity.

31. Ipsos MORI will manage incentive schemes in which providers may take part. These are centrally managed schemes that enable providers to offer incentives to students to complete the NSS. For example, some providers offered printer credits for students who completed the survey online.
32. Students on flexible programmes will receive tailored communication that more accurately reflects their participation in higher education.

### Questionnaire distribution

33. There are two main methods of data collection: online and telephone. Ipsos MORI operates a live, open-access website, where students can log in and complete the survey (this is in addition to the option to respond by following the link in a personalised email). The aim of the site is to verify the identity of students at the point of logging in; once students have completed the survey and their response is validated, they will be automatically removed from the target list and not contacted again. To enable this, and to enable efficient working of the survey more generally, providers should adhere to the deadline for supplying student contact details.
34. We are committed to increasing the online response rate and so reducing the amount of telephone contact. However, phoning remains an important element of the survey and will continue, so providers should provide students' landline and mobile phone numbers where available.
35. To monitor responses and to process data for analysis and reporting, we link all responses to students' HESA numbers or known student identifiers. Telephone interviewers will have automatic access to identifiers. Once students have completed the survey, they will be removed from the target list and not contacted again.
36. Throughout the process Ipsos MORI will send reminders to students who have not responded.
37. Response rates, by provider and by subject area, will be monitored continuously during the process. During the telephone stage, response rates will be reviewed and some areas may be identified for additional targeted follow-up activity, to bring responses up to a sufficient level to report results. This additional activity will involve reminders by email and text message.
38. At any stage during the survey process students may opt out of the survey and will not be contacted again. To do this, students will need to verify their identity by providing some data, such as their date of birth.
39. Provider response rates will be shared by Ipsos MORI during the fieldwork to help providers monitor their survey progress – providers should not share this data more widely. National response rates data will not be made available to providers.

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40. Ipsos MORI will follow up with providers where response rates look as if they will be below those that can be published (see paragraph 42). The funding bodies reserve the right to agree changes to the survey period with individual providers that are at risk of not meeting the provider-level or subject-level(s) publication threshold. The OfS will publish information on its website about our approach and the actions we may take by January 2019. The completeness and accuracy of students' contact data, as supplied by providers, will be a significant factor in achieving a publishable level of responses.

### Publication of 2019 NSS results

41. A major purpose of the NSS is to provide information to help potential students and their advisers make choices about higher education. It also has an important role in improving the student experience, by helping providers to identify areas for action or development.
42. The current publication threshold for NSS results is a 50 per cent response rate with at least ten students responding. All results that meet the publication threshold will be published on the [Unistats website](#). Data will also be published on the OfS website, including benchmarking data. We may publish more data and analysis from the survey than previously available.
43. Data will also be available to providers on the results portal delivered by Texuna Technologies. The results portal will allow providers to access particular elements of their data including optional bank questions, students' open text comments and data below certain publication thresholds.
44. The OfS and UK higher education funding bodies may publish their own analysis of the data including open text comments and optional banks. For data which is not available publicly through the OfS website this will be at aggregate level and not allow providers, courses or individuals to be identified.

## Annex B: Guidance on the 2019 National Student Survey for further education colleges in England

1. The National Student Survey (NSS) will be carried out in 2019 across providers in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland by the Office for Students (OfS) working on behalf of the UK higher education and funding regulatory bodies. Ipsos MORI will manage the survey process and Texuna Technologies will provide the dissemination portal services. The 2019 NSS will follow a similar timetable to the 2018 survey.
2. This annex provides guidance specifically for further education colleges and sixth-form colleges in England.
3. The responsibilities of providers in the successful management of the NSS are:
  - a. Timely submission of student contact details when requested by Ipsos MORI (November 2018)
  - b. Ensuring good data quality by checking the NSS report (target list) generated by the OfS data checking tool. Requests for any necessary changes which cannot be resolved by correcting the student data may be directed to Ipsos MORI for approval by the OfS within the period December 2018 to February 2019
  - c. Engagement with all guidance and requests issued by the OfS, Ipsos MORI and Texuna Technologies, and attending training and events run by them
  - d. Submitting survey preferences to Ipsos MORI. This includes timing of the survey and the choice of optional bank questions. Optional bank choices should be made in conjunction with their student representative body (students' union, association or guild)
  - e. Promotion of the survey at their provider, ensuring all activities meet the guidelines on avoiding inappropriate influence provided by Ipsos MORI and the funding bodies
  - f. Where appropriate, if advised by Ipsos Mori that response rates are low, undertaking additional promotional activity to encourage students to complete the survey (during the surveying period January 2019 to May 2019)
  - g. Accessing the responses and results of the survey via the dedicated results facility (July/August 2019), Office for Students (OfS) website (OfS publication, including benchmarked data) and Unistats site (for students).
4. Further education colleges can access their target lists for the 2019 NSS on the 2017-18 ILR data checking tool. To ensure that the target list generated by the OfS data checking tool can be replicated on receipt of ILR data from the data service, colleges were asked to ensure that their final version of their ILR R14 return was uploaded to the data checking tool, as described in '2017-18 ILR data checking tool'. They should then provide the requested contact details for students on these lists to Ipsos MORI by **Wednesday 28 November 2018**. Further details can be found in the NSS 2019

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'Guidance for institutions and Students' Unions', which is sent to institutional contacts by Ipsos MORI. The guidance document is also available on the [NSS extranet](#).

5. Additions to or removals from the target list are admitted only under specific circumstances, details of which are provided in the guidance. Any such requests for additions or removals must be submitted to Ipsos MORI and agreed by the OfS prior to their inclusion in or removal from the final target list. If approved, the OfS will inform the provider and make the amendment to the target list.
6. Students are able to opt out when the provider asks if they wish to have their contact details passed on to the survey agency (Ipsos MORI) or at any stage during the survey process.
7. Providers may choose up to six banks of optional questions, and may include up to two additional questions specific to the provider. Providers are asked to agree with their student representative body their choice of optional banks of questions for inclusion. Providers should submit their choice of optional banks and additional questions to Ipsos MORI.

## Scope and coverage of the survey

### Coverage

8. The following providers are covered by NSS 2019:
  - a. All higher education institutions in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland
  - b. Alternative providers in England with specific course designation for new students in 2018-19, who completed a HESA return for 2017-18
  - c. Further education colleges and sixth-form colleges in England and Wales where there are students on directly funded prescribed higher education courses
  - d. Further education colleges in Northern Ireland.
9. All full-time and part-time undergraduate students registered at participating providers are eligible to undertake the NSS during their final year of study (or, for flexible programmes where the final year cannot be predicted, after they are expected to have undertaken more than one full-time equivalent and not before their third year of study) with the following exceptions:
  - a. Students on programmes that do not lead to undergraduate qualifications or credits
  - b. Students on a course lasting one year or one full-time equivalent, or less
  - c. Any students who were surveyed in the 2018 NSS (whether or not they responded) and who remain at the same provider

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- d. Any students who we expect to have completed one full-time equivalent or less since they were last surveyed by the end of academic year 2018-19.
10. Students are included in the 2019 survey population if they are expected to complete between 1 February 2019 and 31 January 2020 inclusive.
11. It is possible to add or remove students to the NSS target list in exceptional circumstances, for example if the length of a student's course has decreased after a provider has submitted its ILR return. The full criteria are set out in the guidance provided by Ipsos MORI.
12. Providers will be able to make requests to add or remove students to or from the NSS population once the target list has been finalised by the OfS. Requests for changes can be made from early December for further education colleges. Requests should be submitted as soon as possible after these dates to ensure they can be processed prior to, or early in, the survey period. All requests must be made through the [NSS extranet](#) and should be made in a single file, including the required level of detail. The OfS or relevant funding body will review all requests for additions and removals and may request further details from providers where necessary. Submitting requests as early as possible and responding to queries in a timely manner will help expedite the process. It may be necessary for the OfS to prioritise approvals by survey start week but we will endeavour to action all requests prior to the survey start date.
13. With the exception of students on enhanced first degrees, postgraduates are not included in the NSS.

### Reasons for excluding individuals from the survey

14. We enable providers to exclude specific groups of students from the target population. These are:
  - a. Students who are deceased
  - b. Students with serious health difficulties (including mental health difficulties), where seeking a response may be distressing for the student
  - c. Students who, having been informed that their contact details will be passed onto the survey agency (Ipsos MORI) for the purposes of the NSS, state that they do not wish to be contacted (students will also be able to opt out during the survey process).
15. These are the only grounds on which students may be excluded from the target population. If the provider feels that students are incorrectly included in the target population owing to errors in the data, then these should be submitted as removal requests, using the process in paragraph 12.
16. Providers should code all excluded students on their sample submission as category 'C' (regardless of whether they meet criteria a, b or c in paragraph 14), and providers should not submit contact details for these students.

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17. If a college identifies an error after it has submitted data to the Education and Skills Funding Agency, but then wishes to remove students, the college will need to explain to the OfS the nature of the error, the students affected, and provide an explanation of how it will ensure the error does not occur again. The OfS will then decide whether these students should be removed from the target list. This may result in a requirement to amend the underlying student data.
18. To enable the OfS to monitor exclusions and verify their consistent application, colleges should retain evidence to support them. Where a student asks that their details are not passed on, we will expect providers to retain evidence of this request. If the number of such requests at any college is so high as to affect our ability to conduct the survey successfully, we will discuss this with the provider.
19. Students should not be removed from the student data file supplied by Ipsos MORI even though their contact details are not supplied.
20. Although some students may withdraw in their final year, they will have had significant interaction with the provider, so their opinions are valuable and should be included.

### Process for supplying student contact data

21. Following submission of the ILR data to the OfS Data Checking Tool, a target list of students to be included in the NSS will be automatically generated on 19 October 2018 and provided to Ipsos MORI. Colleges should provide contact details, according to the standard template that will be supplied by Ipsos MORI, for all students on the list.
22. For colleges the standard collection notice already covers the use of student contact details in general surveys. However, given the nature and importance of the NSS, providers should contact students eligible to take part in the survey informing them that they will be contacted by Ipsos MORI and that they may opt out, if they wish. Suggested wording is at Annex D.
23. Providers have the opportunity to define their own structure for receiving their own NSS data, through one of two optional fields on the sample file to indicate the internal 'department code' for each student. These codes, where populated, will be used solely for providing feedback to the provider.
24. For colleges, the OfS will map between learndirect codes on the ILR and the agreed publication subject hierarchy for publication purposes.
25. Providers should submit the requested contact details for students on these lists to Ipsos MORI by **Wednesday 28 November 2018**. Ipsos MORI will provide guidance to its contacts on how to supply these lists as part of the NSS guidance document. The NSS achieves a high response rate and to ensure this continues it is important that providers submit complete and robust contact details to Ipsos MORI by this date.

## Administration of the survey

26. The 2019 survey will be conducted during the spring term so that the results can be published in summer 2019. To avoid concerns regarding impact on internal surveys, Ipsos MORI will continue to:
- brand the NSS independently, which clearly distinguishes its purpose
  - manage the survey's distribution centrally, so that providers are not involved in contacting students to complete the NSS.
27. A five-week 'window' will operate, so providers can choose to start the survey at a time that fits with term timetables and does not clash with examinations. Providers may select a week between 7 January and 4 February 2019 for the survey to start. There will be no communication with students by Ipsos MORI outside of the timing agreed with each provider.
28. Ipsos MORI will conduct the survey at each provider using a sequence of email and telephone surveying. This will take up to eight weeks at each provider, although there may be a need for some targeted follow-up during and beyond this time to increase response rates. Ipsos MORI will deploy the survey modes tactically to personalise the survey to students and providers, and thus help increase online responses and reduce survey costs.
29. The five-week window is in place to ensure that results can be published in time for prospective students to make informed choices. However, we will consider individual requests for a short extension, where the activities of students make it impractical to conduct the survey during that time. Any provider that wishes to make a case for an extension should contact Ipsos MORI by **Wednesday 28 November 2018**.

## Branding and awareness-raising

30. Comprehensive guidance on NSS 2019, including guidelines on appropriate promotion of the survey, will be available from the Ipsos MORI NSS extranet. It is important that this guidance is adhered to and any queries raised with Ipsos MORI. The funding bodies treat seriously any breaches of this guidance, and may investigate and take action where there is evidence of a breach. We undertake an annual review of the process we adopt to respond to allegations and will publish an updated process in December 2018 before fieldwork takes place. This guidance procedure is intended to be read in conjunction with the Good Practice Guidance issued by Ipsos MORI. We would urge providers to ensure all staff who are responsible for the running of the survey are familiar with Ipsos MORI's guidance and seek advice where needed on their approach to avoiding inappropriate influence
31. Ipsos MORI will produce promotional materials for providers and students' unions to distribute locally. If a provider or students' union wishes to use the NSS branding to develop its own marketing material, it may do so and should discuss this with Ipsos MORI who will advise on good practice and offer guidelines to ensure a reasonable

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degree of consistency across the sector. When it contacts providers, Ipsos MORI will discuss who in the provider is best placed to coordinate promotional activity.

32. Ipsos MORI will manage incentive schemes in which providers may take part. These are centrally managed schemes that enable providers to offer incentives to students to complete the NSS. For example, some providers offered printer credits for students who completed the survey online.
33. Students on flexible programmes will receive tailored communication that more accurately reflects their participation in higher education.

### Questionnaire distribution

34. There are two main methods of data collection: online, and telephone. Ipsos MORI operates a live, open-access website, so that students can log in and complete the survey (this is in addition to the option to respond by following the link in a personalised email). The aim of the site is to verify the identity of students at the point of logging in; once students have completed the survey and their response is validated, they will be automatically removed from the target list and not contacted again. To enable this, and to enable efficient working of the survey more generally, providers should adhere to the deadline for supplying student contact details.
35. Although there are two methods of data collection, we are committed to increasing the online response rate and so reducing the amount of telephone contact. However, phoning remains an important element of the survey and will continue, so providers should supply students' landline and mobile phone numbers where available.
36. To monitor responses and to process data for analysis and reporting, we link all responses to students' ILR learner reference number or known student identifiers. Telephone interviewers will have automatic access to identifiers. Once students have completed the survey, they will be removed from the target list and not contacted again.
37. Throughout the process Ipsos MORI will send reminders to students who have not responded.
38. Response rates, by provider and by subject area, will be monitored continuously during the process. During the telephone stage, response rates will be reviewed and some areas may be identified for additional, targeted follow-up activity, to bring responses up to a sufficient level to report results. This additional activity will involve reminders by email and text message.
39. At any stage during the survey process students may opt out of the survey and will not be contacted again. To do this, students will need to verify their identity by providing some data, such as their date of birth.
40. Provider response rates will be shared by Ipsos MORI during the fieldwork to help providers monitor their survey progress – providers should not share this data more widely. National response rates data will not be made available to providers.

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41. Ipsos MORI will follow up with providers where response rates look as if they will be below those that can be published (see paragraph 43). The funding bodies reserve the right to agree changes to the survey period with individual providers at risk of not meeting the provider-level or subject-level(s) publication threshold. The OfS will publish information on its website about our approach and the actions we may take by January 2019. The completeness and accuracy of students' contact data, as supplied by providers, will be a significant factor in achieving a publishable level of responses.

### Publication of 2019 NSS results

42. A major purpose of the NSS is to provide information to help potential students and their advisers make choices about higher education. It also has an important role in improving the student experience by helping providers to identify areas for action or development.
43. The current publication threshold for NSS results is a 50 per cent response rate with at least ten students responding. All results that meet the publication threshold will be published on the [Unistats website](#). Data will also be published on the OfS website, including benchmarking data. We may publish more data and analysis from the survey than previously available.
44. Data will also be available to providers on the results portal delivered by Texuna Technologies. The results portal will allow providers to access particular elements of their data including optional bank questions, students' open text comments and data below certain publication thresholds.
45. The OfS and UK higher education funding bodies may publish their own analysis of the data including open text comments and optional banks. For data which is not available publicly through the OfS website this will be at aggregate level and not allow providers, courses or individuals to be identified.

## Annex C: Guidance on the 2019 National Student Survey for further education colleges in Northern Ireland

1. The National Student Survey (NSS) will be carried out in 2019 across providers in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland by the Office for Students (OfS) working on behalf of the UK higher education and funding regulatory bodies. Ipsos MORI will manage the survey process and Texuna Technologies will provide the dissemination portal services. The 2019 NSS will follow a similar timetable to the 2018 survey.
2. This annex provides guidance specifically for further education colleges in Northern Ireland.
3. The responsibilities of providers in the successful management of the NSS are:
  - a. Timely submission of student contact details when requested by Ipsos MORI (November 2018)
  - b. Ensuring good data quality by checking the NSS target list generated by the Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland (DfE). Requests for any necessary additions or removals may be directed to Ipsos MORI for DfE approval within the period December 2018 to February 2019
  - c. Engagement with all guidance and requests issued by OfS, higher education funding bodies, Ipsos MORI and Texuna Technologies, and attending training and events run by them
  - d. Submitting survey preferences to Ipsos MORI. This includes timing of the survey and the choice of optional bank questions. Optional bank choices which should be made in conjunction with their student representative body (students' union, association or guild)
  - e. Promotion of the survey at their provider, ensuring all activities meet the guidelines on avoiding inappropriate influence provided by Ipsos MORI and the funding bodies
  - f. Where appropriate, if advised by Ipsos Mori that response rates are low, undertake additional promotional activity to encourage students to complete the survey (during the surveying period January 2019 to May 2019)
  - g. Access the responses and results of the survey via the dedicated results facility (July/August 2019), Office for Students (OfS) website (OfS publication, including benchmarked data) and Unistats site (for students).
4. The target lists will be derived from the CDR 1<sup>st</sup> Snapshot, and will be accessible to further education colleges via the NSS extranet. Further education colleges should provide the requested contact details for students on these lists to Ipsos MORI by **Wednesday 28 November 2018**. Further details can be found in the NSS 2019 'Guidance for institutions and Students' Unions', which is sent to institutional contacts by Ipsos MORI. The guidance document is also available on the [NSS extranet](#).
5. Additions to or removals from the target list are admitted only under specific circumstances, details of which are provided in the guidance. Any such requests for additions or removals must be submitted to Ipsos MORI and agreed by DfE prior to their

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inclusion in or removal from the final target list. If approved, the OfS will inform the provider and make the amendment to the target list.

6. Students will be able to opt out when the provider asks if they wish to have their contact details passed on to the survey agency (Ipsos MORI) or at any stage during the survey process.
7. Providers may choose up to six banks of optional questions, and may include up to two additional questions specific to the provider. Providers are asked to agree with their student representative body their choice of optional banks of questions for inclusion. Providers should submit these to Ipsos MORI.

## Scope and coverage of the survey

### Coverage

8. The following providers are covered by NSS 2019:
  - a. All higher education institutions in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland
  - b. Alternative providers in England with specific course designation for new students in 2018-19, who completed a HESA return for 2017-18
  - c. Further education colleges and sixth-form colleges in England, Wales and Northern Ireland where there are students on publicly funded higher education courses.
9. All full-time and part-time undergraduate students registered at participating providers are eligible to undertake the NSS during their final year of study (or, for flexible programmes where the final year cannot be predicted, after they are expected to have undertaken more than one full-time equivalent and not before their third year of study) with the following exceptions:
  - a. Students on programmes that do not lead to undergraduate qualifications or credits
  - b. Students on a course lasting one year or one full-time equivalent, or less
  - c. Any students who were surveyed in the 2018 NSS (whether or not they responded) and who remain at the same provider
  - d. Any students who we expect to have completed one full-time equivalent or less since they were last surveyed by the end of academic year 2018-19.
10. Students are included in the 2019 survey population if they are expected to complete between 1 February 2019 and 31 January 2020 inclusive.
11. It is possible to add or remove students to the NSS target list in exceptional circumstances. The full criteria are set out in the guidance provided by Ipsos MORI.
12. Providers will be able to make requests to add or remove students to or from the NSS population once the target list has been finalised by the OfS and DfE. Requests for changes can be made from early December for further education colleges. Requests should be submitted as soon as possible after these dates to ensure they can be processed prior to, or early in, the survey period. All requests must be made through the

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NSS extranet and should be made in a single file, including the required level of detail. The OfS and DfE will review all requests for additions and removals and may request further details from colleges where necessary. Submitting requests as early as possible and responding to queries in a timely manner will help expedite the process. It may be necessary for the OfS to prioritise approvals by survey start week but we will endeavour to action all requests prior to the survey start date.

13. With the exception of students on enhanced first degrees, postgraduates are not included in the NSS.

### Reasons for excluding individuals from the survey

14. We enable providers to exclude specific groups of students from the target population. These are:
  - a. Students who are deceased
  - b. Students with serious health difficulties (including mental health difficulties), where seeking a response may be distressing for the student
  - c. Students who, having been informed that their contact details will be passed onto the survey agency (Ipsos MORI) for the purposes of the NSS, state that they do not wish to be contacted (students will also be able to opt out during the survey process).
15. These are the only grounds on which students may be excluded from the target population. If the provider feels that students are incorrectly included in the target population owing to errors in the data, then these should be submitted as removal requests, using the process in paragraph 12.
16. Providers should code all excluded students on their sample submission as category 'C' (regardless of whether they meet criteria a, b or c in paragraph 14), and providers should not submit contact details for these students.
17. If a college identifies an error in the target list and wishes to remove students, the college will need to explain to the DfE the nature of the error, the students affected, and provide an explanation of how it will ensure the error does not occur again. DfE will then decide whether these students should be removed from the target list. This may result in a requirement to amend the underlying student data.
18. To enable DfE to monitor exclusions and verify their consistent application, colleges should retain evidence to support them. Where a student asks that their details are not passed on, we will expect providers to retain evidence of this request. If the number of such requests at any college is so high as to affect our ability to conduct the survey successfully, we will discuss this with the provider.
19. Students should not be removed from the student data file supplied by Ipsos MORI even though their contact details are not supplied.
20. Although some students may withdraw in their final year, they will have had significant interaction with the provider, so their opinions are valuable and should be included.

## Process for supplying student contact data

21. The 1st Snapshot CDR extract will be run overnight on 9 November 2018. This file will be used to generate the cohort for the NSS target list. Following this, the provider should provide contact details, according to the standard template that will be supplied by Ipsos MORI, for all students on the list.
22. For colleges the standard collection notice already covers the use of student contact details in general surveys. However, given the nature and importance of the NSS, providers should contact students eligible to take part in the survey informing them that they will be contacted by Ipsos MORI and that they may opt out, if they wish. Suggested wording is at Annex D.
23. Providers have the opportunity to define their own structure for receiving their own NSS data, through one of two optional fields on the sample file to indicate the internal 'department code' for each student. These codes, where populated, will be used solely for providing feedback to the provider.
24. For colleges, DfE will map between RRQ codes on the CDR and the agreed publication subject hierarchy for publication purposes.
25. Providers should submit the requested contact details for students on these lists to Ipsos MORI by **Wednesday 28 November 2018**. Ipsos MORI will provide guidance to its contacts on how to supply these lists as part of the NSS guidance document. The NSS achieves a high response rate and to ensure this continues it is important that providers submit complete and robust contact details to Ipsos MORI by this date.

## Administration of the survey

26. The 2019 survey will be conducted during the spring term so that the results can be published in summer 2019 To avoid concerns regarding impact on internal surveys, Ipsos MORI will continue to:
  - brand the NSS independently, which clearly distinguishes its purpose
  - manage the survey's distribution centrally, so that providers are not involved in contacting students to complete the NSS.
27. A five-week 'window' will operate, so providers can choose to start the survey at a time that fits with term timetables and does not clash with examinations. Providers may select a week between 7 January and 4 February 2019 for the survey to start. There will be no communication with students outside of the timing agreed with each provider.
28. Ipsos MORI will conduct the survey at each provider using a sequence of email and telephone surveying. This will take up to eight weeks at each provider, although there may be a need for some targeted follow-up during and beyond this time to increase response rates. Ipsos MORI will deploy the survey modes tactically to personalise the survey to students and providers, and thus help increase online responses and reduce survey costs.
29. The five-week window is in place to ensure that results can be published in time for prospective students to make informed choices. However, we will consider individual

requests for a short extension, where the activities of students make it impractical to conduct the survey during that time. Any provider that wishes to make a case for an extension should contact Ipsos MORI by **Wednesday 28 November 2018**.

## Branding and awareness-raising

30. Comprehensive guidance on NSS 2019, including guidelines on appropriate promotion of the survey, will be available from the Ipsos MORI NSS extranet. It is important that this guidance is adhered to and any queries raised with Ipsos MORI. The funding bodies treat seriously any breaches of this guidance, and may investigate and take action where there is evidence of a breach. We undertake an annual review of the process we adopt to respond to allegations and will publish an updated process in December 2018 before fieldwork takes place. This guidance procedure is intended to be read in conjunction with the Good Practice Guidance issued by Ipsos MORI. We would urge providers to ensure all staff who are responsible for the running of the survey are familiar with Ipsos MORI's guidance and seek advice where needed on their approach to avoiding inappropriate influence
31. Ipsos MORI will produce promotional materials for providers and students' unions to distribute locally. If a provider or students' union wishes to use the NSS branding to develop its own marketing material, it may do so and should discuss this with Ipsos MORI who will advise on good practice and offer guidelines to ensure a reasonable degree of consistency across the sector. When it contacts providers, Ipsos MORI will discuss who in the provider is best placed to coordinate promotional activity.
32. Ipsos MORI will manage incentive schemes in which providers may take part. These are centrally managed schemes that enable providers to offer incentives to students to complete the NSS. For example, some providers offered printer credits for students who completed the survey online.
33. Students on flexible programmes will receive tailored communication that more accurately reflects their participation in higher education.

## Questionnaire distribution

34. There are two main methods of data collection: online, and telephone. Ipsos MORI operates a live, open-access website, so that students can log in and complete the survey (this is in addition to the option to respond by following the link in a personalised email). The aim of the site is to verify the identity of students at the point of logging in; once students have completed the survey and their response is validated, they will be automatically removed from the target list and not contacted again. To enable this, and to enable efficient working of the survey more generally, providers should adhere to the deadline for supplying student contact details.
35. Although there are two methods of data collection, we are committed to increasing the online response rate and so reducing the amount of telephone contact. However, phoning remains an important element of the survey and will continue, so we ask providers to supply students' landline and mobile phone numbers where available.

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36. To monitor responses and to process data for analysis and reporting, we link all responses to STUDENT\_ID. Telephone interviewers will have automatic access to identifiers. Once students have completed the survey, they will be removed from the target list and not contacted again.
37. Throughout the process Ipsos MORI will send reminders to students who have not responded.
38. Response rates, by provider and by subject area, will be monitored continuously during the process. During the telephone stage, response rates will be reviewed and some areas may be identified for additional, targeted follow-up activity, to bring responses up to a sufficient level to report results. This additional activity will involve reminders by email and text message.
39. At any stage during the survey process students may opt out of the survey and will not be contacted again. To do this, students will need to verify their identity by providing some data, such as their date of birth.
40. Provider response rates will be shared by Ipsos MORI during the fieldwork to help providers monitor their survey progress – providers should not share this data more widely. National response rates data will not be made available to providers.
41. Ipsos MORI will follow up with providers where response rates look as if they will be below those that can be published (see paragraph 43). The funding bodies reserve the right to agree changes to the survey period with individual providers at risk of not meeting the provider-level or subject-level(s) publication threshold. The OfS will publish information on its website about our approach and the actions we may take by January 2019. The completeness and accuracy of students' contact data, as supplied by providers, will be a significant factor in achieving a publishable level of responses.

## Publication of 2019 NSS results

42. A major purpose of the NSS is to provide information to help potential students and their advisers make choices about higher education. It also has an important role in improving the student experience by helping providers to identify areas for action or development.
43. The current publication threshold for NSS results is a 50 per cent response rate with at least ten students responding. All results that meet the publication threshold will be published on the [Unistats website](#). Data will also be published on the OfS website, including benchmarking data. We may publish more data and analysis from the survey than previously available.
44. Data will also be available to providers on the results portal delivered by Texuna Technologies. The results portal will allow providers to access particular elements of their data including optional bank questions, students' open text comments and data below certain publication thresholds.
45. The OfS and UK higher education funding bodies may publish their own analysis of the data including open text comments and optional banks. For data which is not available publicly through the OfS website this will be at aggregate level and not allow providers, courses or individuals to be identified.

## Annex D: Suggested wording for further education colleges to invite eligible students to take part in the National Student Survey

1. We are committed to encouraging and helping providers to improve the response rate among students studying higher education in further education colleges. Where the proportion of eligible students opting out is over 5 per cent, we expect providers to contact such students to encourage them to participate in the survey. However, students who feel strongly should be able to opt out of completing the survey.
2. We therefore suggest the following wording:

You are invited to take part in the 2019 National Student Survey (NSS).

The NSS is an opportunity for students to give feedback on their academic experience, for example on issues such as teaching, academic support and learning resources. The results are published online and used to help future students to choose courses that best suit their needs and interests. They are also used by universities and college and student unions to improve the student experience. The NSS is conducted across the UK, so that results can be compared nationally. As well as providing important information to prospective students, the results are used by the college to inform improvements and changes that will benefit students in the future. You can see the results of last year's survey at <https://unistats.ac.uk>.

The survey is conducted by Ipsos MORI, an independent market research agency. Students studying on higher education courses run directly by further education colleges are included. All students who are currently in their final year on such courses, and expect to complete their studies between 1 February 2019 and 31 January 2020, are eligible to take part. All survey responses are treated anonymously.

The survey (which can be taken online or by phone) takes about ten minutes to complete. It is increasingly important in providing information to prospective students and to providers. We very much hope that you will be willing to take part. Ipsos MORI will contact all eligible students in the 2019 spring term. However, if you would prefer not to be contacted, please let **xxxxx (contact name)** know by **xxxxx (date)**.