Privacy notice for the sexual misconduct survey 2027

1. Introduction

The Office for Students (OfS) is the regulator for higher education in England. We are committed to protecting your personal information and being clear about what information we hold about you and how we use it.

This privacy notice applies to the sexual misconduct survey. It sets out details about the information we collect, who processes your information, what they use it for, the legal bases for this processing, and your rights under data protection legislation.

About the OfS

The OfS aims to ensure that every student, whatever their background, has a fulfilling experience of higher education that enriches their life and career. This should mean that students can study without facing harassment or sexual misconduct. The purpose of this survey is to collect further evidence about the prevalence of sexual misconduct in higher education to help us understand the scale of the issue and how different student groups are affected.

You can find more information about the OfS and the work that we do on our website.

The sexual misconduct survey will be carried out on our behalf by Ipsos (an independent social and market research agency). Ipsos also conducts the National Student Survey (NSS), which you are also invited to take part in.

The NSS and the sexual misconduct survey are separate surveys, each with its own specific purpose but both are being delivered by Ipsos on behalf of the OfS.

The sexual misconduct survey will be made available to you after you have completed the NSS.

2. Data controller and Data Protection Officer

The OfS is the 'data controller' of any personal information collected within scope of this privacy notice.

Ipsos is a 'data processor' working on behalf of the OfS to administer the NSS.

Both the OfS and Ipsos are registered with the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and you can check the entry details on the ICO website. The OfS's registration number is ZA309955.

Our location and contact details are below:

The Office for Students
Westward House
Lime Kiln Close
Bristol
BS34 8SR

Tel: 0117 931 7317

Email: dp@officeforstudents.org.uk

Our Data Protection Officer (DPO) is the first point of contact for people whose information is processed. You can contact the DPO using the details above. You should note that this email address is monitored by other members of the OfS's data protection team. Therefore, please mark any correspondence 'for the attention of the DPO'.

3. Our purpose for using the information

The 2027 sexual misconduct survey aims to build on the findings of the sexual misconduct survey conducted in 2025 and explore the national prevalence of sexual misconduct experienced by students at universities and colleges in England.

We can only use your personal information where we have a specific purpose or purposes for doing so. This survey intends to help us understand the scale of this important issue and how different student groups are affected.

If we want to use your personal information for a reason other than those purposes set out above, we will tell you before we start that use and provide further information about the new purpose(s).

4. Legal basis for using your personal information

Under data protection legislation, we require a legal basis to be able to process your personal information for the purposes set out above.

The legal bases are:

- processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest or in the exercise of official authority vested in the Controller (see UK GDPR Article 6(1)(e)).
- processing of special categories of data is necessary for statistical and research purposes (see UK GDPR Article 9(2)(j)).

This processing is subject to appropriate safeguards for research and statistical purposes, in accordance with UK GDPR Articles 84A-84D UK GDPR.

5. Who sees my personal information?

The OfS is the 'data controller' of any personal information collated and transferred for this survey. The OfS may, from time to time, engage other non-statutory bodies or agents to carry out functions on its behalf. In order to carry out this survey the OfS has appointed Ipsos who will request

personal information, including contact details, from your higher education provider. The OfS, as the data controller, will retain control of any personal data transferred under contract with non-statutory bodies.

6. Who we share your personal information with and why

Once the survey is complete, we may use a third-party supplier acting on our behalf to help us share the results, including with universities and colleges. Any supplier will work under a contract with the OfS, will only use the data on our instructions, and will store it in the UK.

Any published results will protect the confidentiality of respondents, and no individual will be identifiable.

If your feedback relates to any sexual misconduct experiences or incidents or you share any concerns about safeguarding, please note that these cannot be followed up with you by your education provider or the OfS due to confidentiality. The OfS will not have access to your contact details and will not be able to contact you and would not expect to make any contact with your education provider about specific situations. It is important that if you have any concerns about your own wellbeing or safeguarding that you contact your education provider for information on the support and services available.

If you are currently in danger or need urgent medical attention, please contact the emergency services by phoning 999.

The table that follows contains support services that you can contact, in a non-emergency situation, for help and advice.

Table: Support services

Support services	Contact details
The Police (law enforcement)	Call '101'. This is a national reporting line.
National Health Service (NHS)	Call '111'. This is a national, 24/7 helpline.
NHS mental health support	You can find support at: https://www.nhs.uk/mentalhealth/.
The Samaritans (a charity dedicated to reducing feelings of isolation and disconnection)	Call '116 123'. This is a national 24/7 helpline.
Student Minds (the UK's student mental health charity)	You can access support via: https://www.studentminds.org.uk/get-support/
Mind (a mental health charity)	Call '0300 123 3393' or you can find support at: https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helplines/.
SHOUT (a free, confidential text messaging support service for anyone who is struggling to cope)	Text '85258' or you can find support at: https://giveusashout.org/.

Support services	Contact details
Rape crisis England and Wales	Call '0808 500 2222' or you can find support at: https://rapecrisis.org.uk/get-help/.

7. What personal information do you hold and collect about me?

Personal data for the sexual misconduct survey will be drawn from the NSS data collection and used to invite you to take part in this online survey about your experiences of sexual misconduct.

Student information for the NSS is initially collected by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the Department for Education and supplied to the OfS. The OfS then provides Ipsos with the following categories of personal data for each eligible student:

- date of birth
- course details
- pseudonymised unique identifiers (pseudonymisation is a technique that replaces or removes information that identifies an individual).

The OfS then requests student contact details from universities and colleges to be passed to Ipsos to conduct the survey. Universities and colleges provide Ipsos with the following categories of personal data for each eligible student:

- name
- email address
- unique identifiers.

This information is used purely for the purpose of delivering the survey and will **not** be shared with any external organisation or the OfS.

In addition to your survey responses, Ipsos also collect paradata such as time taken to complete the survey. This information is supplied to the OfS and is only used for analysis and evaluation to see whether the survey is working successfully and whether it can be improved. Below is a list of the paradata:

- date of response
- length of time to respond
- length of time on each screen (online)
- information about the browser used
- information about duplicate responses
- information about partial responses

- flags to show how many email addresses were supplied
- information about whether emails bounced back.

The OfS will also match this data with the following special category data received from HESA and students' Individualised Learner Record (ILR):

- ethnicity
- religion (if applicable)
- disability (if applicable)
- sexual orientation.

Why we collect special categories of data before issuing the survey

The collection of the special category data listed above will be used to:

- ensure that individuals with different characteristics are adequately represented and that their views and experiences are considered.
- check whether there is any difference in responses to the survey questions by students with a given characteristic.
- assess whether there is any response bias; whether students who responded had the same characteristics as the people who did not respond.

The OfS will then perform analysis on the data to identify the prevalence of sexual misconduct and understand the context surrounding sexual misconduct, including at different providers and among different groups of students.

Your participation in this research, together with your individual responses to the questions, will be kept strictly confidential in line with information security requirements and standards as agreed between Ipsos and the OfS.

The results of the survey will be used by the OfS for internal analysis. The OfS expects to publish the results of the sexual misconduct survey soon after publication of the NSS 2027 results.

8. How long we will hold your personal information

We are only able to retain a copy of your personal information if it is still needed for the purpose(s) for which it was collected. The following conditions apply to the personal information processed as part of the sexual misconduct survey:

- Ipsos will destroy all student contact details within one calendar month of the survey closure (by 31 May 2027).
- Within three calendar months of project closure, Ipsos will securely remove all other student data from their computer systems and transfer it in a pseudonymised format to the OfS by 31 October 2027.

- Pseudonymised responses to the survey and paradata about the responses (as described above) will be retained indefinitely by the OfS as permitted for research and statistical purposes subject to appropriate safeguards. This helps us understand how students' experiences change over time, identify emerging issues, and provide a robust evidence base for decisions made by the Office for Students that affect higher education and the interests of current and future students. Any reports the OfS publishes will not include identifiable individualised data.

9. Where your personal information will be stored

Your personal information will be kept strictly confidential and stored securely in the UK. Neither the OfS, Ipsos, nor any third party acting on our behalf will transfer it outside the UK.

10. How we protect your personal information

The OfS has a number of security measures in place to protect your personal information, including:

- The OfS is accredited to the Cyber Essentials Plus standard for cybersecurity.
- All staff are required to undertake training in data protection and information security on joining the OfS.
- There are formal information security policies that must be read and understood by all staff.
- Personal information is only available to those members of staff who require access as part of their role. This is managed with an access control list, specifying which users are granted or denied access to the information.
- Personal data is stored in pseudonymised form with access to the key that resolves the pseudonymisation strictly controlled.

You can read more information on our approach to information security on our website.

Ipsos has regular internal and external audits of its information security and is registered to the International Standard for Information Security, ISO 27001. Ipsos is a member of the Market Research Society, which means it has signed up to carrying out market research in an ethical and compliant way.

11. How do I opt-out of being contacted by Ipsos to complete the sexual misconduct survey?

You can ask Ipsos to remove your details from the contact list being used for the sexual misconduct survey. Students may do this by contacting Ipsos from 6 January until 30 April 2027.

Ipsos will ask you to confirm your details to ensure that the correct records are removed from the contact list. If you chose to opt-out of the survey, Ipsos will retain your personal details for the duration of the survey but will not contact you again for the purposes of administering this survey. You may continue to receive information about the NSS, which Ipsos also administers on our behalf. Your personal data will be automatically destroyed by 31 May 2027.

You can also request to have your personal data erased. Students may do this by contacting Ipsos from 6 January until 30 April 2027.

If you choose data erasure, Ipsos will securely and permanently delete your personal information (contact details, date of birth, etc.) used for this survey. This is an irreversible process, which means you will not be able to take the survey once this process has been completed.

In exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary for the OfS to analyse student-level data relating to refusals or opt-outs. In this case, Ipsos will securely transfer data to the OfS about students who have actively opted out of the survey.

Please note higher education providers may send their own communications to students regarding the sexual misconduct survey. Neither the OfS nor Ipsos is responsible for these provider communications.

For further information, please contact the research team at thestudentsurvey@ipsos.com.

12. Your rights over your personal information

Once your personal information has been collected, you have certain rights in relation to that personal information that you may exercise. You have the right to request:

- a copy of your personal information
- the correction of inaccurate personal information held about you
- the deletion of your personal information
- that the processing of your personal information is restricted
- that you are not subject to automated decision making or profiling (if these take place).

You also have the right to object to the processing of your personal information.

All these rights have certain limitations depending on the request and the purpose for which we are holding your personal information. Further information about these rights and our processes for handling such requests is available on our website.

13. Use of cookies

Cookies are text files placed on your computer to collect standard internet log information and visitor behaviour information. This information is used to track visitor use of the website and to complete statistical reports on website activity. For further information about our cookies visit our website, or further information about the use of cookies by Ipsos is available on the NSS website.

14. Complaints about the use of your personal information

If you are unhappy with the way in which your personal information has been handled by the OfS, please contact us via our DPO (details in section two) and we will try to resolve your issue informally.

If you remain dissatisfied, you can complain to the data protection supervisory authority. In the UK, this is the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and it can be contacted at:

Information Commissioner's Office (ICO)
Wycliffe House
Water Lane
Wilmslow
Cheshire
SK9 5AF

Tel: 0303 123 1113

Email: casework@ico.org.uk

15. Changes to this notice

We regularly review our privacy notices and we will inform you of any changes to this notice by placing an update on our privacy notices webpage.

We last updated this privacy notice on 21 October 2026.

16. How can I obtain further details about this privacy notice or the OfS's compliance with it?

If you have any questions or require further information about this privacy statement, you can email smsurvey@officeforstudents.org.uk.

17. Can I provide feedback on the survey?

Yes. Ipsos and the OfS are committed to continuously improving the survey. Should you have a question, comment or complaint about this research, please contact Ipsos at thestudentsurvey@ipsos.com or the OfS at smsurvey@officeforstudents.org.uk.