

National Student Survey

Good Practice Guide - 2024

Marketing and Promoting the NSS

For Higher Education Providers in England

October 2023





# Introduction

1. The National Student Survey (NSS) is a high-profile annual census of nearly half a million students across the UK. Conducted each year since 2005, the NSS has become renowned for producing robust and reliable data. The survey asks undergraduates to provide feedback on their course.
2. The NSS is managed by the Office for Students (OfS) and undertaken by Ipsos 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.
3. The NSS gathers students' opinions on the quality of their courses which helps to:
  - inform prospective students' choices;
  - supply data that supports providers in improving the student experience;
  - support public accountability.
4. Every university in the UK takes part in the NSS, as do many colleges and alternative providers. NSS response rates have been consistently high.

## Using this Good Practice Guide

5. In 2024, providers in England are not required to promote the NSS to their students. However, they can choose to do so if they wish. This guidance applies to providers in England. Providers in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales are still required to promote the survey to their students and should refer to the Good Practice Guide that covers these nations.
6. In order for NSS data to be made publicly available, each provider needs to achieve a minimum of 10 respondents and 50% response rate from the students eligible at overall provider level and by each Common Aggregation Hierarchy group (CAH). Therefore, this Good Practice Guide is intended to help provider staff who have a role in delivering and promoting the NSS to achieve the publication threshold.
7. Should you choose to promote the NSS 2023 to your students, the following sections contain guidelines and instructions on promoting the NSS, including what is considered inappropriate influence and how to avoid it when encouraging student participation. This guide also details the marketing materials that will be sent to providers in November 2022 by Ipsos (if requested via the order form), and advice for providers that would like to create their own campaigns.
8. Please take the time to familiarise yourself with these guidelines, particularly the information on inappropriate influence. Allegations of inappropriate influence are taken very seriously by the UK funding and regulatory bodies and may result in the suppression of data for the affected course(s)/subject(s) when the NSS results are published.
9. Should you have any questions regarding the content of this guide or wish to discuss your NSS marketing order or promotion more generally, please contact Ipsos on 020 8861 8110 or email [nss@ipsos.com](mailto:nss@ipsos.com).





- 15.** Once a validated response has been received from a student, they will receive an automated confirmation email and should not be contacted by Ipsos again. If students complete the survey and are still being contacted by us, or if they have not received a confirmation email, it may be that they either did not fully complete or subithr

# How will the results of the NSS be released?

## 17. Response Thresholds

To protect student anonymity and ensure the robustness of the findings from the NSS, the OfS operates a strict data threshold policy.

18. For NSS data to be published on the OfS website or on Discover Uni, the provider needs to achieve a minimum of 10 respondents and 50% response rate from eligible students, both overall and by each Common Aggregation Hierarchy group (CAH). The results from any providers who have not reached the threshold will not be published.

19. The NSS data is currently only published to providers who have reached the threshold to the data that providers can see to protect the anonymity of the respondents. In order to see the open text comments for a particular category of responses, a provider must have achieved a minimum of 10 responses in that category. Otherwise, the data will not be displayed. Users should not use the data to attempt to identify individuals, or in a way that is likely to facilitate their inadvertent identification. More information about the [guidelines](#) for providers on the use of published and unpublished NSS data in marketing and publicity materials can be found online at <https://nss.texunatex.com/ui/login>.

20. Ipsos will notify all providers where response rates seem likely to fall short of the publication threshold.











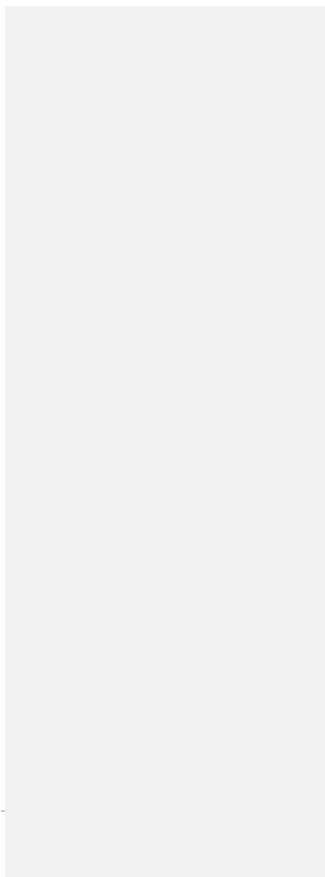
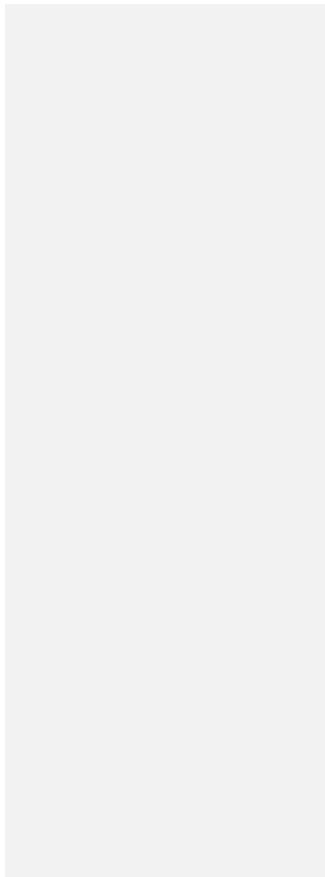


It is important to ensure that your I.T. department/contact is aware that students' email accounts will be receiving emails from these domains (@ipsos-online.com and @thestudentsurvey.com), and that the IT system is set up to allow these through.

## TERM AND DATES

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NOTES



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FINAL SURVEY WEEK	<p>Ipsos – Final Reminder Emails</p> <p>Reminder emails from Ipsos will arrive in non-responding students’ inboxes in the final survey week; these emails are also sent in batches, so providers’ email systems do not tag them as spam.</p>
	<p>Provider – Completion Sessions</p> <p>Providers can arrange final dedicated sessions to maximise the use of</p>

# Required NSS



closed social media posts among other channels. Inter-departmental competitions can also be formed which has been found to boost final response rates. Both are permitted under the new guidelines.

- 53.** Providers are no longer permitted to share response rates on open social media platforms. This includes X (Twitter), Instagram, and public Facebook groups. However, response rates can continue to be shared on closed social media platforms, such as private/closed Facebook groups which are

Details of the information that has been shared with them

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Method of distribution

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Details of the time the information was shared

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□

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Operational justification for releasing this information

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- 61.** If you have any questions regarding these new guidelines, please contact the NSS Helpline at [nss@ipsos.com](mailto:nss@ipsos.com).

## Online Promotion

- 62.** Online promotion is an effective way to reach a wide student audience, particularly those who are not exposed to local campus promotional activities. Providers should attempt to include online and digital efforts within their overall promotional plan.
- 63.** Ipsos has produced a number of digital materials providers can make use of. More information can be

involved in promoting the survey on social media are aware of what they can and cannot do, as well as the consequences of inappropriate posts. See [Inappropriate Influence](#) for more information.

## Facebook













## Pre-survey launch:

student guide on inappropriate influence, the value of their honest views, what to expect on NSS

Communicating change. Showing students what has changed as a result of the NSS and how staff are listening, e.g. “You Said, We Did” campaigns.

On screen promotions. Displaying information about the NSS on plasma screens and IT terminals around the provider.

Social media. Build and maintain a social media presence for the NSS, where you can inform students of the dates of the survey, as well as provide them with links to more information on what the survey is, the NSS video, and how the results have been used at your provider to implement change.

## Internal Communication and Press Releases

**112.** Providers may choose to publish feature articles on their staff intranet to provide background information and tips for engaging students. This can include articles to raise awareness such as “spotlight” interviews, publicising the previous year’s prize draw winner(s) and communicating changes that have been implemented as a result of the NSS. It can also include features in student papers and/or radio stations to encourage completion.

**113.** [Annex 1](#) provides examples of articles that can be used as a basis for communications.

## Engaging Student Bodies and Representatives

**114.** If providers want to promote the NSS themselves, the role of the Students’ Union, Association or Guild (SU) can be important. SU support can run alongside the provider’s main campaign, giving a student-led and student-focused approach. Furthermore, early engagement of the SU, such as involving them in planning, can prove beneficial.

**115.** Examples of SU support include:

Creating a buzz. The SU has an understanding of what appeals to potential respondents and can spread the word.

Targeting promotion. Some providers consult their SU on the best places to display promotional materials.

Communicating with students. Use weekly SU newsletters to promote the NSS.

NSS ambassadors. Dedicated student/course reps can help to spread the word about the NSS. Some providers have NSS champions/ambassadors to help formulate campaigns and promote the survey to final year students.

Student events. Include NSS promotions in any online SU events, e.g., reps can ask students to complete the survey there or send out NSS-branded giveaways. Some providers find that it is easier to

Smartphones and tablets such as iPads and Kindles

Graduation packages, e.g., gown hire, photo packages, champagne reception.

University/Final Year Ball Tickets.

Vouchers for free coffees or meal deals

Print and photocopy credits.

Some providers have identified that they work with their SUs to identify the incentive that would be most appropriate for their students.

## Word of Mouth

- 117.** Providers have previously recognised the importance of word-of-mouth promotion. This can be achieved through SU representatives, department heads, administrators and/or tutors speaking directly with eligible students about the NSS. This may be online or in person. Remember:

## Planning and Coordination

**120.** Setting up a formal procedure can ensure response rates meet the publication threshold. This may include:

**121.** Dedicated NSS Operations Team and/or an NSS Steering Group:

Representatives from across the provider can meet regularly (e.g., once every 2 weeks) to discuss response rates and how to boost them.

A group can get together online to brainstorm promotional ideas. Discuss areas of low response and when appropriate,











**138.** As part of pre-launch survey plans, providers are expected to send an email to all eligible students, informing them of the NSS, that their data will be transferred to Ipsos and how they will be contacted to complete the survey. This email will also contain details about inappropriate influence and include a link to a student guide on the topic. This will help to raise awareness among students on the value of their honest views, what to expect on NSS promotion, what is allowed and not allowed, and where students should go for help and support if they are concerned about being influenced. There is also a digital help card and OfS designed social media graphics available on the NSS Extranet which providers can use to raise further awareness with students about what is allowed and not allowed during survey promotion.

## Avoiding Inappropriate Influence, Dos and Don'ts

### Do:

- 139.** Do run a neutral campaign that focuses solely on boosting responses in the NSS. It is important that the NSS is treated as an independent social research survey. As a result, if you opt to run a marketing campaign it should focus on the survey rather than the provider and should not encourage students to respond in a particular way.
- 140.** Do provide examples of where NSS feedback has resulted in improvements in previous years. Demonstrating how feedback from the NSS has led to tangible changes at the provider can be a powerful way to promote the survey. For example: "Your feedback counts – in a previous NSS, students expressed that library opening hours were an issue. Since then, we introduced a 24-hour central library." However, care must be taken not to combine this with other internal campaigns – please see '**don't**' below.
- 141.** Do encourage eligible students to participate. All eligible students should be targeted in any provider-led promotional campaigns.
- 142.** Do allow students to give their feedback regardless of their opinion. When promoting the NSS, providers should encourage all students to participate regardless of their opinion of the provider or course.
- 143.** Do be wary of tone and use of language when discussing the NSS and asking students to complete it. Be sure to keep promotion as neutral as possible. Staff can explain the importance of the NSS, improvements that their feedback has led to in previous years, and how it will help prospective students. Do not link the NSS to league tables, a provider's performance in the TEF or to the perceived value of students' degrees.
- 144.** Do target promotion in departments or courses with low response rates. During the NSS fieldwork, Ipsos will share response rate information with providers, which can be used to identify targets for promotional campaigns.
- 145.**

**147.** Do ensure students have total privacy when completing the survey.

Students must not feel pressured to respond in any particular way. Therefore, staff should respect students' privacy when they are taking the survey. If opting to host voluntary completion sessions, staff





# NSS Marketing Materials

## Ipsos Marketing Packages

- 164.** The Good Practice Guide outlines guidance for using NSS marketing materials to promote the NSS and parameters around [creating your own marketing materials](#).
- 165.** Ipsos will promote the survey to students through a communication schedule and the production of marketing materials, as detailed in this section.
- 166.** The OfS and UK funding and regulatory bodies have agreed to keep a similar NSS promotional campaign from 2023 for NSS 2024 with some changes to the colour scheme and photo imagery in the marketing materials.
- 167.** Providers will be sent hard copy marketing materials by Ipsos if they have requested them via the order form. It is not compulsory to use the marketing materials provided (free of charge).
- 168.** Listed contacts at providers should have received a separate form for NSS poster orders on 6 October. For more information, please see the NSS Set Up Guide, available via the [NSS Extranet](#).
- 169.** The deadline for requesting posters was 20 October. Orders completed by this date will be delivered from early November. Please contact Ipsos if you require hard copy materials but did not submit an order by this date.

## Hard copy materials



## **174. Social media-specific banners**

Static banners that can be posted on social media. The banners are optimised for mobile phone usage



**178. Other supporting materials**

Ipsos will also provide template examples of communications, some of which can be found in the [Annexes](#).

**Provider Intranet Template**

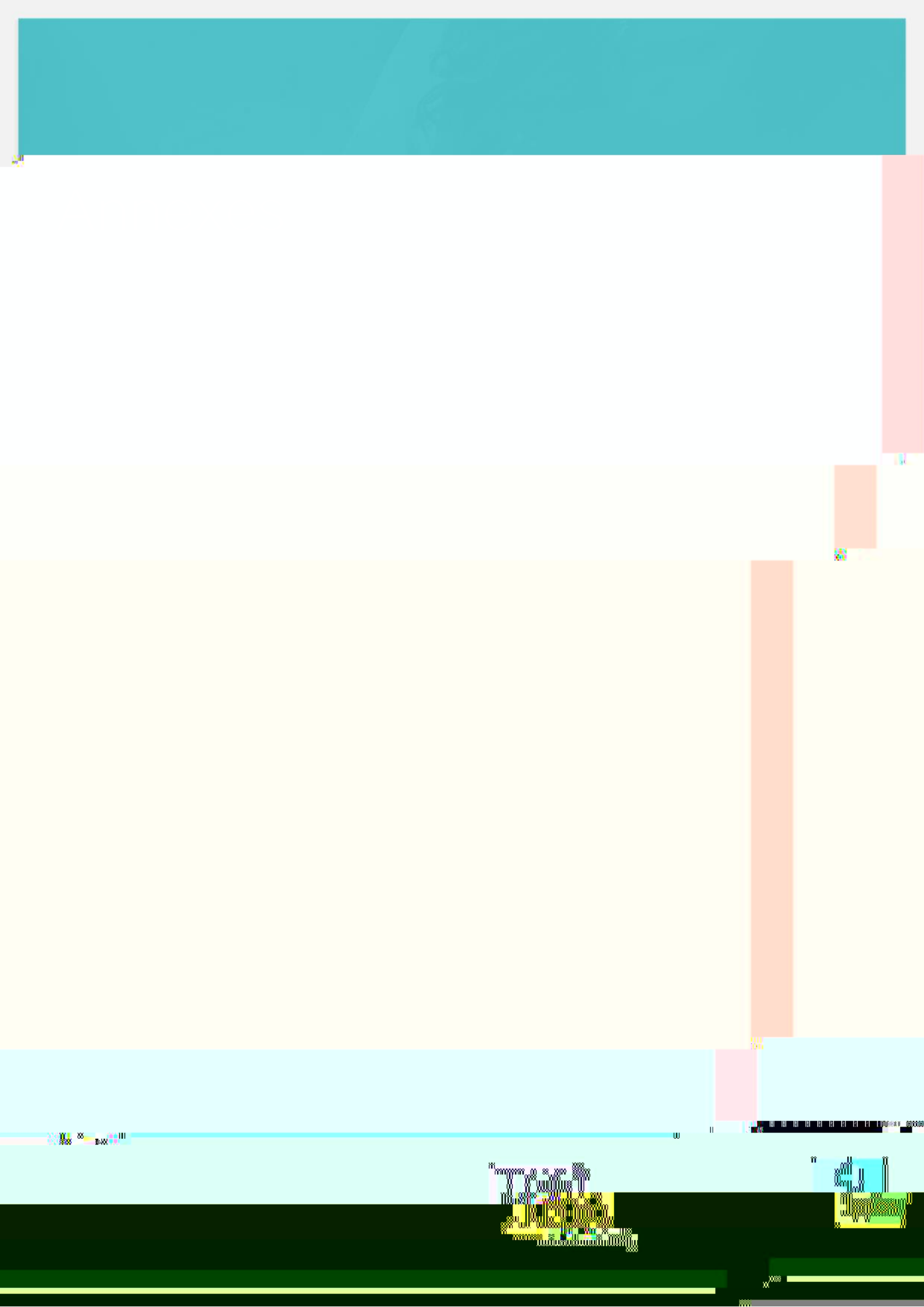
Template articles have been prepared for provider use (e.g., intranet and newsletters), to raise awareness and provide information on the survey.

**Circular letters**











Inappropriate influence is defined as any activity which may encourage students to reflect anything other than their true opinion of their experiences during their course in their NSS responses. A student guide on inappropriate influence is available which details what may constitute inappropriate influence and the types of promotion universities and colleges are, or are not, allowed to undertake. It provides details on the help and support available to you - if you feel you are being or have been influenced in how to respond to the survey, along with the process in place to investigate allegations of inappropriate influence and what happens in case of a breach of guidance.

More information on the student guide on inappropriate influence is available at:

<https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/nss-influence/>

Your Views, Your NSS at [provider].





## Memo to Staff

# The National Student Survey 2024

The National Student Survey (NSS) 2024 will launch at [provider] on the [survey start week]. It's the annual survey of mostly final year undergraduates across the UK.

The NSS provides us with valuable information from students about their experience at [provider] and on their course. We're inviting all staff to promote the survey to your students to help raise awareness of the NSS, tell them why it's important, and encourage them to take part.

Promoting the NSS locally is one of the best ways to help students understand the survey and respond with their views. The more students participate, the better and more useful the data. The NSS helps us to improve the experience for future students. The NSS also provides essential official data for prospective students who are considering higher education. The data is made public to help inform student choice through the [Discover Uni](#) website.

We really encourage you to promote the survey to your students. Although Ipsos can send emails and texts to students who haven't responded, staff can help students to better understand why the survey matters.

### Guide to promoting the survey

Remember, it is important to be aware of the promotional guidelines and what may constitute inappropriate influence. It's important that students are free to give their honest opinion. Please see the [inappropriate influence help card](#) and the Ipsos marketing and promoting the NSS guidelines in the [Good Practice Guide](#) for more information. All internal promotional activities should aim to raise awareness of the NSS amongst eligible students and encourage them to give honest and confidential feedback on their course experience.

[NSS Coordinator/students' union contact] will be coordinating our NSS promotion this year and will ensure that guidelines issued by the [OfS](#) in relation to promotion are adhered to – more information is in the attached Advice for Staff briefing. In short, please make sure that your students are:

- Made aware that the survey is voluntary, and sessions dedicated to completing the NSS are not compulsory to attend;

- Encouraged to give their honest feedback on what they liked and did not like about their course;

- Not asked to fill in the survey while a member of staff is overseeing their responses or made to feel that their responses are being monitored;

- Not encouraged to reflect in their answers anything other than their genuine perception of their experience.

### How many responses do we need?

It is important that as many students as possible provide their feedback for the survey to generate reliable information. We need to achieve a response rate of at least 50% at provider level and in our subjects of study (combined with 10 respondents per cohort) in order for our data to be made publicly available. [Last year we achieved an overall response rate of XX% and we are aiming to beat that this year] [Last year we only managed to achieve an overall response rate of XX% so we need to improve on this and reach at least 50%].

### What happens next?

Eligible students will be sent an invitation to complete the survey





January 2024 and 30 April 2024 when the survey closes. Students may also opt out of the survey at any point during fieldwork.

If you have any questions, please contact [NSS Coordinator] or Ipsos at [nss@ipsos.com](mailto:nss@ipsos.com). If your students have any questions, please direct them to [www.thestudentsurvey.com](http://www.thestudentsurvey.com) or they can contact the student helpline at Ipsos directly at [thestudentsurvey@ipsos.com](mailto:thestudentsurvey@ipsos.com).

Many thanks for your help.

[NSS Champion]

## For more information

Please contact [nss@ipsos.com](mailto:nss@ipsos.com) or call us on 020 8861 8110.

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