

National Student Survey privacy notice

This privacy statement is mirrored from the National Student Survey (NSS) website hosted by Ipsos: <http://www.thestudentsurvey.com/>.

About this privacy notice

This notice applies to the NSS.

It sets out details about who processes your information, what they use it for, the legal bases for this processing, and your rights under data protection legislation.

This notice is regularly reviewed and sometimes updated, for example when organisations change their name, or to clarify how your information is used. Updates may be made at any time, and you will always find the most up-to-date version at: www.officeforstudents.org.uk/ofs-privacy/other-privacy-notice/.

Who carries out the NSS and why?

The NSS is being carried out by Ipsos, an independent research agency, on behalf of the Office for Students (OfS) and UK funding and regulatory bodies: the Department for Economy Northern Ireland (DfENI), Medr (formerly the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW)), and the Scottish Funding Council (SFC).

The OfS is the regulator of the higher education sector in England and has certain statutory functions set out in the Higher Education and Research Act 2017. The NSS forms an important part of the OfS's regulation of the quality of higher education. You can find more information about the OfS and the work that they do on their website: www.officeforstudents.org.uk.

The OfS and the UK funding and regulatory bodies have a statutory role in ensuring that the quality of teaching in higher education is assessed. The OfS and its partners believe that students' views should form an important part of the assessment.

The OfS has commissioned the survey on behalf of the UK funding and regulatory bodies. The NSS is a key component of the wider regulatory landscape in UK higher education and these bodies are responsible for funding the survey.

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 and you can check the entry details here: <https://ico.org.uk/about-the-ico/what-we-do/register-of-datacontrollers/>.

The OfS has also appointed a data dissemination provider, CACI Limited, to disseminate the results of the NSS to participating universities and colleges and students' unions.

What is the purpose of the NSS and what is the legal basis for processing my personal information?

The NSS is an annual survey that gives final year undergraduate students the opportunity to provide feedback on their learning experience.

The NSS also aims to assist future generations of higher education students in their choices of what and where to study, by allowing them to see anonymous feedback on subjects and on universities and colleges.

It surveys eligible students who are:

At higher education providers in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland

- Studying higher education courses in directly-funded further education colleges in England, Northern Ireland and Wales.
- Studying at privately-funded providers in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland

The results are made publicly available each year via the [Discover Uni](https://discoveruni.gov.uk/) website.¹

Under data protection legislation, a legal basis is required to be able to process your information. In this case, 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)) and for statistical and research purposes (see UK GDPR Article 89).
- Processing of special categories of data is necessary for statistical and research purposes (see UK GDPR Article 9(2)(j)) in accordance with Article 89(1) and Schedule 1 part (4) of the DPA 2018.

Who sees my personal information?

The OfS is the 'data controller' of any personal information collated and transferred under contract with survey agents. The OfS may, from time to time, engage other non-statutory bodies or agents to carry out functions on their behalf.

The OfS has appointed Ipsos to carry out the NSS. For the purposes of the NSS, Ipsos is acting as a 'data processor' on behalf of the OfS. The OfS has a data protection agreement in place with Ipsos which includes measures for safeguarding your personal information.

¹ See <https://discoveruni.gov.uk/>.

The OfS also has a data protection agreement in place with CACI Limited, the organisation that will disseminate the results of the NSS to universities and colleges and who will receive part of your survey data in a non-identifiable form. The agreement provides the necessary protection under the law to safeguard students' information.

For the purposes of the NSS, the OfS may share student information, or parts of it, with the UK funding and regulatory bodies – DfENI, Medr and the SFC. For further information on how these organisations use NSS data, please contact these organisations directly.

The OfS is committed to protecting your personal information and being clear about what information we hold about you and how we use it. Your personal information will be kept strictly confidential by all parties involved. It will be stored securely within the United Kingdom and will not be transferred outside that territory without the explicit written consent of the OfS and then ensuring appropriate safeguards compliant with the requirements of data protection legislation are in place (whether in accordance with UK GDPR Article 46 or LED Article 37) as determined by the OfS. In the event of a transfer outside of the European Economic Area, each record of text will only be identifiable internally to Ipsos by a serial number.

What personal information do you collect about me and how are my contact details obtained?

Student information is initially collected by the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and supplied to the OfS. The OfS or DfENI provide Ipsos with the following categories of personal data for each eligible student:

- date of birth
- course details
- unique identifiers.

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:

- names
- email addresses
- telephone numbers
- unique identifiers
- language preference (English or Welsh).

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

In addition, your survey responses to the NSS are collected through the survey instrument. Ipsos collects paradata such as screen resolution, method of participation and time taken to complete the survey. This information is supplied to the OfS and is used only 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
- mode 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 and phone numbers were supplied
- whether emails bounced back
- number of emails sent
- if online, whether they accessed via the website or the email link
- ID of the Ipsos telephone interviewer
- number of phone attempts made
- whether they refused/opted out on the phone
- if prize draw offered, whether they opted in.

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.

We work to avoid disclosing information about individuals, particularly when this information is sensitive (for example, NSS results that suggest that students are not content with aspects of their course). For instance, we will suppress data when there are too few respondents in a particular group to reduce the risk of disclosing information about individuals.

In rare cases, all students in a group (course, department or characteristic) may respond negatively or positively to a question. In this scenario, it would reveal something about all the individuals in that group if this data was published. To protect the confidentiality of respondents in

cases where all the respondents responded negatively, or all students responded and all but one responded negatively, data is suppressed and replaced with a marker to mitigate the risk of any detriment to individuals that may occur from identification.

How will the information I provide be used?

The student contact details provided by your university or college are used solely by Ipsos to invite you to participate in the survey and to validate that the correct individuals are responding to the survey.

Your responses to the NSS will be used for research purposes and may also be used by the OfS and UK funding and regulatory bodies in connection with performance of any of their statutory functions. For more information about how your responses to the NSS may be used by the OfS in performance of its statutory functions, please see the OfS general privacy notice (<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/ofs-privacy/privacy-notice/>).

Responses to the NSS will be retained by the OfS in a pseudonymised format. Pseudonymisation is a technique that replaces or removes information that identifies an individual. For more information about retention of your personal information, please see the section 'How long will my personal information be held for?' below.

Will my NSS responses be shared with my university or college?

The NSS results of this research that are made available to universities and colleges, as well as publicly, will be anonymised and provided in the form of statistical information only. We take steps to avoid individuals being identified in any published results. 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.

We can also assure you that your individual responses to the NSS and open text comments will **not** be used for marketing. However, universities and colleges are permitted to paraphrase open text comments in marketing materials from the core NSS questions, as long as the text does not identify any individuals, and the comments are not attributed to the NSS. We will not sell your information to any third parties.

Providers will use the open text comments from the NSS as feedback on your learning experience. If you make any comments relating to your physical or mental wellbeing or share concerns about safeguarding in the open text questions, please note that these cannot be followed up with you by your university or college due to confidentiality. Individuals cannot be identified from their responses so universities and colleges will not know who has given the feedback.

It is important that if you have concerns about your own wellbeing that you contact your provider for information on support available.

For an emergency situation and/or if there is an immediate risk to life, please contact the emergency services on 999.

For a non-emergency situation, you can contact the following services for help and advice:

- The Police: you can call them on 101, which is a 24/7 helpline.

- The NHS: you can call them on 111, which is a 24/7 helpline.
- The Samaritans: a charity dedicated to connecting people in crisis with trained volunteers who will always listen. You can call them on 116 123 which is a 24/7 helpline.
- Student Space: an online platform providing support services and advice and information on student life. This now also incorporates Student Minds: the UK's student health charity. You can find support on this page at: <https://studentspace.org.uk/>
- Mind: a mental health charity which offers support by phone at 0300 123 3393 or online at: <https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/helplines/>
- SHOUT 85258: a free, confidential, 24/7 text messaging support service for anyone who is struggling to cope: <https://giveusashout.org/>
- The NHS mental health information and support website: <https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/>.

How long will my personal information be held for?

The following conditions apply to personal information provided in response to the NSS:

- All student contact details will be destroyed by Ipsos within one calendar month of survey closure (by 31 May 2026).
- 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 2026).
- Pseudonymised responses to the NSS and paradata about the response as described above may be used by the OfS in connection with performance of any of its statutory duties. For more information about how personal information may be used by the OfS in connection with the performance of its statutory functions, and how long the OfS will retain personal information for these purposes, please see the OfS's general privacy notice [here](#).
- Pseudonymised responses to the NSS and paradata about the response as described above will be retained indefinitely by the OfS for use in producing statistical analysis and research into quality and student experience and trends in higher education, and to improve future surveys. Any reports the OfS publishes will not include identifiable individualised data.

How do the OfS and Ipsos ensure my personal information is held securely?

The OfS and Ipsos take responsibilities to keep your personal information secure very seriously. As such, we take every reasonable precaution to ensure your information is protected from loss, theft or misuse. These precautions include appropriate physical security of our offices, controlled access to computer systems and use of secure, encrypted internet connections when collecting personal information.

The OfS has a number of security measures in place to protect your personal information, including accreditation to the Cyber Essentials Plus standard for cybersecurity, and mandatory staff training in data protection and information security.

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.

How do I opt out of being contacted by Ipsos to complete the NSS?

You can ask Ipsos to remove your details from the contact list being used for the NSS. Ipsos will ask you to confirm your details to ensure that the correct records are removed from the contact list. It is important that students verify their identity so the NSS provides robust data for potential students and their advisers to make informed choices. 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. Your personal data will be automatically destroyed by 31 May 2026.

Students may do this using the 'opt-out' form on the survey website from 7 January until 30 April 2026, or by contacting Ipsos.

You can also request to have your personal data erased. If you choose data erasure, Ipsos will securely and permanently delete your personal information (contact details, date of birth, etc.) from the contact list 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.

Students may do this using the same 'opt-out' form on the survey website from 7 January until 30 April 2026. After this date, you can request this at any stage by contacting Ipsos.

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 some providers send their own communications to students regarding the NSS. Neither the OfS nor Ipsos are responsible for these provider communications.

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

How will the results of the NSS be used?

The OfS and the UK funding and regulatory bodies will use the results of the survey to publish aggregated and anonymised results of the survey in the following ways:

- Published 'in context' on the websites of universities and colleges via a 'widget'. This is a small web application that displays information from the Discover Uni website for the course which the user is viewing.
- Published on the Discover Uni website, to enable users to search and compare information about courses and universities and colleges.

- It is also envisaged that data will be available via the UCAS course search tool (Course Finder), so users can view the data at the same time as viewing the courses to which they are interested in applying.
- For analysis. This may result in the UK funding and regulatory bodies undertaking research or the release of data, including any open comments that you may make, to OfS-approved users (on behalf of the other UK funding and regulatory bodies), such as academic researchers and sector organisations for the purpose of conducting analysis or research. The OfS will retain control of the data under contract with such users, or if that user is subcontracting, we will require they have the same controls. Reports will only present anonymised and aggregated data and at no point will individuals be identified.
- To provide summary feedback to individual universities and colleges. This data will be provided to universities and colleges to help them identify where their strengths lie and also how they can make improvements. This summary feedback will be aggregated and anonymised, ensuring no individual student can be identified. These results may also include the text of any comments that students provide at the end of the questionnaire. Every effort is made to clean the comments and make them anonymous, and users of the data are advised to use them appropriately. This text will not be attributed to individuals; students are advised to avoid making comments that:
 - could enable them to be individually identified
 - name individuals
 - make references that could identify an individual.
- Providers will use the open text comments from the NSS as feedback on your learning experience. If you make any comments relating to your physical or mental wellbeing or share concerns about safeguarding in the open text questions, please note that these cannot be followed up with you by your university or college due to confidentiality. Individuals cannot be identified from their responses so universities and colleges will not know who has given the feedback. It is important that if you have concerns about your own wellbeing or safeguarding that you contact your provider for information on support available. See also 'Will my NSS responses be shared with my university or college?' section above for national services you can contact for help and advice.
- Providers are permitted to share open text comments data between themselves and a third party on the basis of the third party processing data on behalf of the provider for the purposes set out in the NSS privacy notice.
- Universities and colleges may use their NSS results in marketing materials, to promote particular courses or the provider as a whole. This is permitted, but there are several restrictions depending on the type and quality of the data being shared.
- The publication thresholds (a minimum 50 per cent response rate and at least 10 students) must be adhered to at all levels. Any results below this threshold must not be published. NSS results from published data may be used in marketing materials and attributed to the NSS, providing the above-mentioned publication thresholds are met.

- Open text comments from the core NSS questionnaire should not be used in publicly available materials, in order to preserve the anonymity of students. The anonymised open-text comments are only shared with the relevant university or college or UK funding and regulatory body, or with OfS-approved researchers of sector organisations. Therefore, universities and colleges may not quote open text comments in marketing materials. However, open text comments from the core NSS questionnaire may be paraphrased in marketing materials, as long as the text does not identify any individuals, and the comments are not attributed to the NSS. The above-mentioned publication thresholds must be met for the cohort whose results are being paraphrased.
- NSS results from unpublished data such as optional bank questions or provider-specific questions may also be used in marketing materials, but these may not be attributed to the NSS. The above-mentioned publication thresholds must be met for the cohort whose results are being published.
- Open text comments from the optional bank questions or the provider-specific questions may not be used in any form. Although names are removed from the NSS feedback, it may still be possible for those working at a university or college to identify themselves and colleagues. Therefore, such information may be personal data and universities and colleges are asked to bear this in mind when processing the data.
- The OfS and UK funding and regulatory bodies may use the NSS data in connection with performance of their statutory functions. For more information about how personal information may be used by the OfS in connection with performance of its statutory functions, please see the general OfS privacy notice [here](#).
- As part of the UK funding and regulatory bodies requirement to fulfil their statutory duties, providers are permitted to use their NSS results statistical data, including data from the optional banks questions, for inclusion in their TEF submissions. Any results data used as part of submissions will be anonymised and provided in the form of statistical information only. Providers are advised to exclude in their submissions any direct quotations from open text comments or optional banks qualitative data in order to maintain respondent anonymity and data privacy.

Optional questions

Some universities and colleges ask their students optional or university/college-specific questions.

These questions are asked via the online survey only and provide additional confidential feedback to universities and colleges. The OfS and the UK funding and regulatory bodies use the information for the following purposes:

- To provide summary feedback to individual universities and colleges. This data will be provided to universities and colleges to help them identify where their strengths lie and how they can make improvements;
- For statistical analysis. This may result in the release of data to other approved users, which may include academic researchers. The OfS will retain control of the data under contract with such users, or if that user is subcontracting, we will require they have the same controls. Reports will only present anonymised and aggregated data;

- In connection with performance of their statutory functions.

This data will **not** be published on the Discover Uni website.

How can I exercise my rights under the data protection legislation?

All information is used in compliance with data protection legislation (the General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018). Once your personal information has been collected, you have certain rights in relation to that personal information that may be exercised, including the right to ask:

- for a copy of your personal information, via a process known as a Subject Access Request
- to update or rectify inaccurate personal information held about you
- for your personal information to be deleted (within certain limits)
- for your survey responses to be deleted
- not to be contacted again ('do not contact' request)
- to restrict the processing of your personal information
- to object to the processing and automatic processing of your personal information.

Please note that these are not absolute rights and do not apply in all circumstances, depending on the request and the purpose for which we are holding your personal information.

If you have any concerns about the use of data for these purposes or would like to exercise one of your rights above, please contact the Data Protection Officer at the OfS by emailing dp@officeforstudents.org.uk, or by visiting www.officeforstudents.org.uk/contact/how-to-request-information-from-us/.

You may also make this request by post, by writing to the following address:

Data Protection Officer
Westward House
Lime Kiln Close
Stoke Gifford
BRISTOL
BS34 8SR

A Subject Access Request will be fulfilled within one month of receipt of the request. The OfS will determine if any exemptions apply, so information may be redacted accordingly. Exemptions include any content that:

- contains the personal data of a third party or otherwise identifies a third party
- would prejudice the prevention or detection of a crime
- contains legal advice

- contains data that, if disclosed, would adversely affect the ability of the UK funding and regulatory bodies to carry out their public functions.

Please note that this is not an exhaustive list, and the OfS will apply any exemptions on a case-by-case basis.

Requests to rectify or delete personal information will be processed as soon as possible after receipt of the valid request. Please note that not all personal data can be deleted where this would adversely affect the ability of the UK funding and regulatory bodies to carry out their public functions.

To ensure that any of the above processes are applied to the correct data subject, the OfS may require some further identifying information. This may include date of birth, or a copy of a data subject's passport or driving licence.

Please note that in order to fulfil your request and collate all personal information in scope, your details may need to be shared between Ipsos and the OfS, and other organisations processing for the purposes of the NSS.

Further information can be found about these rights and our processes for handling such requests on the OfS website at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/ofs-privacy/individual-rights-under-the-general-data-protection-regulation/.

If we are not able to resolve the issue to your satisfaction, you can also make a complaint to the data protection supervisory authority. In the UK, this is the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) and they can be contacted at:

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

Tel: 0303 123 1113

Email: casework@ico.org.uk

How can I find out about the use of cookies on the NSS website?

The NSS website uses cookies to help provide you with a good experience when you browse the site and to make site improvements. For further information about the use of cookies on the NSS website please see: <https://www.thestudentsurvey.com/cookie-policy/>.

How can I obtain further details about this privacy statement or our compliance with it?

If you have any questions or require further information about this privacy statement, Ipsos' compliance with data protection laws or the information held about you for this research; please

contact the OfS using the details above or Ipsos. Ipsos can be contacted by email at: theStudentSurvey@ipsos.com, with '25-029904-03 NSS 2026' as the subject; or by letter to:

Ref: 25-029904-03 NSS 2026

The National Student Survey
Ipsos
Kings House
Kymberley Road
Harrow
HA1 1PT

Can I provide feedback on the NSS?

Yes. Ipsos, the OfS and the UK funding and regulatory bodies are committed to continuously improving the NSS. Should you have a question, comment or complaint about this research please contact Ipsos at thestudentsurvey@ipsos.com, or the OfS at nss@officeforstudents.org.uk, or by letter to Ipsos at:

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Eligibility criteria for the NSS

The eligibility criteria as defined by the OfS (across all participating providers) are as follows:

- Part-time and full-time students:
 - Full-time undergraduate students registered at participating higher education institutions, further education colleges, further education institutions and alternative providers (where applicable).
 - Part-time undergraduate students registered at participating higher education institutions, further education colleges, further education institutions and alternative providers (where applicable).
- Final year students and equivalent:
 - Students expected to be in their final year.
 - Students on flexible programmes where the final year cannot be predicted, after they are expected to have undertaken more than one full-time equivalent (FTE) and not before their fourth academic year of study.
- Students with the following funding arrangements:
 - Students studying at directly funded providers in the UK.

- Students studying at privately funded providers
- Studying a course that is associated with a health or social care regulatory body, including students studying pre-registration nursing, midwifery, allied health profession, social work and clinical practice subjects.
- Students are included in the 2026 survey population if they are expected to complete between 1 February 2026 and 31 January 2027 inclusive.
- However, the following are **not** eligible:
 - Students who are not on closed courses
 - Students on programmes that do not lead to undergraduate qualifications or credits.
 - Students on a course lasting one year or one FTE or less.
 - Any students who were eligible in the NSS 2025 (whether or not they responded) and who remain at the same provider.
 - Students under the age of 16.

This privacy notice was last updated in October 2025.