

Office for
Students



National Student Survey 2026

Quality update



Department for the

Economy



Scottish Funding Council

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The National Student Survey (NSS) is managed by the Office for Students (OfS) on behalf of the UK funding and regulatory bodies – the Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland), the Scottish Funding Council and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales. The survey provides information for prospective students and for stakeholders to support a high quality learning experience.

National Student Survey 2026: Quality update

1. This report contains information on the quality characteristics of the data collected through the National Student Survey (NSS) 2026.
2. The NSS was open from 7 January to 30 April 2026. The survey is mixed mode, with responses collected online, by telephone and a small number of postal responses.
3. The information in this report will help you to understand the strengths and limitations of the data and decide best how to use it.
4. The current version of the survey has now been running for four years, and there are no additional concerns this year about the quality or reliability of the data. This is therefore a short quality update, for more information see the fuller quality report produced in 2024.¹

Important points

5. The National Student Survey is a census survey: we survey every student in our target population of final year undergraduates. The survey results therefore cannot be subject to sampling error.
6. Because it is useful to providers, students and the general public, we publish NSS results based on very small populations (as low as ten students). There is a high degree of statistical uncertainty around some of these results, and they should always be viewed together with the uncertainty measures included in the data dashboard.

Update on accuracy and reliability

7. The response rates for the National Student Survey remain high, which reduces the risk of non-response bias. As an additional precaution against non-response bias, we suppress results when the response rate for the population is less than 50 per cent. The overall response rate for NSS 2026 is 71.8 per cent, which is slightly lower than the NSS 2024 response rate of 72.3 per cent. The response rates for the participating countries are 72.0 per cent for England, 70.0 per cent for Northern Ireland, 69.6 per cent for Scotland and 72.5 per cent for Wales. The response rates for 2026 are slightly lower for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales but continue to be high overall.
8. The NSS is a mixed mode survey: respondents can answer the survey either online or by telephone. In 2026, 78.4 per cent of respondents answered the survey online, compared with 78.3 in 2025. There is a risk with mixed mode surveys that responses can vary depending on the mode, which in turn affects the accuracy of the results. The positivity measure between online and telephone respondents varies by question, with phone responses an average of 1 percentage point and a maximum difference of 5

¹ Available from [National Student Survey 2024 results - Office for Students](#).

percentage points higher. This difference is slightly less than seen in NSS 2025 which was less than that seen in 2024.

9. The accuracy of the NSS results depends on students being able to freely express their views about their experience. We recognise a risk that students may be influenced by teaching staff, and others, to respond to the survey in a way that does not reflect their experience. This would distort the survey and we have a process for identifying and dealing with inappropriate influence.² In 2026, we have not found it necessary to suppress any results due to inappropriate influence.
10. While generating the NSS statistics, we assessed the completeness of the underlying student data which is used to report by student characteristic and inform benchmark calculations. Points of note are:
 - a. Where benchmarking factors have unknown values, or very small groups, for the purposes of benchmarking these are combined with the largest group within that factor. For instance, UK students with unknown ethnicity are combined with the white ethnic group.³ We also suppress cases where more than 50 per cent of a benchmarking factor are unknown. This led to the suppression of benchmarks for 200 groups (out of a total of 120,000) for the NSS 2026 release.
 - b. There remain some data that is unknown or not available. This is often higher in the new fields introduced into the NSS portal in 2023, which are published as part of the sector-level dashboard. These extra fields are used to give additional information about the relationships between the student population and NSS results, but are not benchmarking factors or published more widely at provider-level.
 - c. Following discussions with the Department for Economy, Northern Ireland we have increased the number of populated data splits for Northern Ireland colleges. The number of populated student characteristic splits increased for these colleges in NSS 2025.
 - d. Eligibility for Free School Meals, Service Child Status and Estrangement will not be included in the splits for sector-level release due to a couple of data issues. These student characteristics will be included at a later date.
11. With more than two years of consistent data, we could return to aggregating results across years, in the cases where publication thresholds are not met. However, this makes the data more complicated to understand, especially since benchmarks are provided. At this stage we are not planning to aggregate results across years in the NSS publication.

² See: [Inappropriate influence - Office for Students](#).

³ See: [NSS documentation and definitions - Office for Students](#).



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