

Office for
Students



The National Student Survey 2026



Department for the
Economy

Medr

Y Comisiwn Addysg Drydyddol ac Ymchwil
Commission for Tertiary Education and Research



Scottish Funding Council
Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba

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Introduction

1. This publication sets out the arrangements for the National Student Survey (NSS) 2026 and the actions required from participating:
 - universities
 - further education colleges and sixth form colleges that run higher education courses
 - other higher education providers that return student data to HESA.
2. Table 1 summarises actions and key milestones for participating providers. More information is in paragraphs 17 to 20 and in the annexes of this document.

Table 1: Provider actions and key milestones

Date	Actions and key milestones
22 October 2025	Ipsos to issue NSS 2026 set-up guide and good practice guide to providers
28 November 2025	Review and update NSS contact details
28 November 2025	Complete 'my survey options' form
28 November 2025	Submit NSS 2026 sample templates with contact details of eligible students
7 January 2026	The NSS will launch
8 January – 30 April 2026	The survey fieldwork period
8 July 2026	Provisional date for publishing the NSS 2026 results on the OfS website and for dissemination of detailed results to individual providers through the NSS data portal

3. This publication also provides an overview of the administration of the survey, provider support contact details, survey timetable and dissemination of results.

National Student Survey 2026

4. The NSS is a UK-wide survey undertaken by final year higher education students to give feedback on their courses. The survey is managed by the Office for Students (OfS) on behalf of the four UK funding and regulatory bodies.
5. The survey is a key component of the quality assurance and wider regulatory landscape in UK higher education. Participation is compulsory for higher education providers as follows:
 - a. In **England**, all providers registered with and regulated by the OfS will be expected to participate in the NSS as an ongoing condition of registration.
 - b. In **Northern Ireland**, NSS participation is a condition of funding as set out in the financial memoranda between universities and the Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland). Further education colleges in Northern Ireland take part in the NSS to meet quality assurance requirements.
 - c. In **Scotland**, participation is a condition of the Scottish Funding Council's funding for higher education providers.
 - d. In **Wales**, all regulated providers and funded providers are expected to participate in the NSS to ensure that the views of their diverse student populations are represented and that providers have regard to their Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)¹ duties to advance equality of opportunities, eliminate unlawful discrimination, foster good relations and promote equality. NSS outcomes will provide information to Medr, the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research, the regulator of tertiary education in Wales.
6. The survey also provides information for prospective students to help them find the right course and provides data that supports universities and colleges to improve the student experience.
7. The survey will be delivered on behalf of the UK funding and regulatory bodies by:
 - Ipsos, which will administer the survey – see paragraphs 22-26 for more details.
 - CACI Limited, which will deliver the data dissemination portal for providers – see paragraphs 30-32 for more details.

Key points

NSS 2026 questionnaire

8. For NSS 2026, the NSS questionnaire will be the same as for NSS 2025 and will be delivered across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. The freedom of expression question will be asked to students in England only and the overall satisfaction question will be asked to students in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland only.
9. The UK funding and regulatory bodies ran a shorter fieldwork pilot in NSS 2025 alongside the standard fieldwork schedule to test an approach to mitigate the risk of any drop in NSS

¹ Please see [Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 \(EA2010\)](#) which details the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).

response rates. We are considering the findings from the pilot and how to handle a shorter survey fieldwork period going forward. The shorter survey period is anticipated to start in the 2027-28 academic year for all providers, to accommodate a later sign-off date for the student return. However, for NSS 2026 we are continuing with the normal fieldwork schedule.

10. The OfS also ran the sexual misconduct survey, in England only, using the NSS 2025 platform. An analysis of the survey results and sector-level data were published in September 2025.²
11. The full list of NSS 2026 questions can be found in Annex A available on the same OfS webpage as this document.
12. The optional bank questions and their response scales will remain the same in 2026, using the Likert response scale.

Survey promotion

13. To reduce the work required of providers, we are continuing with the principle that providers in England are not required to promote the NSS 2026 to their students. However, we recognise that some providers in England will wish to do so. Providers in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are still required to promote the survey. We expect any providers promoting the survey to review any internal campaigns to ensure that they meet the guidance on marketing and promoting of the NSS and avoiding inappropriate influence (see the 2026 good practice guide).³
14. During survey fieldwork, responses will be monitored, and targeted follow-up is carried out to ensure that publication thresholds are met. In early March, in addition to the targeted follow-up, all providers that are at risk of not meeting the publication threshold will be put into the booster phase to send additional email reminders and an additional SMS to their non-responding students. The booster phase will start automatically if a provider's response rate is below 43 per cent by mid-March and will continue for some until mid-April. The fieldwork timetable is set out in the Ipsos set-up guide for providers which is available on the Ipsos NSS extranet.⁴

Survey costs

15. The costs of the NSS 2026 for universities and colleges in England, Wales and Northern Ireland will be covered by the relevant governments through the OfS, Medr and the Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland). All providers in Scotland are required to contribute to the costs of their students' participation and will be contacted by the Scottish Funding Council with further details on this. The Scottish Funding Council will also contribute to the costs of the survey.

² Available at [Sexual misconduct survey 2025 - analysis of results - Office for Students](#)

³ Available at [NSS extranet](#). Please note: the NSS extranet is accessible to those in the ipsosgroup.sharepoint.com directory.

⁴ See [NSS extranet](#). Please note: the NSS extranet is accessible to those in the ipsosgroup.sharepoint.com directory.

Survey timetable

16. The timetable for NSS 2026 will run as follows:

- a. The NSS will launch on **7 January 2026**.
- b. The survey fieldwork will take place between **8 January** and **30 April 2026** and will be run by Ipsos.
- c. The provisional date for publication of the NSS 2026 results on the OfS website is **8 July 2026 at 0930**. Detailed results will be disseminated to individual providers through the NSS data portal provided by CACI Limited on the same date and time. The NSS 2026 results publication is subject to decisions and final agreement from the UK funding and regulatory bodies following the quality review of the data.
- d. NSS results at course level will be published on the Discover Uni website.⁵

Actions for providers for NSS 2026

17. All participating providers are asked to carry out the following actions:

- a. Review, and where necessary update, their relevant NSS provider contact details. The information should be supplied using the 'My details' form on the Ipsos NSS extranet.⁶ Ipsos issued login details for the NSS extranet to the nominated main and secondary NSS provider contacts in the week commencing 29 September 2025.
- b. Submit their completed 'My survey options' form through the Ipsos NSS extranet. This form asks for providers' preferences for their survey start week and optional questions, and details of any prize draws.
- c. Populate their NSS 2026 sample templates with the requested contact details for all students on their target list; this is a list of all students eligible for NSS 2026, based on the 2024-25 student data. Details should be supplied via the 'Upload sample data' section of the Ipsos NSS extranet. Any proposed additions to or removals from the target list should follow the process set out by Ipsos.

18. All participating providers are asked to complete the above actions by **28 November 2025**.

Instructions on how to supply this information are included in the NSS 2026 set-up guide, which will be issued to provider contacts by Ipsos on 22 October 2025. The guidance is also available on the Ipsos NSS extranet⁷ and includes information regarding survey administration, key responsibilities and dates.

19. Detailed guidance relating to NSS 2026 and the actions requested from all participating providers are in the annexes available on the same OfS webpage as this document:

⁵ See <https://discoveruni.gov.uk>.

⁶ See NSS extranet. Please note: the NSS extranet is accessible to those in the ipsosgroup.sharepoint.com directory.

⁷ See NSS extranet. Please note: the NSS extranet is accessible to those in the ipsosgroup.sharepoint.com directory.

- Higher education providers in all nations and further education colleges in Wales returning student data to HESA – see Annex B.
- Further education colleges in England – see Annex C.
- Further education colleges in Northern Ireland – see Annex D.

20. In a drive to reduce burden on providers, the additions and removals process has been reviewed and updated for NSS 2026. The annexes of this document and the NSS 2026 set-up guide provided by Ipsos provide further details about this process.

Further support

21. The active support of participating providers is crucial to ensuring the survey data is of high quality. We encourage all providers and students' unions to draw on the resources available and to get in touch if they require additional support. Table 2 shows the contacts for different elements of the NSS.

Table 2: NSS contacts

Organisation	Email address	First point of contact for queries relating to
Ipsos	nss@ipsos.com	The running of the survey, including: • setting up and promoting the survey • student target lists • optional questions • incentive schemes
CACI Limited	NSS support team can be contacted via the Contact Support form on the NSS data portal	Providers' detailed results on the NSS data portal
Office for Students	nss@officeforstudents.org.uk nssallegations@officeforstudents.org.uk	Areas such as: • NSS policy and development • onward use of results • allegations of inappropriate influence

Administration of NSS 2026

22. Ipsos administers the survey on behalf of the OfS and the other UK funding and regulatory bodies. It is responsible for contacting students, promoting the survey and providing cleaned data to the funding bodies. As part of its role, Ipsos will liaise directly with providers regarding survey administration and will offer advice and support to set up and prepare for the survey. This will include survey options such as start week, optional bank questions and provider-specific questions.
23. Providers will be invited to select one of five weeks when Ipsos can launch the survey to their students. There will be no communication from Ipsos with students outside the times agreed with individual providers.
24. Ipsos will issue a comprehensive guidance document, 'Setting up and preparing for the National Student Survey 2026',⁸ for all participating providers on 22 October 2025. The guidance should be read in conjunction with this publication.
25. For providers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and any providers in England that want to promote the survey, Ipsos will:
 - a. Supply NSS-branded marketing materials and advise providers on the production of their own materials.
 - b. Facilitate incentive schemes to encourage students to take part in the survey.
26. Ipsos will produce materials for the NSS 2026 promotional campaign and providers will be able to access the full suite of marketing materials from the Ipsos NSS extranet. Further information about marketing materials and promoting the survey will be provided in the NSS 2026 good practice guide⁹ from Ipsos on 22 October 2025.

Inappropriate influence on the NSS survey

27. The OfS is responsible for managing the process on behalf of the UK funding and regulatory bodies to address any concerns that students have been inappropriately influenced in their completion of the NSS. To maintain the integrity of the NSS data, we need to ensure that students who complete the survey have not been influenced by their provider, or any other party, to respond in a way that does not reflect their true opinion. The OfS will work with the relevant UK funding and regulatory bodies to resolve any concerns that relate to a provider in their nation.
28. The procedures for investigating allegations of inappropriate influence on survey results¹⁰ are intended to be read in conjunction with the good practice guide issued by Ipsos, which explains what constitutes inappropriate influence and how to avoid it when encouraging student

⁸ Available at [NSS extranet](#). Please note: the NSS extranet is accessible to those in the ipsosgroup.sharepoint.com directory.

⁹ Available at [NSS extranet](#). Please note: the NSS extranet is accessible to those in the ipsosgroup.sharepoint.com directory.

¹⁰ Available at [Promotion of the NSS - Office for Students](#)

participation. We urge providers to ensure that all staff who are responsible for the running of the survey are familiar with Ipsos's good practice guide, and seek advice where needed from Ipsos or the OfS on their approach to avoiding inappropriate influence.

29. A student guide on inappropriate influence is available¹¹ to help raise awareness among students of the value of their honest views, what to expect from NSS promotion, what is and is not allowed, and where they should go for help and support if they are concerned about being influenced. Providers are asked to inform students about this guide as part of their pre-launch survey plans. More details on this are provided in the NSS 2026 set-up guide issued by Ipsos.

Dissemination of NSS 2026 results

30. For NSS 2026, CACI Limited will provide the survey results on the NSS data portal on behalf of the OfS and UK funding and regulatory bodies. The NSS data portal allows providers to access detailed NSS results as well as additional, unpublished elements of their data, including open text comments, data from the additional bank of questions and provider-specific questions, and data below the publication threshold.
31. CACI Limited provides a dedicated NSS support team¹² to help providers in accessing their data and responding to queries.
32. In preparation for dissemination of NSS 2026 results, CACI Limited will contact providers in spring 2026 to:
- confirm user and login details
 - confirm the details of publication of NSS 2026 results on the portal.

¹¹ Available at [Inappropriate influence - Office for Students](#).

¹² The CACI NSS support team can be contacted via the [Contact Support form](#) on the NSS data portal.



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