



October 2018

National Student Survey

Good Practice Guide



National Student Survey

Marketing
and
Promoting
the National
Student
Survey

- 2019 –

Short version

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I. Introduction

In order for NSS data to be made publicly available to prospective students, each provider needs to achieve a minimum of 10 respondents and 50% response rate from the students eligible at overall provider level and by each Common Aggregation Hierarchy group (CAH).

To achieve these thresholds, all providers are encouraged to promote the NSS to optimise survey participation among eligible students. Local marketing and promotion are essential to ensuring good response rates. Providers 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 2019 within providers, including details on inappropriate influence and how to avoid this when encouraging student participation. 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 the UK Funding Bodies and may result in the suppression of data for the affected course/subject when the NSS results are published.

Please note that this version of the Good Practice Guide has been amended from previous versions, to account for changes to guidelines regarding the sharing of interim response rates. Please read Section II Promoting the NSS (4. Guidance on the Sharing of Interim Survey Data) carefully to familiarise yourself with the new practice.

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.

II. Promoting the NSS

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

- The Office for Students (OfS)'s¹ guidelines for providers' own marketing campaigns and inappropriate influence
- Guidelines
- 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

Why should providers 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 providers to enhance the student experience.

The purpose of the NSS promotional campaign is to raise awareness of the survey amongst the eligible student population so that the provider can achieve maximum response rates. For the NSS results to be published, the thresholds of **both 10 respondents and 50% response rate** overall and for each reporting unit must be met. Aggregated results that meet the publication threshold are made available via the [OfS](#) and [Unistats](#) websites. Detailed results are also made available to providers in the Summer of each year. Good response rates ensure that providers can benefit from robust data that can help identify areas of good practice and improvement.

¹ In partnership with the relevant funding partners

Providers are invited to engage with the eligible students and try to encourage completion of the survey online at www.thestudentsurvey.com. Providers are expected to refer to these guidelines before and during engagement with eligible students.

1. OfS's Guidance for Promoting the Survey

Providers 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 OfS's² 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 communications for the NSS. Providers are asked to ensure that all members of staff involved in NSS communications are briefed on the following guidelines, including lecturers/tutors/Students' Unions/Associations/Guilds and Student Representatives. By adhering to the guidelines, providers will minimise the potential for inappropriate influence. This will safeguard the integrity of the data and avoid subject/overall provider 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;
- Guidance on sharing interim response rate data during fieldwork;
- Restrictions relating to embedding your NSS campaign into your provider's broader campaign; and
- Information relating to the NSS brand.

² In partnership with the relevant funding partners

2. Inappropriate influence

Providers 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 providers' marketing materials must not attempt to sway the opinion of students in any way.

Q1. What is inappropriate influence?

OfS (in partnership with the relevant funding partners) defines inappropriate influence as **any activity or behaviour that 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 or implicitly instructing students on how to complete the survey, such as explaining the meanings of questions or the NSS response scale. The questions and scale are self-explanatory and students should be left to interpret these in a way they see fit. Providers are not permitted to recommend that students respond in a certain way, e.g. 'I recommend that you select agree or mostly agree', misrepresent the scale to students, i.e. defining the 'neither agree nor disagree' as a negative response, or provide standard or example responses.
- Linking the NSS to league tables, job prospects and the perceived value of students' degrees. Providers are **not** permitted to tell students that negative responses could make their degrees look bad to future employers. There should be no link made between completion of the survey and employers' perceptions of positive and negative outcomes.
- Arranging compulsory sessions for students to complete the NSS. Completion of the NSS, while beneficial to providers, is completely voluntary for students. While arranging completion sessions is allowed, providers 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. Providers should not stand or sit beside students when they are completing the survey, or take them through their responses question-by-question. Students should be given due privacy so they can respond with honesty.
- Comparing the NSS response scale to other scales with different purposes, i.e. assignment marking schemes.

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

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

When promoting the survey, providers should take into consideration whether the campaign could inappropriately influence the type of responses participants may give. OfS (in partnership with the relevant funding partners) expect providers 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 providers should consider the following when developing marketing materials:

- The campaign should **not** influence the results of the survey but rather should aim to boost response rates;
- The campaign should promote the survey, **not** the provider;
- The campaign should **not** explain the response scale or draw attention to consequences of negative responses;
- The campaign should encourage all eligible students to participate, whatever their opinion of the provider or course, but should **not** indicate that the survey is compulsory;
- The campaign should **not** be interpreted by a student or an external person as an attempt to influence the answers they might give.

With regards to direct communications with students (e.g. emails to eligible students or lecture shout outs), providers 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 A](#) 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 provider or to the person who deals with the provider's data submissions, who should be able to provide further guidance regarding 'inappropriate influence' in student surveys.

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

Where a concern or allegation is raised, it will be investigated by OfS through the Allegations Procedure.³ 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. OfS (in partnership with the relevant funding partners) could take action to suppress the affected NSS data for the provider meaning that no NSS results would be published for the affected courses at the provider in the specific year, nor would it be available to use in marketing activities, learning enhancement work or inclusion on Unistats, OfS's website etc.

More information on the Allegations Procedure for raising concerns, and how the OfS deal with allegations of inappropriate influence, can be found in their guidance 'National Student Survey: Procedures for investigating allegations of inappropriate influence on survey results'; this guidance can be read in full at: <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/c68e2add-7523-4feb-95e6-902d05cf7ac1/nss-allegations-procedure-2019.pdf>.

³ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-information-and-data/national-student-survey-nss/inappropriate-influence/>

Please note, the OfS has undertaken an annual review of the Allegations Procedure and has published an updated process in December 2018.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding inappropriate influence, please do not hesitate to contact the OfS Allegations team at NSSAllegations@officeforstudents.org.uk or Ipsos MORI at 020 8861 8110 or nss@ipsos.com who can route this through to the OfS for investigation.

3. Providers' Own Marketing Campaigns

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

Q1. Can providers embed their NSS campaign in their broader promotions?

Providers **are not** to embed their NSS marketing activity in broader provider promotional activities, for example 'Pride' and 'I Love' campaigns.

The reasons why providers are not permitted to embed their NSS campaign into broader provider 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 provider.
- Provider campaigns are generally designed to encourage those it targets to respond positively with regards to the provider. In this context, OfS is not assured that a clear division can be made between the positive provider messages in this type of campaign and the required neutrality of NSS materials.
- Students and providers have raised concerns about embedded campaigns and inappropriate influence.

- If a provider 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 provider campaigns need to include anything from the Ipsos MORI supplied marketing materials?

All internal marketing campaigns should include:

- The NSS logo – please ensure the updated logo is used on any provider materials
- The survey web address www.thestudentsurvey.com (or portal address to redirect to this site)
- The relevant funders (Office for Students, Department for the Economy Northern Ireland, Higher Education Funding Council Wales or Scottish Funding Council) and Ipsos MORI logos

Providers have a responsibility to ensure that the messages around the NSS are 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.

4. Guidance on the Sharing of Interim Survey Data

Interim data on the daily running of the NSS 2019 (namely, response rates) will be made available to providers during fieldwork, in advance of their publication.

The sharing of this information is subject to **greater restrictions than in previous years**. Therefore, even if you are familiar with the NSS, please read the below section carefully to ensure your institution's practice is compliant with the new guidelines.

Q1. Can provider campaigns share interim response rates during fieldwork?

The OfS is now designated as a producer of 'Official Statistics', and therefore complies with the UK Statistics Authority's Code of Practice for Statistics. As a consequence, the release of any data produced through the NSS prior to official publication is subject to various restrictions. This applies to the release of interim data, namely response rate, whilst the survey is in fieldwork.

Whilst running their own marketing campaigns, providers find it beneficial to share interim response rates with students or departments. This practice has been found to boost final response rates and is **both permitted and encouraged** under the new guidelines.

In previous years this practice has included the sharing of response rate data with students and departments by email, on their website or VLE, in lecture shout outs, faculty meetings, on campus TV screens, and in social media posts among other channels. These have occasionally formed part of inter-departmental competitions to achieve higher response rates.

Following the changes in the use of NSS data, interim response rates must **only be released to third parties in the event that this release is limited, documented, and solely for the purposes of operational requirements and/or quality assurance**. As encouraging higher response rates is an operational requirement of the NSS, the release of response rate data to a selection of staff, to student representative bodies and to particular student groups is permitted, provided that this release is limited and documented.

Detailed response rate information must not be disclosed to any third parties (including staff or students) who are not directly involved in the operation of the NSS. , Please ensure that all staff and students accessing the information for promotional purposes are aware that they should consider the information confidential and not for wider or external circulation.

Failure to comply with these requirements may cause the OfS to reconsider its approach to providing access to NSS response rates in advance of publication for future iterations of the NSS.

Q2. How should the dissemination of response rate data be documented?

Providers who wish to share response rates during fieldwork for the purposes of increasing their response rates have a duty to make sure that they will be used for this reason alone, and that this strategy is documented in a Project Communications Plan.

This plan should form a part of your Provider's Communications Strategy on promoting the NSS, and must include the following information:

1. **Details of each group the information is released to;**
 - "Final Year Philosophy Students"
2. **Details of the information that has been shared with them;**
 - "Provider-level and Philosophy department interim response rates (as of 13/03/19)"
3. **Method of distribution;**
 - "Entry on Philosophy Department VLE"
4. **Details of the time the information was shared;**
 - "Posted at 19:00 on 14/03/19"
5. **Operational justification for releasing this information.**
 - "Philosophy Department response rate shared to encourage participation in the survey."

Documenting the **target audience** is sufficient – it is not necessary to document each individual who has had access to the information.

Keeping a Project Communication Plan on file is enough to ensure adequate documentation. This document must be **on record** for inspection by the OfS or the Office for Statistics Regulation in the event of a breach of the code of practice for statistics.

Q3. How will interim response rate data be shared with providers?

The OfS and its partners at Ipsos MORI will share interim response rate information with providers **three times a week** whilst the survey is live. This includes response rates at the provider and department levels.

This information will be released via the NSS extranet, only to the Main or Second NSS contacts at your provider.

NSS contacts will have the following responsibilities:

- To ensure that access to the information is only disseminated to individuals or particular groups in the provider for whom this access is **directly related to the provider's operation of the NSS**;
- Evaluating the operational requirements behind each release of data.

Q4. What activities are permitted under the new guidelines?

Sharing provider response rates with the following groups is **permitted**, provided that they are solely for the purpose of increasing responses to the survey:

- **Academic colleagues**, through faculty meetings or for the purposes of running internal inter-departmental competitions;
- **Target student cohorts**, through the VLE, lecture shout outs, displays on campus screens (only at the provider and at no other institution), student mobile apps, and closed social media groups;
- **Relevant committees, student unions, academic boards or other relevant bodies.**

The following activities are example of those that are **not permitted**, as they are unlikely to improve response rates at the provider:

- Sharing response rates with **anyone outside the provider** (this includes any media organisations, and any other group that is not involved in delivering the NSS at the provider in question);
- Sharing interim response rates for **any purpose other than improving response rates** to the survey, including unrelated promotional purposes.

If you have any questions regarding these new guidelines, please contact the NSS Helpline at nss@ipsos.com.

III. NSS National Marketing Campaign

1. NSS 2019 Campaign

Providers will be sent an NSS marketing pack by Ipsos MORI to help providers promote the NSS. It is not compulsory to use the marketing materials provided.

The following section outlines the materials and support available to providers to help promote the NSS. All the materials detailed here are made available by Ipsos MORI.

1.1. Ipsos MORI marketing packages

Promotional materials must be ordered with Ipsos and will be delivered by Ipsos MORI – we will confirm a date.

Promotional materials are available in Welsh and Providers requiring Welsh versions.

i) Posters

Posters should be displayed in prominent positions of the provider's buildings where there is a lot of student traffic.

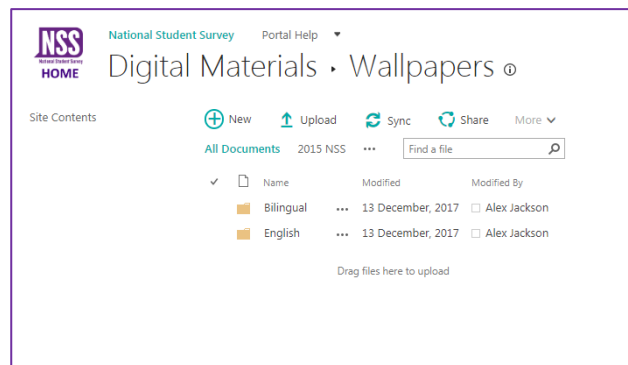
ii) Flyers

The flyers can be made available/handed out in high traffic areas, including reception areas, communal areas (e.g. libraries and cafeterias), in lectures, seminars and teaching sessions, placed in students' pigeonholes, sent to students when communicating by post, etc. They can also be sent to distance learners, students on placement or learners who are not campus-based.

iii) Digital materials

Within the e-marketing pack you will receive wallpapers and e-banners and the design will be based on the main poster design.

iv) NSS Video and YouTube Channel



A video will be available for providers. It can be played on plasma screens around campus and placed on provider websites, as well as any social media profiles to promote the survey. Higher quality versions will be hosted on YouTube and the URL will be communicated to providers.

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, the official video will be translated into Welsh. Videos supplied by Welsh providers also need to be available in both English and Welsh.

v) Logos and icons

The logo can be used on promotional giveaways, e.g. stationary, USBs, t-shirts, stickers, shopping bags, etc. as well as other marketing materials.

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.

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 to complete the online survey.

vi) Supporting materials

Ipsos MORI will also provide template examples of popular communications:

Newspaper articles

Circular letters

Presentation slides

Survey timetable

Staff briefing

2. Promotional Guidelines

Q1. When should we display promotional materials?

The survey website will remain live until **30 April 2019**. Please continue to display the materials until this date.

2.1. Creating your own promotional materials

Providers 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.

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

Providers are permitted to adapt the Ipsos MORI supplied marketing materials, however, restrictions apply.

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

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. Providers can direct students via their portals to the survey web address.

The survey website www.thestudentsurvey.com goes live on **Monday 7 January 2019**. Regardless of your provider'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.

Please note that students can also complete the survey via the telephone. If students do have a preferred method of contact, they can opt out of a contact mode online (www.thestudentsurvey.com) or can contact the Ipsos MORI student helpline at thestudentsurvey@ipsos.com.

2.2. Planning your communication schedule

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

One week before survey launch date

Send pre-emptive emails to eligible students

Survey week 1

- The first email invitations from Ipsos MORI

Survey week 2

- Reminders

Survey week 3

- Telephone survey

Survey week 4-5

- Follow-up stage

Survey week 6

- Targeted follow-up phase

Final survey week

- Final reminders and promotions

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

Inappropriate influence reminder

It is appropriate to remind students that they can 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. When a provider selects their survey choices they can opt to include a prize draw to encourage completion of the survey. Should the provider 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

Providers may organise prize draws if they wish to do so. Ipsos MORI is able to publicise providers' prize draws.

3.2. Opting in to a prize draw

If the provider 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 provider.

Prize draw administration

Ipsos MORI will provide the details of the prize winners to the provider.

4. Social Media

This section outlines some **social media strategies** that providers 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 providers 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 most popular social media platforms used by students and providers alike include Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube. In fact, all these sites and apps can be linked together, allowing providers to share the same post across different social media platforms. Social media applications are already utilised by providers in a range of ways and some ideas for 'creating a buzz' about the NSS are included below.

The marketing guidelines and rules on inappropriate influence also apply to social media posts, so please ensure that all those 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 providers 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 providers' websites/portals and shared amongst eligible students. You could try to develop an engaging 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.

Facebook is a useful way to 'spread the word' about the NSS among final year students. Some providers 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.

A feature of **Facebook** allows users to post live videos across the site. Providers 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/Associations and Guilds and NSS champions



with their own **Facebook** pages 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, providers 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, 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. 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 2018, 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 completion of the survey or to publicise previous results and subsequent changes made at the providers.

Providers 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 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 the survey 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 statement 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 Retweets⁴

To 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.

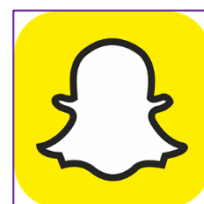
Smartphone Apps. Making use of some of the most popular smartphone apps to promote the NSS would ensure that messages are reaching them through as many means as possible.

Instagram is a social networking medium that allows users to share pictures and videos with others, and to other social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook. Providers 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.

Providers can post pictures or videos of their NSS campaigns in action alongside their custom hashtag campaigns, e.g. #NSS2019, etc. They can also implement NSS Instagram booths across campuses where students can take photos for their provider's **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 providers 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. Providers 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 providers 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

⁴ https://blog.twitter.com/official/en_us/a/2014/what-fuels-a-tweets-engagement.html

or videos taken after dedicated sessions or specific areas on campus where students complete the survey.

4.2. Competitions and prize draws

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

i) Create a challenge

Providers could use social media as an avenue to create an internal or external competition to boost response rates. This can be done in many ways, including:

- Using [Datawrapper](#) to post an **interactive chart** to your intranet or Moodle pages to show the current response rate versus your overall targets (as documented in your provider's Project Communications Plan, see [Section II](#));
- Post response rates to various closed [Facebook](#) pages and challenge other departments or campuses to beat your score (as documented in your provider's Project Communications Plan, see [Section II](#));
- Post a link to the online survey and encourage students to 'share' it in order to be in with a chance to win a small prize;
- Create a competitive element **among campuses** and **other departments** for participation to help make sure as many subject areas meet the threshold for publication;
- Regularly tweet updates using a **custom hashtag** and encourage further participation through the provider [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), [Snapchat](#) and [Facebook](#) accounts while the survey is open;
- Take to [Twitter](#) and [Instagram](#) to encourage students to spread the word, for example offering a reward for the best **NSS tweet** or [Instagram](#) post of the week or for the best method of promotion;

- Run a campaign to boost response rates over fieldwork, for example a member of staff or a rep undertaking a forfeit if internal response rate targets are met. Progress can be posted on closed **Facebook** groups (as documented in your provider's Project Communications Plan, see [Section II](#)), and final challenges can be filmed/photographed and promoted on social media sources, such as **Twitter** and **Instagram**, or added to your **Snapchat** story. In 2013, one SU representative had an NSS logo permanently tattooed to his foot!

ii) Promote providers' prize draws and competitions

Many providers organise prize draws to encourage eligible students to enter the survey. Prizes are a useful element to communicate via social media sources. Promote the prize draws that have been identified to Ipsos MORI to encourage students to complete the survey online, as well as internal rewards and prizes to help boost response rates. Some ways you can do this include:

- Having a “**complete the NSS**” day or week by booking a computer room and providing snacks and sweets so groups of students can complete the survey together. You can promote the session using social media. Please be mindful of student privacy during these sessions. Staff or students running the sessions must not be seen to stand behind students while they complete the survey and cannot complete the survey on anyone else's behalf.
- Providing extra incentives for people to complete the survey using their **smartphone or tablet**. Maybe have a dedicated stall on campus that has any giveaways on offer to students that complete the survey via a mobile device then and there. Again, be mindful of student privacy when they are completing the survey at your stall.
- Encouraging people to tweet when they have completed the survey or received a reward for doing so; custom hashtags such as **#NSSRewards** or **#NSSComplete** can be used for this. You can even take their picture or a video of them completing the survey, with the students' permission, to upload to your **Instagram** accounts or add to your **Snapchat** stories.

- Encouraging participation through the SU [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#) accounts; for example, the Students' Union (Association or Guild) could arrange a social event for students who complete the survey (using [#NSSReward](#) to claim a place).
- Posting real pictures of incentives with an SU representative or NSS mascot. Perhaps you could post pictures of eligible students claiming prizes as well, with their permission. Adding a caption such as "Would you like to get your hands on these?" will contribute toward attracting and encouraging completion. These pictures can be shared across all social media platforms via [Instagram](#) or added to your NSS storyline on [Snapchat](#).

You can also communicate the outcome of the prize draws once fieldwork has closed or the winners have been drawn. Some ideas include:

- Sharing the number of rewards that have been claimed, e.g. the number of coffees given away. In 2018, several providers used their response rate reports to monitor the number of students that had responded and made a charitable donation for every completed response. They communicated the total throughout fieldwork using social media. (Please note: this must be treated the same as response rate data and must be documented in your provider's [Project Communications Plan](#), [see Section II](#))
- Posting a picture or video of the winners claiming their prize, as above.

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 are useful to the participating providers. Thresholds are applied to ensure that there are enough responses to preserve individuals' anonymity. Therefore, data not meeting these thresholds cannot be published.

Ipsos MORI will follow up with providers where response rates seem likely to fall short of the publication thresholds. The funding bodies reserve the right to agree changes to the survey period with individual providers at risk of not meeting the publication threshold. 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 providers to improve their annual response rates.

1. Tips to boost response rates

Engaging Departments and Teaching Staff

Support 'from the top' - from senior and academic staff - can be key to the success of the NSS at a provider. Four in ten students told us that they heard about the NSS through a member of staff. Staff at providers are often best placed to communicate the benefits and importance of the survey - they can communicate directly with students about how the results will be used by prospective students and to improve the learning experience at the provider more generally. See [Section II](#) for what can be deemed as Inappropriate Influence.

Providers have identified that they encourage staff to get involved in the following ways:

Pre-survey launch. Briefing staff to explain the nature and purpose of the survey, how to engage students, an overview of eligibility, how the prize draw process works

(if offered), as well as to remind them (and students) about the conduct of the survey (e.g. anonymity and inappropriate influence).

Holding meetings with senior management, heads of schools and marketing teams to discuss an action plan and form a clear communication strategy for engaging students and encouraging completion. A thorough communications plan built into the student and staff calendar, and around Ipsos MORI's survey schedule, is highly useful to avoid over-contacting students. Please see below for more information on communication planning.

During fieldwork. Encourage staff to:

- Sign up to 'key responsibilities', e.g. distributing promotional materials, implementing an NSS feature on their department website, and co-ordinating email communications to students making them aware of the oncoming survey and the email invitation they will receive from Ipsos MORI.
- Deliver lecture shout outs to their final year students using the Ipsos MORI produced presentation slides and video, or materials created by your own provider. They can also help to promote the survey by handing out flyers to students during seminars.
- Arrange course-specific dedicated sessions for the NSS, possibly incentivised, so students can make use of their personalised links. These can be built into tutors' timetables from the outset. Students should not be told that these sessions are compulsory.
- Use their social media platforms to reach out to students about the survey.
- Circulate weekly response rates to teaching staff/department heads, highlighting areas of good and bad performance and pointing out where their department is compared to others. (Please note: this must be documented in the provider's **Project Communications Plan**, see [Section II](#))

Many providers identify staff support as essential in meeting response rate targets, given their ability to directly engage with students. Some ideas implemented include:

Monitoring response rates. Using the thrice-weekly response rate reports provided by Ipsos MORI to guide internal promotion of the NSS.

Create a competition. Introducing a table for departments/subjects to identify top and bottom performers. Some providers have implemented prizes for those who get the overall best response rate. Social media is particularly effective in creating a sense of competition among students and boosting response rates.

Keep staff abreast of survey progress. Forwarding response rate reports to course leaders, heads of departments and senior management so that they are aware of where targets are /are not being met and can act on it effectively. (Please note: this must be documented in the provider's **Project Communications Plan**, [see Section II](#)).

Building a social media presence. Using departments' social media profiles to post reminders about the survey, response rate updates and details of any incentives and prize draws on offer.

Email Communication

Electronic communication has been identified by respondents and providers as an important way to promote the NSS fieldwork. Providers should:

- 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 so students can find out more.
- Send emails to students addressed from the Principal, Dean of the provider or Pro-Vice-Chancellor; this adds weight to the message. Messages from a named contact, known to the individual student (e.g. course leader/head of department), can be more effective.

- Provide the email details of eligible students to staff at providers to reduce burden on them; this enables them to target messages more efficiently. Introductory and reminder emails regarding the NSS should only be sent to eligible students rather than all final year students to avoid confusion for those students who are not eligible.

Redirecting to the NSS Website

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

Other internal sites used to promote the survey include:

- The providers' intranet sites. Information can be subject-specific or generic.
- Virtual learning environments (VLE), which publicise the NSS, e.g. Moodle. Information can be subject-specific or generic.
- Providers also advertise the NSS on IT terminals within the provider, on computers, plasma screens, etc.

Promotional Materials

Providers 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 supplied promotional materials. Displaying official NSS branded promotional materials around the provider campuses and buildings. Some methods used to maximise the coverage of these materials include:

- Displaying materials in places where final year students will see them. Some providers work with course reps to identify 'traffic hotspots' such as learning resource centres/PC laboratories, lecture theatres, seminar rooms, the library, shops or bars. The NSS video can also be played in these areas and presentation slides can be displayed in final year lectures/tutorials.

- Targeted distribution of materials. For example, some providers hand out flyers in lessons (e.g. with low response rates) or send them out in the post to any online or distance learners to promote the survey and encourage completion.

Creating provider-specific marketing materials. Some providers prefer to create their own 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 OfS's guidelines. Other promotional tools used include:

- *Communicating change.* Showing students what has changed as a result of the NSS and how they are listening, e.g. "You Said, We Did" campaigns.
- *On screen promotions.* Displaying information about the NSS on plasma screens and IT terminals around the provider.
- *Provider mascot.* Some providers introduce a mascot that visits campuses with a laptop talking to final year students to encourage them to complete the survey.
- *Social media.* Building and maintaining a social media presence for the NSS at your provider throughout fieldwork where you can inform students of the dates of the survey, as well as provide them with links to more information on what the survey is, the survey video, and how the results have been used at your provider to implement change.

Internal communication and PR

- Publishing feature articles on the staff intranet to provide background information and tips to staff for engaging students.
- Articles to raise awareness such as feature interviews, publicising the previous year's prize draw winners and communicating changes that have been implemented as a result of NSS findings.

- Features in student papers and/or radio stations to encourage completion.

[Annex B](#) provides examples of articles that could be used as a basis for communications.

Engaging Student Bodies and Representatives

Many providers with a Students' 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 provider's main campaign, giving a student-led and student-focused approach. Furthermore, they identified that early engagement of the SU, such as involving them in planning, can prove beneficial.

Creating a buzz. Student involvement with the SU means that they have an understanding of what appeals to potential respondents and can spread the word.

Targeting promotion. Some providers consult their SU on the best places to display promotional materials, e.g. traffic hotspots. The SU offers a range of places to raise awareness, e.g. SU offices/facilities, shops, bars, etc.

Communicating with students. Some SUs have weekly newsletters, which can be used to promote the NSS.

NSS ambassadors. Many providers have dedicated student/course reps that can help to spread the word to other students about the NSS. Some providers have a dedicated NSS champion/ambassador to help formulate NSS campaigns and help promote the survey to final year students.

Student events. Providers can include NSS promotions in any upcoming SU events, where reps can ask students to complete the survey there and then or hand out NSS-branded giveaways. Some providers find that it is easier to approach students at these type of events where they are all gathered together.

Social media. Encouraging SU reps to promote the NSS on their social media profiles is an effective way to encourage completion.

Incentives

Providers offer a range of incentives to encourage students to complete the NSS. The most common items offered in the past include:

- 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 providers have identified that they work with their SUs to identify the incentive that would be most appropriate for their students.

The Power of Word of Mouth

Providers 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. Remember:

Lecture shout-outs. By encouraging staff to include a dedicated slide at the end of every presentation, show the NSS video in lectures or hand out flyers with any reading lists in seminars.

Student representatives. Reps could spread the NSS word among their peers and illustrate the value of student opinion. They can create a presence for the survey on campus though creating NSS mascots and they can engage societies/associations.

Dedicated Time to Complete the Survey

The majority of providers set up dedicated time or space for 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. Students should be aware that these sessions are not compulsory. Please make staff aware of the rules and regulations surrounding inappropriate influence.

Examples of how sessions are done include:

Allocating time in tutorials to complete the NSS. Some providers build time into their timetables to ensure that students complete the NSS. Some tutors make sure that their class visits PC labs or Learning Resource Centres.

Dedicated PCs or 'hubs' available for completion. Some providers allocate computers or areas called 'hubs' specifically for the completion of the NSS during fieldwork. These labs are set up in areas visited by students.

Subject sessions. Some subject leads have introduced NSS sessions, where they try to entice eligible students to participate in the survey by offering an incentive. Some providers hire a room and offer free pizza/lunch.

Mobile devices. Student reps with mobile devices can be sent to areas frequented by eligible students. This could be in the form of a stall with incentives for those who complete it there and then.

Planning and Coordination

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

Dedicated NSS Operations Team and/or an NSS Steering Group

- Ensuring that representatives from across the provider meet regularly (e.g. once every 2 weeks) to discuss response rates and how to boost them.

- Getting a group together to brainstorm promotional ideas. They can openly discuss areas of low response and when appropriate, invite department/subject representatives to discuss areas of lower performance.
- Tracking email conversations between representatives to communicate weekly response rates and discuss promotional needs.
- Bringing representatives from each department together at regular meetings and encouraging them to cascade information to their colleagues in department meetings.

All meetings involving the sharing of interim response rates must be documented in the provider's [Project Communications Plan](#), [see Section II](#).

Communications planning. In order to maximise response rates, some providers have developed a communications plan for the NSS Fieldwork before the launch of the survey.

Preparing for fieldwork. Formal plans to ensure that staff are fully briefed on the NSS process, the importance of reaching required response rates, and the start and end dates of fieldwork.

Timetable for promotional activity. Some providers produce a detailed plan of promotional activity so that they target students appropriately. This includes:

- Ensuring that students are aware of any prizes on offer and how the process for these works.
- Developing complementary email communications to reach students in the intervening periods between Ipsos MORI communications.
- Identification of key dates in the student and staff calendar that may affect participation, e.g. holidays, exams, and coursework deadlines.

Identification of key responsibilities. Some providers have a formal document which identifies who will have responsibilities for communications, e.g. those best placed to engage with students and what their key responsibilities should be.

Innovative ideas. Providers explore different ideas to engage students with the NSS, including involving students from relevant specialisms to get involved with the promotion, e.g. Art & Design, Marketing and/or Communications to develop NSS strategies for the provider.

General awareness. Some providers also explore ways to raise awareness of the NSS amongst non-final year students. This includes poster campaigns to promote changes that have been implemented as a result of NSS findings.

Contacting students. Survey fatigue and general annoyance from being over-contacted can prevent eligible students from participating in the survey. Providers should be co-ordinating their contact activity to avoid this, for example:

- Planning communications in line with the Ipsos MORI timetable.
- Being aware of any other internal research that is being undertaken by the provider and planning communications so students are not bombarded.
- Ensuring that communications with students are staggered.
- Personalising emails or signing emails from representatives that are recognised by students, e.g. Dean or subject head.

Communications Checklist

Findings from previous surveys suggest that contact from the provider plays a key role in boosting response rates.

Many providers 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. The following pages summarise some of the initiatives adopted in the form of a checklist, which providers can follow both before and throughout the fieldwork period.

COMMUNICATIONS CHECK LIST

Pre-survey launch

- Organise staff briefing(s).**
- Develop a clear strategy and timeline for contacting students.**
- Display promotional materials in high traffic areas.**
- Organise meetings with student representatives.**
- Inform student media and PR of the survey launch.**
- Develop electronic presence.**
- Build a social media presence for the NSS at your provider.**
- Send a pre-emptive email to students.**

During the fieldwork period

- Lecture shout-outs.
- Regular staff updates.
- Email reminders.
- Organise dedicated sessions to complete survey.
- Implement a dedicated Survey Day/Week for completing the NSS.
- Consider offering incentives.
- Run PR/media activity throughout the fieldwork.
- Word of mouth.
- Creating response rate competitions between different departments.
- Maintain NSS social media presence.
- Senior management support.
- Students' Union (Association or Guild) or student rep involvement.
- Provider staff briefings and updates.
- Online promotion.
- Targeted email reminders.
- Engaging 'harder-to-reach' students.

Annexes

A. Advice for Staff

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

Staff at providers 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, providers, SUs and other stakeholders.

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 providers 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.

Students are included in the 2019 survey population if they are expected to complete their course between 1 February 2019 and 31 January 2020 inclusive.

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 2019 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 2019, 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 2018 will not be surveyed in 2019, unless removed by OfS.

The following are not eligible:

- Students on programmes that do not lead to undergraduate qualifications or credits.
- Students on a course lasting one year or one FTE (full-time equivalent) or less.
- Any students who were eligible in the NSS 2018 (whether or not they responded) and who remain at the same institution.
- Students under the age of 16.

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

In order for results to be made publically available on the OfS and Unistats websites, 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 providers, 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. The full questionnaire and optional banks can be found on the Extranet home page.

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.

Other questions included in the NSS are:

- NHS practice placement questions. Please note that students will only be asked to respond to the NHS questions if they have been flagged as being on an NHS-funded course. These questions will be included before question 27 in the core questionnaire.
- Degree Apprenticeship questions. Students will only be asked to respond to the degree apprenticeship questions outlined above if they have been flagged as being on a degree apprenticeship or a higher apprenticeship at levels 6 or 7. These questions will be included after the optional banks.

- Providers can add up to six optional modules from a bank of questions, and up to two questions of their own devise.
- All students studying their first degrees will be eligible to complete the Intentions After Graduation Survey (IAGS). The survey is commissioned by the UK funding bodies and asks students about their immediate intentions after graduating. The IAGS will be asked after students have submitted their responses to the NSS.
- Marketing question. Students will be asked to tell us where/how they found out about the NSS after their online response has been submitted. This question is optional and can be skipped.

Q6. How can students access the NSS?

Online

All students with valid email addresses will be sent email invitations to take part in the survey.

Students can also go online to complete the survey directly at www.thestudentsurvey.com between **7 January 2019** and **30 April 2019**, regardless of whether they have received an email or not.

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

Once a validated response has been received from a student, they will receive an automated confirmation email.

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.

Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course.

Please show the extent of your agreement by selecting the box that reflects your current view of your course as a whole.

Definitely agree

Mostly agree

Neither agree nor disagree

Mostly disagree

Definitely disagree

Not applicable

Telephone

We will make follow up calls to non-responding students.

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 NSS contacts at your provider to identify which students are included in the list of eligible students for the NSS 2019. You can also contact the NSS dedicated helpline at nss@ipsos.com.

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

Please send an email including the student's learner number and identifier to 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 where we can check their eligibility.

Q8. How can we boost our response rates?

There are a number of ways to promote the NSS within your subject areas; please refer to the guidance provided in the NSS 2019 Good Practice Guide.

1. Inappropriate influence

Q1. What is inappropriate influence and why is it important to ensure that there is no undue influence in promoting the NSS?

OfS (in partnership with the relevant funding partners) defines inappropriate influence as **any activity or behaviour that may encourage students to reflect anything other than their true opinion of their experiences during their course in their NSS responses.**

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.

Inappropriate influence can emerge in several ways, for example:

- Explicitly or implicitly 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. Staff are not permitted to recommend that students respond in a certain way, e.g. 'I recommend that you select agree or mostly agree', misrepresent the scale to students, i.e. defining the 'neither agree nor disagree' as a negative response, or provide standard or example responses.
- Linking the NSS to league tables, job prospects and the perceived value of students' degrees. Staff are **not** permitted to tell students that negative responses could make their degrees look bad to future employers. There should be no link made between completion of the survey and employers' perceptions of positive and negative outcomes.
- Arranging compulsory sessions for students to complete the NSS. Completion of the NSS, while beneficial to providers, is completely voluntary for students. While arranging

completion sessions is allowed, staff 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. Staff should not stand or sit beside students when they are completing the survey, or take them through their responses question-by-question. 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 staff should be alert to other possible types of inappropriate influence.

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

When promoting the survey, staff should take into consideration whether the campaign could inappropriately influence the type of responses participants may give. OfS (in partnership with the relevant funding partners) expect providers 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 staff should consider the following when developing marketing materials:

- The campaign should **not** influence the results of the survey but rather should aim to boost response rates;
- The campaign should promote the survey, **not** the provider;
- The campaign should **not** explain the response scale or draw attention to consequences of negative responses;
- The campaign should encourage all eligible students to participate, whatever their opinion of the provider or course, but should **not** indicate that the survey is compulsory;

- The campaign should **not** be interpreted by a student or an external person as an attempt to influence the answers they might give.

With regards to direct communications with students (e.g. emails to eligible students or lecture shout outs), providers 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. 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 provider or to the person who deals with the provider's data submissions, who should be able to provide further guidance regarding 'inappropriate influence' in student surveys.

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

Where a concern or allegation is raised, it will be investigated by OfS through the Allegations Procedure.⁵ 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. OfS (in partnership with the relevant funding partners) could take action to suppress the affected NSS data for the provider meaning that no NSS results would be published for the affected courses at the provider in the specific year, nor would it be available to use in marketing activities, learning enhancement work or inclusion on Unistats, OfS's website etc.

More information on the Allegations Procedure for raising concerns, and how the OfS deal with allegations of inappropriate influence, can be found in their guidance 'National Student Survey: Procedures for investigating allegations of inappropriate influence on survey results'; this guidance can be read in full at:

⁵ <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/student-information-and-data/national-student-survey-nss/inappropriate-influence/>

https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/1169/nss_allegations_procedure.pdf.

Please note, OfS undertake an annual review of the Allegations Procedure and will publish an updated process in December 2018 before the 2019 fieldwork takes place.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding inappropriate influence, please do not hesitate to contact the OfS Allegations team at NSSAllegations@officeforstudents.org.uk or Ipsos MORI at 020 8861 8110 or nss@ipsos.com who can route this through to the OfS for investigation.

2. Prize Draws

How does the prize draw process work?

You will be told if your provider 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 provider.

3. Response rates

Will I get updates on response rates during fieldwork?

Ipsos MORI issues regular response rate reports to providers 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. All instances of this information being shared must be documented in the provider's [Project Communications Plan](#), [see Section II](#).

B. Supporting Materials⁶

Intranet/news articles

1. Provider/subject/department intranet template:

The National Student Survey (NSS) 2019 is now live at [provider]. The survey is open to mostly final year undergraduates, who can complete it now at www.thestudentsurvey.com.

What is the NSS?

The NSS is a nationally recognised annual survey of mostly final year undergraduates in the UK. The survey provides students with an opportunity to give their honest opinions on what they liked about their time on their course at [provider] as well as things that they feel could have been improved.

The survey is administered by [Ipsos MORI](#), an independent market research agency on behalf of the UK Higher Education Funding Bodies and Regulator, so responses remain anonymous at all times.

Why should I take part?

- *The NSS provides you with the opportunity to provide honest feedback on your student experience;*
- *Your feedback will be used to improve the student experience at [provider];*
- *The results are taken very seriously and inform the quality assurance system with regards to teaching quality;*
- *Results are used by prospective students, their families and advisors to make decisions on what and where to study.*

Have Your Say at [provider].

⁶ All supporting materials in Annex B will be translated into Welsh. Welsh providers will be issued these materials once they are available.

What happens with the results?

The NSS results are made publicly available to help prospective students, their families and advisors make informed decisions of where and what to study. Providers and supporting Students' Unions also use the data to identify areas of strengths and weaknesses to bring about change and enhancements to improve the learning experience for future generations of students.

Data from previous surveys are available on [Unistats](#).

Letters/memos

1. Email to eligible students

[Do you want your opinions on your student experience to be heard? / Are you in your final year of a course leading to undergraduate qualifications or credits? Do you want your opinions on your student¹ experience to be heard?]

Take part in the [National Student Survey \(NSS\) 2019!](#) Whether you feel your time as a student at [\[provider\]](#) has been great, or you feel some aspects could be improved, the NSS gives you a unique opportunity to have your say at [\[provider\]](#).

Your opinions matter and will shape the future at [\[provider\]](#). Based on previous years' results we have implemented the following changes: [\[example of changes made by NSS results e.g. extended library hours, better access to personal tutors, invested in more PCs in campus\]](#).

NSS results are made publicly available through [Unistats](#) to help prospective students, their families and advisors make informed decisions of where and what to study. Have Your Say at [\[provider\]](#).

If you are eligible for the survey, [Ipsos MORI](#) will contact you by email during [\[survey start week\]](#) to invite you to fill in the survey online. However, you can complete the NSS online or via a mobile device at www.thestudentsurvey.com at any time from 7 January 2019 to 30 April 2019. Thank you in advance for taking part in the NSS!

2. Memo to staff

The National Student Survey 2019

The National Student Survey (NSS) 2019 will launch at [\[provider\]](#) on the [\[survey start week\]](#). The NSS is a survey of mostly final year undergraduates in England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland. FE colleges with directly funded HE students (i.e. students in their final year of a course leading to undergraduate qualifications or credits) in England, Northern Ireland and Wales, and Alternative Providers with specific course designation in England will also participate. The NSS is commissioned by the [Office for Students \(OfS\)](#), on behalf of the UK funding bodies and administered by [Ipsos MORI](#), an independent research company.

The NSS results are made available to participating providers annually and are published nationally on the [Unistats](#) website.

Promotion of the NSS at a localised level is a key factor in achieving the required response rates for results to be made publicly available. Good response rates ensure that NSS data can be made available to prospective students, providers and students' unions to support student choice and quality enhancement.

Local marketing of the survey cannot be over-emphasised. Although Ipsos MORI can communicate with non-responsive students and encourage participation, we are in the prime position to raise awareness of the survey, convey its importance and encourage participation. It is important to be aware of the marketing guidelines and what may constitute inappropriate influence. Please see the attached Staff Briefing [\[attach Ipsos MORI's Advice for Staff in Annex A\]](#) for more information. All internal marketing activities should have the aim to

raise awareness of the NSS amongst mostly final year undergraduate students and encourage students to give honest and anonymous feedback on their course experience.

It is important that as many students as possible provide their feedback for the survey to generate reliable information. We need to achieve a response rate of at least 50% at provider level and in our subjects of study (combined with 10 respondents per cohort) in order for our data to be made publicly available. *[Last year we achieved an overall response rate of XX% and we are aiming to beat that this year] [Last year we only managed to achieve an overall response rate of XX% so we need to improve on this and reach at least 50%].*

During *[survey start week]* our eligible students will be sent an invitation email to complete the NSS. Those who have not completed the survey may later be contacted via telephone. Early online completion is desirable so please make your students aware of the NSS and encourage them to complete the survey online at www.thestudentsurvey.com (via computer or mobile device) before 30 April 2019. Students may also opt out of the survey at any point during fieldwork.

***[NSS Coordinator/students' union contact]* will be coordinating our NSS promotion this year and ensuring that guidelines issued by [OfS](#) in relation to promotion are adhered to – more information is in the attached Staff Briefing. In short, please make sure that your students are:**

- Encouraged to give their honest feedback on what they liked and did not like about their course;
- Not asked to fill in the survey while a member of staff is overseeing their responses or made to feel that their responses are being monitored;
- Not encouraged to reflect in their answers anything other than their genuine perception of their experience.

If you have any questions, please contact *[NSS Coordinator]* or Ipsos MORI at nss@ipsos.com. If your students have any questions, please direct them to www.thestudentsurvey.com or they can contact the student helpline at [Ipsos MORI](#) directly at thestudentsurvey@ipsos.com.

Many thanks for your help.

[NSS Champion]

3. Briefing for course reps

The National Student Survey 2019

The National Student Survey (NSS) 2019 will launch at [provider] on the [survey start week]. The NSS is a survey of mostly final year undergraduates in England, Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland. FE colleges with directly funded HE students (i.e. students in their final year of a course leading to undergraduate qualifications or credits) in England, Northern Ireland and Wales, and Alternative Providers with specific course designation in England will also participate. The annual survey gathers the opinions of students about their experiences on their course. It asks 27 core questions on a range of issues including the quality of teaching, learning opportunities, assessment and feedback, academic support, organisation and management, learning resources, learning community and student voice.

The NSS provides a powerful resource for informing providers on how to enhance the student learning experience. For course reps, the NSS provides valuable information on those that have studied on your course.

In order for the results to be made public, each provider and subject needs at least 10 students and 50% of eligible students to respond. The higher the response rate, the better!

Student and course reps can make a real difference to response rates by raising awareness of the survey and the impact it can have, and by targeting their promotion of the survey in areas most likely to attract students, e.g. student shops or on social media sites. In order to ensure that [provider] achieves the required response rates for publication of their data, we are writing to ask for your support to help us to promote the survey to your peers.

Tips for promoting the survey include:

- *Contacting those on your course informing them of what the NSS is, and why it is important to complete;*
- *Creating an exciting promotional campaign which will grab people's attention;*
- *Working with other student reps and asking for past NSS results which you can use when speaking to current students about what others have said;*
- *"You said, we did" campaigns are a great way of making people realise that their feedback makes a difference. It reflects how students' opinions have been taken into account in previous years and highlights the changes that have resulted;*
- *Use the official NSS marketing materials, provided by Ipsos MORI;*
- *Read the Ipsos MORI marketing guidelines and tips in the Good Practice Guide.*

During [survey start week], all eligible students will be sent an invitation email to complete the NSS. Those who have not completed the survey may later be contacted by telephone. Early online completion is desirable so please make your fellow students aware of the NSS and encourage them to complete the survey online at www.thestudentsurvey.com (via computer or mobile device) before 30 April 2019. Students may also opt out of the survey at any point during the fieldwork.

If you have any questions, please contact [NSS Coordinator] or Ipsos MORI at nss@ipsos.com. If your students have any questions, please direct them to www.thestudentsurvey.com or they can contact the student helpline at Ipsos MORI directly at thestudentsurvey@ipsos.com.

Many thanks for your help.

[NSS Champion]