

HEFCE Circular letter 30/2016: A new National Student Survey for 2017

Annex A: Final list of NSS 2017 questions

Questions which are unchanged from 2016 are marked with an asterisk.

The teaching on my course

1. Staff are good at explaining things*
2. Staff have made the subject interesting*
3. The course is intellectually stimulating*
4. My course has challenged me to achieve my best work [new]

Learning opportunities [new section]

5. My course has provided me with opportunities to explore ideas or concepts in depth
6. My course has provided me with opportunities to bring information and ideas together from different topics
7. My course has provided me with opportunities to apply what I have learnt

Assessment and feedback

8. The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance*
9. Marking and assessment has been fair [amended]
10. Feedback on my work has been timely [amended]
11. I have received helpful comments on my work [amended]

Academic support

12. I have been able to contact staff when I needed to*
13. I have received sufficient advice and guidance in relation to my course [amended]
14. Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices on my course [amended]

Organisation and management

15. The course is well organised and running smoothly*
16. The timetable works efficiently for me [amended]
17. Any changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively*

Learning resources

18. The IT resources and facilities provided have supported my learning well [amended]
19. The library resources (e.g. books, online services and learning spaces) have supported my learning well [amended]
20. I have been able to access course-specific resources (e.g. equipment, facilities, software, collections) when I needed to [amended]

Learning community [new section]

21. I feel part of a community of staff and students
22. I have had the right opportunities to work with other students as part of my course

Student voice [new section]

23. I have had the right opportunities to provide feedback on my course
24. Staff value students' views and opinions about the course
25. It is clear how students' feedback on the course has been acted on
26. The students' union (association or guild) effectively represents students' academic interests
27. Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course*

Annex B: Review of the NSS

1. The new questionnaire for 2017 has been developed through a three-year research programme undertaken by UK HE funding bodies as part of the **Review of Information about learning and teaching and the student experience**. The review culminated in a consultation in October 2015, which set out proposals for new criteria for questions in the main survey, changes to the main survey and to the optional banks and questionnaire, and also asked for views on further changes that could be made after 2017 to capture feedback from students not currently included in the survey. The consultation outcomes were published in August 2016 (www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/roiconsult/). This work has been overseen by the Higher Education Public Information Steering Group. Details of the full review programme can be downloaded from www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/roiconsult/about/.
2. In our August 2016 consultation outcomes publication we noted that the final wording of the NSS questionnaire and format would be based on post-consultation testing and piloting. This included a **pilot survey** from January-April 2016 (with approximately 27,000 responses) informed by feedback from the consultation. We also commissioned pre- and post-pilot **cognitive testing** undertaken by IFF Research which concluded in July 2016. IFF's work included testing alternative survey formats to address the phenomenon of acquiescence bias identified in the reviewⁱ. The analysis of the pilot testing and report from IFF are due to be published shortly on the HEFCE website.
3. We used the findings of these reports to produce the list of NSS 2017 questions that are at Annex A, and these were endorsed by HEPISG. With the exception of the students' union question (the current Question 23 in the survey) where no consensus emerged in the research (as detailed below), all questions tested well post-pilot with only minor changes suggested by the consultants.

Students' union question

4. In the consultation we originally proposed removing the students' union questionⁱⁱ from the main survey, because it did not fit the proposed NSS criteria as it was not about the academic experience and did not test well. The proposal did not receive a clear mandate: nearly half agreed or strongly agreed, just over a third disagreed or strongly disagreed and about a fifth neither agreed nor disagreed. We therefore tested an alternative question in the piloting and post-pilot testing: 'Students' academic interests on my course are effectively represented by the students' union (association or guild)'.ⁱ
5. The cognitive testing and pilot analysis found that the students' union question is the only question within the survey which appears to yield challenges for students: some are uncertain about what is meant by the term 'academic interests', and some do not associate the role of the students' union with its support for academic interests and wider support services. As this question had strong support from NUS as a driver for improving students' unions' performance in this area, we sought advice from HEPISG, which on balance gave support to retaining the question in the main survey and that it should be kept under close review. A previously tested version of the students' union question, as requested by NUS, will therefore be included in NSS 2017 under the new 'Student voice' section. The results for this question will however be reported separately to the other questions in the student voice section.

Survey interface

6. We plan to change the interface for the survey on all formats (desktop, mobile and tablet computers) to maximise student engagement and encourage considered responses. Building on the findings of the IFF report, the final interface for the 2017 survey (the layout and format for different platforms, such as mobile and tablet) will be agreed based on prior testing and with advice from Ipsos MORI.

Other work

7. As noted in the consultation outcomes publication, during 2016-17 we will be developing proposals to capture feedback from students not currently included in the NSS, with an initial focus on one year courses and top-up programmes.

8. We are also developing proposals in relation to a feedback survey for taught postgraduate students, building on the feedback we received in the consultation and earlier research.

ⁱ Acquiescence bias is a survey phenomenon where respondents provide the same response to every question. It is common in surveys like the NSS which ask for responses to positive statements. Our consultation noted we would use changes to the survey format to encourage students to provide considered responses, and that we would not include negative questions which can over-complicate the survey and counter-productively increase acquiescence bias (see Review of Information consultation www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/year/2015/201524/).

ⁱⁱ The current question is 'Thinking of all the services, including support, activities and academic representation provided by the students' union (association or guild) at your institution, to what extent do you agree with the following statement: I am satisfied with the students' union (association or guild) at my institution'.