

National Student Survey consultation

About you

In what capacity are you responding to the survey?

To provide an official response on behalf of a higher education provider, organisation or representative group

If you are responding on behalf of an organisation, is it a:

Higher education provider

Which of the following best describes you?

Employee of a higher education provider

In regard to which country are your responses?

England

Section one: Scope of the NSS

Q1. Do you agree we should retain the current criteria for NSS core questions?

Yes

Section two: Changes to the NSS questionnaire

Q2. What are the consequences - both positive and negative - of changing to the use of direct questions for the NSS? By 'direct questions' we mean questions which elicit respondents' views on an issue of interest by asking about it directly. The questionnaire response options are tailored specifically to match the question.

The findings from "pilot two" of the NSS review, showed that there were too many changes to determine whether the use of direct questions had increased engagement or understanding with the questions: it is hard to say at this stage therefore whether this will be a useful change. The consultation sets out additional question changes which will be tested further before making any final decisions on the survey design, and this is welcomed.

A change in the survey design would impact on time series analysis, especially where changes have been implemented and the NSS was to be used as one part of the evaluation process. There could also be an increased burden on providers in having to create new ways for analysing responses to the survey, as questions will not all have the same possible answers. Guidance on this would be welcomed, were any changes made. A balance will need to be struck so that the reporting of responses is meaningful and well understood but not unduly burdensome. The suggestion that there may be a "% positive response" score rather than a "% Agree" would appear to be a reasonable approach. This would need to be considered further when looking at any potential changes to the survey design.

Q3. What are the consequences – both positive and negative – of removing the summative question for England only?

We support the inclusion of the summative question in England as it is helpful to prospective students. If the wording were adjusted in any way then it would need to be tested with students to ensure it was well defined and understood. The consultation discusses moving to a question on “quality” rather than “satisfaction” but either term is subjective, and moving to “quality” may put more emphasis on the question outcomes than is appropriate.

It is not agreed that removal of a summative question would reduce susceptibility to rankings. All three of the major national league tables use data from this question in addition to data from other questions in their rankings; it is imagined that they would just use data from the other questions going forward.

Q4. Should we retain the current summative question for Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales or move to the revised question with a focus on quality not satisfaction?

Unsure

Comments:
not applicable

Q5. Should a question on freedom of expression be offered as an additional question after the core questionnaire?

Unsure

Comments:

It is difficult to comment without knowing what the final question would be, for example the example question is very broad and open to a multitude of interpretations e.g., Is it in general over the last x years, or specifically when having academic discussions? Only when a member of university staff is present, or with anyone? Is it referring to academic ideas, opinions and beliefs, or cultural, social and/ or philosophical ones. This could also be interpreted as how comfortable a student feels raising questions in lectures for example.

A more specific version of this question would be more helpful in terms of understanding the types of positive action that could be taken following the survey outcomes.

If any question were to be included, it would be expected that it would meet the essential question criteria, for example covering measurable and valid issues and producing unambiguous results. A rigorous testing and refinement process would be needed to ensure validity for onward use by all stakeholders.

Q6. Should a question on mental wellbeing provision be offered as an additional question after the core questionnaire?

Yes

Comments:

This is an area which occurs increasingly in NSS student comments.

The proposed question won't allude to the quality of the mental wellbeing provision itself, just the quality of the communication around it. This does though seem reasonable as the testing of related questions showed that respondents chose “did not know” or similar when asked about the provision itself.

Q7. What are the unintended consequences of asking a question about students' awareness of mental wellbeing services where no support to respondents can be offered?

Were a question on mental wellbeing provision to be included, respondents could receive a tailored response for their institution, with appropriate website links etc.

Section three: Periodic review of the NSS

Q8. Do you agree that the NSS should normally be reviewed every four years? Is the proposed timing between reviews a sensible balance between developing insight and maintaining capacity to change?

Yes

Comments:

This seems reasonable, but we wouldn't expect, or wish, to see the survey change dramatically every four years as this would limit the usefulness of time series data. We would suggest a 'light-touch' review therefore.

Section four: Survey fieldwork timing

Q9. What would be the impact on students and providers of the fieldwork period running from mid-February to the end of April for all providers?

The main impact would most likely be reduced response rates. The mitigating actions in the consultation seem reasonable i.e. adjusting the timings of email and SMS contact with students, and the telephone phase.

Section five: Welsh language

Q10. In relation to the design and use of the NSS in Wales, what effect (if any), positive or negative, will the proposals outlined in this document have on:

- opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language?
- treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?

not applicable

Q11. In relation to the use of the design and use of the NSS in Wales, how could the proposals be changed so that the policy decision would have positive effects, or increased positive effects, on:

- opportunities for persons to use the Welsh language?
- treating the Welsh language no less favourably than the English language?

not applicable

Other comments

Q12. Did you find any aspects of the proposals unclear? If so, please specify which, and tell us why.

Yes

Comments:

We were unclear on whether the question criteria in proposal 1 related to all questions included in the survey or just the core questions. We would expect these criteria to apply to all questions in the survey.

We were also unclear on the difference between a post core compulsory question (proposed in proposals 4 and 5) and the core set of questions. We would welcome clarification around how the data from these different types of questions: core, post core compulsory questions, optional questions, will be used.