Dear Head of Provider

**A new National Student Survey for 2017**

1. This letter announces arrangements for the 2017 National Student Survey (NSS), and the action required from all institutions by **Monday 28 November 2016**. This includes:
   - providing up to date institutional contact details
   - checking the sample list of students to be included in the survey (the ‘target list’) and providing students’ contact details.

2. **For the 2017 survey the UK higher education (HE) funding bodies are introducing substantial changes to the survey questionnaire** based on the outcomes of the Review of Information ([www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/Year/2016/201615/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/Year/2016/201615/)) that were published in August. The revised list of survey questions is at Annex A. (All annexes are published alongside this letter on the HEFCE website.)

3. Ipsos MORI will continue to run the survey on our behalf, and provide support to institutions in managing and promoting the survey.

4. Detailed guidance relating to the 2017 NSS and the action requested are in the annexes (Annex C for higher education institutions (HEIs) and alternative providers, and Annexes D and E for further education colleges and sixth-form colleges (FECs)).


**Actions for all institutions**

6. All HEIs, directly funded FECs and participating alternative providers are asked to review and update if necessary their relevant NSS institutional contact details. The information should be supplied to Ipsos MORI no later than **Monday 28 November 2016** using the ‘My Details’ form,
available on the Ipsos MORI NSS extranet ([www.ipsos-mori.com/nss/extranet](http://www.ipsos-mori.com/nss/extranet)). This is a password-protected site, and Ipsos MORI will send login details to the nominated main and secondary NSS contacts.

7. All institutions should populate their 2017 NSS sample templates with the requested contact details for students on their target list (this is a list of all students eligible for 2017 NSS based on the 2015-16 student data submitted). Details should be supplied to Ipsos MORI by **Monday 28 November 2016** via the 'Upload Sample Data' section of the Ipsos MORI NSS extranet.

8. Instructions on how to supply this information are included in the NSS 2017 ‘Guidance for institutions and students’ unions’, which will be sent to institutional contacts on **Wednesday 26 October 2016** and will also be available on the Ipsos MORI NSS extranet. The guidance includes information regarding survey administration, appropriate promotion of the survey and key responsibilities and dates.

**NSS 2017**

9. For 2017, we are introducing substantial changes to the survey questionnaire, based on outcomes of the funding bodies’ Review of Information consultation ([www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/Year/2016/201615/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/pubs/Year/2016/201615/)) and an extensive testing programme. These are the first major changes to the survey since its introduction in 2005. While this will inevitably interrupt trend data, changes are needed now to ensure the survey remains fit for purpose. The final list of questions for the survey are provided as Annex A to this letter. This includes nine new questions on student engagement, updated questions on assessment and feedback and learning resources, removal and transfer of personal development questions to the optional question banks, and removal of two duplicative questions to ensure the survey remains short. The open text boxes and the current scale for responses will continue to be used. Further details on the new survey are given below and in Annex B on the review of the NSS.

10. The NSS will be administered across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. It will run to a similar timetable to the 2016 survey, with fieldwork taking place between January and April 2017, and results published in August 2017. Data will be provided at a detailed level to institutions through a dissemination site, and will be published by HEFCE on its website and on a revised Unistats site in September 2017. Further information about publication on Unistats, including changes we are making to the presentation of NSS, is available from [www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/unikis/consultations/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/unikis/consultations/). We expect to provide a detailed timetable for publication in a HEFCE Circular letter in April 2017.

11. The UK funding bodies have appointed Ipsos MORI to continue to manage the survey for a period of up to four years (2017-2020). Its role is to administer the survey and return data to the funding bodies and to provide support to institutions, including resources to help promote the survey. This includes facilitating a centrally managed incentive scheme on behalf of institutions to encourage students to take part in the survey.

12. Ipsos MORI will liaise directly with NSS contacts at institutions on how the 2017 NSS will be run. This will include selecting optional questions, incentive schemes and marketing materials. As with the 2016 survey, institutions will also be able to select one of five starting weeks for their survey.

13. In England and Northern Ireland the survey costs for HEIs and FECs will be covered by the relevant governments through HEFCE and the Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland). All providers in Scotland and Wales, as well as alternative providers in England, will pay directly for the administration of the survey. All providers who pay directly will shortly be contacted with further
details on this. The Scottish Funding Council, Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW), Health Education England and National College for Teaching and Leadership also contribute to the costs of administering the survey.

14. While the survey is managed by Ipsos MORI and the funding bodies, the active support of providers and students’ unions is vital in ensuring the data is robust and of high quality, particularly in delivering high response rates. As is clear from the Review of Information, the NSS is instrumental in giving students a voice in their education, enabling prospective students to make choices about their future, supporting providers to enhance the quality of their courses, and ensuring wider public accountability.

15. We are aware that NUS is considering whether to seek to disrupt the survey in 2017. The funding bodies have to date worked productively with NUS on the NSS, and we are in close contact with NUS to understand its position. Whatever decision is ultimately taken, we will continue to work on behalf of students and other stakeholders who rely on the survey to ensure the NSS continues to be a success. This will include:

   a. Ensuring students have factual information about the survey and its uses when contacted by Ipsos MORI.
   b. Support for providers who may want guidance on promotional activity.
   c. Communication with students’ unions about their role in agreeing the optional banks and the importance of their choosing these with institutions.
   d. Working directly with students’ unions to enable them to access and use NSS data.

16. In addition, we will be retaining in the main survey a question on the role of students’ unions (on academic representation) (see Annex B).

17. We encourage all providers and students’ unions to draw on the resources available and to contact Ipsos MORI or HEFCE if they require additional support.

Optional banks

18. For the new 2017 survey the current optional banks will remain, with adjustments to address overlap with the new student engagement questions and the addition of an optional personal development bank (which comprises the three personal development questions which are currently in the main survey) and potentially a students’ union optional bank, which we are developing with NUS.

19. As agreed through our consultation, from 2017 onwards we expect institutions to agree their choice of optional bank questions with their student representative body (student union, association or guild). Further information about this will be provided by Ipsos MORI.

20. In the autumn, and in line with the outcome of the Review of Information, we will work with the sector and students to explore the inclusion of new optional banks from NSS 2018 onwards. This may include, among others, redeveloped questions on personal development, on employability, entrepreneurship and careers, as well on support for specific student learning needs and on wellbeing.

Intentions after Graduation Survey (IAGS)

21. We will continue to run the Intentions after Graduation Survey as a follow-on survey to the NSS. The IAGS provides valuable information to providers and to policymakers about student progression, including to postgraduate study. The costs of the IAGS will be covered by the funding bodies. On completing the NSS, students completing first degree programmes will be invited to take
part in a separate ‘click-through’ survey asking them about their intentions after graduation. This will be offered to online respondents only.

**Reviewing the impact of NSS 2017**

22. The new NSS has undergone extensive testing and piloting, and we intend to review the impact of the new survey on providers and students. The outcome from this work will inform whether any revisions to the survey are required for NSS 2018, including if any additional support and guidance is required for students or HE providers.

**Higher Education Public Information Steering Group (HEPISG)**

23. These changes to the NSS have been overseen by HEPISG, which provides advice to the UK funding bodies on student information and is chaired by Professor Janet Beer, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Liverpool. Professor Beer will hand over to Sir David Bell, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Reading, from the group’s next meeting in early 2017.

24. Finally, may I take this opportunity, on behalf of the funding bodies, to thank you for your continued active engagement with the National Student Survey. Your support has been fundamental to the success of the survey over the past decade. We look forward to working with you to ensure it continues to support student choice and a high-quality learning experience for all students into the future.

Yours sincerely

Chris Millward
Director (Policy)

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i The two questions that have been removed are: ‘Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching’ and ‘Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand’.