

Office for  
Students



# National Student Survey 2025

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 2025: Quality update

1. This report contains information on the quality characteristics of the data collected through the National Student Survey (NSS) 2025.
2. The NSS was open from 8 January to 30 April 2025. 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 three 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 last year.<sup>1</sup>

## 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 10 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<sup>2</sup>.
7. There is a known quality issue with care leaver data supplied by JISC for the 2023-24 Student data collection. This has caused an under-identification of care leavers in the data for the NSS 2025 results. For this reason, we are delaying the publication of 2025 care experienced data in the student characteristics dashboard until autumn 2025. Data for the other characteristics we were not able to update, service child status and estrangement, will also be published in this autumn update.

## Update on accuracy and reliability

8. 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 2025 is 71.5 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 71.4 per cent for England, 73.3 per cent for Northern Ireland, 71.5 per cent for Scotland and 73.3 per cent for Wales. This continued high response rate is despite

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<sup>1</sup> [NSS data: quality report - Office for Students](#)

<sup>2</sup> See provider level dashboard: [National Student Survey data: provider-level dashboard - Office for Students](#).

concerns that the introduction of the Sexual Misconduct Survey following the core NSS survey in England would lead to lower response rates to the core survey.

9. In any given NSS year, the data is analysed to see if there are any providers with such a near miss to the publication threshold and assess if there is a need to lower the threshold by exception. For NSS 2025, a large provider with a large NSS student population missed the publication threshold by a small percentage (less than half a percentage point). In this unique situation, it has been allowed to publish the overall NSS 2025 data for this provider at a top level by exception and for this year only. In taking this decision, consideration of response bias and enabling the views of this large cohort of students to be in the public domain on the OfS website and Discover Uni, has been taken into account to support the higher education choices of prospective students, whilst also ensuring we safeguard the robustness and quality of the NSS survey.
10. The NSS is a mixed mode survey: respondents can answer the survey either online or by telephone. In 2025, 78.3 per cent of respondents answered the survey online, compared with 80.2 in 2024. 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 2 percentage points and a maximum difference of 6 percentage points higher. This difference is slightly less than seen in NSS 2024.
11. 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.<sup>3</sup> In 2025, we have not found it necessary to suppress any results due to inappropriate influence.
12. 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. Concerns about data quality due to the new data futures model when NSS 2024 was published have reduced this year.
  - b. 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.<sup>4</sup> We also suppress cases where more than 50 per cent of a benchmarking factor are unknown. This led to the suppression of benchmarks for 70 groups (out of a total of 120,000) for the NSS 2025 release.

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<sup>3</sup> See: [Inappropriate influence - Office for Students](#).

<sup>4</sup> See: [NSS documentation and definitions - Office for Students](#).

- c. There remains some data that is unknown or not available. This is often higher in the new fields introduced into the NSS portal in 2023. This is used to give higher education providers additional information about the relationships between their student population and NSS results, but are not benchmarking factors or published more widely.
  - d. 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 has increased for these colleges in NSS 2025.
13. 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.



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