

The National Student Survey (NSS) 2026



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Summary: This publication sets out the arrangements for the National Student Survey (NSS) 2026 and the actions required from universities

FAO: Principals of Scotland's universities and the general public.

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The National Student Survey (NSS) 2026

Introduction

1. This publication sets out the arrangements for the National Student Survey (NSS) 2026 and the actions required from universities.
2. **Table 1** summarises actions and key milestones for participating institutions. More information can be found in **Annex B**.

Table 1: Institution actions and key milestones

Date	Actions and key milestones
22 October 2025	Ipsos to issue NSS 2026 set-up guide and good practice guide to institutions
28 November 2025	Review and update NSS contact details
28 November 2025	Complete 'my survey options' form
28 November 2025	Submit NSS 2026 sample templates with contact details of eligible students
7 January 2026	The NSS will launch
8 January – 30 April 2026	The survey fieldwork period
8 July 2026	Provisional date for publishing the NSS 2026 results on the OfS website and for dissemination of detailed results to individual institutions through the NSS data portal

3. This publication also provides an overview of the administration of the survey, institution support contact details, survey timetable and dissemination of results.

National Student Survey 2026

4. The NSS is a UK-wide survey undertaken by final year higher education students to give feedback on their courses. The survey is managed by the Office for Students (OfS) on behalf of the four UK funding and regulatory bodies.
5. The survey is a key component of the quality assurance and wider regulatory landscape in UK higher education. Participation is compulsory for higher education institutions as follows:
 - a. In **Scotland**, participation is a condition of the Scottish Funding Council's funding for higher education institutions.
 - b. In **England**, all institutions registered with and regulated by the OfS will be expected to participate in the NSS as an ongoing condition of registration.
 - c. In **Northern Ireland**, NSS participation is a condition of funding as set out in the financial memoranda between universities and the Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland). Further education colleges in Northern Ireland take part in the NSS to meet quality assurance requirements.
 - d. In **Wales**, all regulated institutions and funded institutions are expected to participate in the NSS to ensure that the views of their diverse student populations are represented and that institutions have regard to their Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED)¹ duties to advance equality of opportunities, eliminate unlawful discrimination, foster good relations and promote equality. NSS outcomes will provide information to Medr, the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research, the regulator of tertiary education in Wales.
6. The survey also provides information for prospective students to help them find the right course and provides data that supports universities and colleges to improve the student experience.
7. The survey will be delivered on behalf of the UK funding and regulatory bodies by:
 - Ipsos, which will administer the survey – see paragraphs 22-26 for more details.
 - CACI Limited, which will deliver the data dissemination portal for institutions – see paragraphs 30-32 for more details.

¹ Please see [Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 \(EA2010\)](#) which details the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED).

Key points

NSS 2026 questionnaire

8. For NSS 2026, the NSS questionnaire will be the same as for NSS 2025 and will be delivered across England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland. The freedom of expression question will be asked to students in England only and the overall satisfaction question will be asked to students in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland only.
9. The UK funding and regulatory bodies ran a shorter fieldwork pilot in NSS 2025 alongside the standard fieldwork schedule to test an approach to mitigate the risk of any drop in NSS response rates. We are considering the findings from the pilot and how to handle a shorter survey fieldwork period going forward. The shorter survey period is anticipated to start in the 2027-28 academic year for all institutions, to accommodate a later sign-off date for the student return. However, for NSS 2026 we are continuing with the normal fieldwork schedule.
10. The OfS also ran the sexual misconduct survey, in England only, using the NSS 2025 platform. An analysis of the survey results and sector-level data were published in September 2025.²
11. The full list of NSS 2026 questions can be found in **Annex A**.
12. The optional bank questions and their response scales will remain the same in 2026, using the Likert response scale.

Survey promotion

13. Institutions in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland are required to promote the survey. To reduce the work required of institutions, OfS are continuing with the principle that institutions in England are not required to promote the 2025 survey to their students. However, OfS recognise that some institutions in England will wish to do so. We expect any institutions promoting the survey to review any internal campaigns that to ensure that they meet the guidance on marketing and promoting of the NSS and avoiding inappropriate influence (see the 2026 good practice guide).³
14. During survey fieldwork, responses will be monitored, and targeted follow-up is carried out to ensure that publication thresholds are met. In early March, in addition to the targeted follow-up, all institutions that are at risk of not meeting the publication threshold will be put into the booster phase to send additional email reminders and an

² Available at [Sexual misconduct survey 2025 - analysis of results - Office for Students](#)

³ Available at [NSS extranet](#). Please note: the NSS extranet is accessible to those in the ipsosgroup.sharepoint.com directory.

additional SMS to their non-responding students. The booster phase will start automatically if a institution's response rate is below 43 per cent by mid-March and will continue for some until mid-April. The fieldwork timetable is set out in the Ipsos set-up guide for institutions which is available on the Ipsos NSS extranet.⁴

Survey costs

15. All institutions in Scotland are required to contribute to the costs of their students' participation and will be contacted by the Scottish Funding Council with further details on this. The Scottish Funding Council will also contribute to the costs of the survey. The costs of the NSS 2026 for universities and colleges in England, Wales and Northern Ireland will be covered by the relevant governments through the OfS, Medr and the Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland).

Survey timetable

16. The timetable for NSS 2026 will run as follows:
 - a. The NSS will launch on **7 January 2026**.
 - b. The survey fieldwork will take place between **8 January** and **30 April 2026** and will be run by Ipsos.
 - c. The provisional date for publication of the NSS 2026 results on the OfS website is **8 July 2026** at **0930**. Detailed results will be disseminated to individual institutions through the NSS data portal provided by CACI Limited on the same date and time. The NSS 2026 results publication is subject to decisions and final agreement from the UK funding and regulatory bodies following the quality review of the data.
 - d. NSS results at course level will be published on the [Discover Uni website](#).⁵

Actions for institutions for NSS 2026

17. All participating institutions are asked to carry out the following actions:
 - a. Review, and where necessary update, their relevant NSS institution contact details. The information should be supplied using the 'My details' form on the Ipsos [NSS extranet](#).⁶ Ipsos issued login details for the NSS extranet to the nominated main and secondary NSS institution contacts in the week commencing **29 September 2025**.

⁴ See [NSS extranet](#). Please note: the NSS extranet is accessible to those in the [ipsosgroup.sharepoint.com](#) directory.

⁵ See <https://discoveruni.gov.uk>.

⁶ See [NSS extranet](#). Please note: the NSS extranet is accessible to those in the [ipsosgroup.sharepoint.com](#) directory.

- b. Submit their completed 'My survey options' form through the Ipsos NSS extranet. This form asks for institutions' preferences for their survey start week and optional questions, and details of any prize draws.
 - c. Populate their NSS 2026 sample templates with the requested contact details for all students on their target list; this is a list of all students eligible for NSS 2026, based on the 2024-25 student data. Details should be supplied via the 'Upload sample data' section of the Ipsos NSS extranet. Any proposed additions to or removals from the target list should follow the process set out by Ipsos.
18. All participating institutions are asked to complete the above actions by **28 November 2025**. Instructions on how to supply this information are included in the NSS 2026 set-up guide, which will be issued to institutional contacts by Ipsos on 22 October 2025. The guidance is also available on the Ipsos NSS extranet⁷ and includes information regarding survey administration, key responsibilities and dates.
 19. Detailed guidance relating to NSS 2026 and the actions requested of higher education institutions can be found in Annex B.
 20. In a drive to reduce burden on institutions, the additions and removals process has been reviewed and updated for NSS 2026. The annexes of this document and the NSS 2026 set-up guide provided by Ipsos provide further details about this process.

Further support

21. The active support of participating institutions is crucial to ensuring the survey data is of high quality. We encourage all institutions and students' unions to draw on the resources available and to get in touch if they require additional support. Table 2 shows the contacts for different elements of the NSS.

Table 2: NSS contacts

Organisation	Email address	First point of contact for queries relating to:
Ipsos	nss@ipsos.com	The running of the survey, including: • setting up and promoting the survey • student target lists • optional questions

⁷ See [NSS extranet](#). Please note: the NSS extranet is accessible to those in the ipsosgroup.sharepoint.com directory.

		incentive schemes
CACI Limited	NSS support team can be contacted via the Contact Support form on the NSS data portal	Institutions' detailed results on the NSS data portal
Office for Students	nss@officeforstudents.org.uk nssallegations@officeforstudents.org.uk	Areas such as: - NSS policy and development - onward use of results - allegations of inappropriate influence

Administration of NSS 2026

22. Ipsos administers the survey on behalf of the OfS and the other UK funding and regulatory bodies. It is responsible for contacting students, promoting the survey and providing cleaned data to the funding bodies. As part of its role, Ipsos will liaise directly with institutions regarding survey administration and will offer advice and support to set up and prepare for the survey. This will include survey options such as start week, optional bank questions and institution-specific questions.
23. Institutions will be invited to select one of five weeks when Ipsos can launch the survey to their students. There will be no communication from Ipsos with students outside the times agreed with individual institutions.
24. Ipsos will issue a comprehensive guidance document, 'Setting up and preparing for the National Student Survey 2026'⁸, for all participating institutions on **22 October 2025**. The guidance should be read in conjunction with this publication.
25. For institutions in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and any institutions in England that want to promote the survey, Ipsos will:
 - d. Supply NSS-branded marketing materials and advise institutions on the production of their own materials.
 - e. Facilitate incentive schemes to encourage students to take part in the survey.

⁸ Available at [NSS extranet](#). Please note: the NSS extranet is accessible to those in the [ipsosgroup.sharepoint.com](#) directory.

26. Ipsos will produce materials for the NSS 2026 promotional campaign and institutions will be able to access the full suite of marketing materials from the Ipsos NSS extranet. Further information about marketing materials and promoting the survey will be provided in the NSS 2026 good practice guide⁹ from Ipsos on 22 October 2025.

Inappropriate influence on the NSS survey

27. The OfS is responsible for managing the process on behalf of the UK funding and regulatory bodies to address any concerns that students have been inappropriately influenced in their completion of the NSS. To maintain the integrity of the NSS data, we need to ensure that students who complete the survey have not been influenced by their institution, or any other party, to respond in a way that does not reflect their true opinion. The OfS will work with the relevant UK funding and regulatory bodies to resolve any concerns that relate to an institution in their nation.
28. The procedures for investigating allegations of inappropriate influence on survey results¹⁰ are intended to be read in conjunction with the good practice guide issued by Ipsos, which explains what constitutes inappropriate influence and how to avoid it when encouraging student participation. We urge institutions to ensure that all staff who are responsible for the running of the survey are familiar with Ipsos's good practice guide, and seek advice where needed from Ipsos or the OfS on their approach to avoiding inappropriate influence.
29. A student guide on inappropriate influence is available¹¹ to help raise awareness among students of the value of their honest views, what to expect from NSS promotion, what is and is not allowed, and where they should go for help and support if they are concerned about being influenced. Institutions are asked to inform students about this guide as part of their pre-launch survey plans. More details on this are provided in the NSS 2026 set-up guide issued by Ipsos.

Dissemination of NSS 2026 results

30. For NSS 2026, CACI Limited will provide the survey results on the NSS data portal on behalf of the OfS and UK funding and regulatory bodies. The NSS data portal allows institutions to access detailed NSS results as well as additional, unpublished elements of their data, including open text comments, data from the additional bank of questions and institution-specific questions, and data below the publication threshold.

⁹ Available at [NSS extranet](#). Please note: the NSS extranet is accessible to those in the [ipsosgroup.sharepoint.com](#) directory.

¹⁰ Available at [Promotion of the NSS - Office for Students](#)

¹¹ Available at [Inappropriate influence - Office for Students](#).

31. CACI Limited provides a dedicated NSS support team¹² to help institutions in accessing their data and responding to queries.
32. In preparation for dissemination of NSS 2026 results, CACI Limited will contact institutions in spring 2026 to:
 - confirm user and login details
 - confirm the details of publication of NSS 2026 results on the portal.

¹² The CACI NSS support team can be contacted via the [Contact Support form](#) on the NSS data portal.

Annex A: Questionnaire for the National Student Survey (NSS) 2026

Please note: the response scale is indicated beneath each question.

Core questions

Teaching on my course

1. How good are teaching staff at explaining things?

Very good; Good; Not very good; Not at all good; This does not apply to me

2. How often do teaching staff make the subject engaging?

Very often; Fairly often; Not very often; Rarely; This does not apply to me

3. How often is the course intellectually stimulating?

Very often; Fairly often; Not very often; Rarely; This does not apply to me

4. How often does your course challenge you to achieve your best work?

Very often; Fairly often; Not very often; Rarely; This does not apply to me

Learning opportunities

5. To what extent have you had the chance to explore ideas and concepts in depth?

To a large extent; To some extent; To a small extent; Not at all; This does not apply to me

6. How well does your course introduce subjects and skills in a way that builds on what you have already learned?

Very well; Well; Not very well; Not at all well; This does not apply to me

7. To what extent have you had the chance to bring together information and ideas from different topics?

To a large extent; To some extent; To a small extent; Not at all; This does not apply to me

8. To what extent does your course have the right balance of directed and independent study?

To a large extent; To some extent; To a small extent; Not at all; This does not apply to me

- 9. How well has your course developed your knowledge and skills that you think you will need for your future?**

Very well; Well; Not very well; Not at all well; This does not apply to me

Assessment and feedback

- 10. How clear were the marking criteria used to assess your work?**

Very clear; Clear; Not very clear; Not at all clear; This does not apply to me

- 11. How fair has the marking and assessment been on your course?**

Very fair; Fair; Not very fair; Not at all fair; This does not apply to me

- 12. How well have assessments allowed you to demonstrate what you have learned?**

Very well; Well; Not very well; Not at all well; This does not apply to me

- 13. How often have you received assessment feedback on time?**

Very often; Fairly often; Not very often; Rarely; This does not apply to me

- 14. How often does feedback help you to improve your work?**

Very often; Fairly often; Not very often; Rarely; This does not apply to me

Academic support

- 15. How easy was it to contact teaching staff when you needed to?**

Very easy; Easy; Not very easy; Not at all easy; This does not apply to me

- 16. How well have teaching staff supported your learning?**

Very well; Well; Not very well; Not at all well; This does not apply to me

Organisation and management

- 17. How well organised is your course?**

Very well organised; Well organised; Not very well organised; Not at all well organised;
This does not apply to me

- 18. How well were any changes to teaching on your course communicated?**

Very well; Well; Not very well; Not at all well; This does not apply to me

Learning resources

- 19. How well have the IT resources and facilities supported your learning?**

Very well; Well; Not very well; Not at all well; This does not apply to me

20. How well have the library resources (e.g., books, online services and learning spaces) supported your learning?

Very well; Well; Not very well; Not at all well; This does not apply to me

21. How easy is it to access subject specific resources (e.g., equipment, facilities, software) when you need them?

Very easy; Easy; Not very easy; Not at all easy; This does not apply to me

Student voice

22. To what extent do you get the right opportunities to give feedback on your course?

To a large extent; To some extent; To a small extent; Not at all; This does not apply to me

23. To what extent are students' opinions about the course valued by staff?

To a large extent; To some extent; To a small extent; Not at all; This does not apply to me

24. How clear is it that students' feedback on the course is acted on?

Very clear; Clear; Not very clear; Not at all clear; This does not apply to me

25. How well does the students' union (association or guild) represent students' academic interests?

Very well; Well; Not very well; Not at all well; This does not apply to me

(Please note: Question 25 is a standalone question, and is not part of the Student voice theme)

Additional questions

Mental wellbeing services

26. How well communicated was information about your university/college's mental wellbeing support services?

Very well; Well; Not very well; Not at all well; This does not apply to me

Freedom of expression

(Please note: Question 27 is for students in England only)

27. During your studies, how free did you feel to express your ideas, opinions, and beliefs?

Very free; Free; Not very free; Not at all free; This does not apply to me

Overall satisfaction

(Please note: Question 28 is for students in Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales only and is asked after the healthcare questions)

28. Overall, I am satisfied with the quality of the course.

Definitely agree; Mostly agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Mostly disagree; Definitely disagree; Not applicable

Healthcare, allied health and clinical practice placements

(Please note: The following questions are for students studying subjects which include healthcare, allied health and clinical practice placements)

Response scale:

Definitely agree; Mostly agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Mostly disagree; Definitely disagree; Not applicable

H1. I received sufficient preparatory information prior to my placement(s).

H2. I was allocated placement(s) suitable for my course.

H3. I received appropriate supervision on placement(s).

H4. I was given opportunities to meet my required practice learning outcomes / competences.

H5. My contribution during placement(s) as part of the clinical team was valued.

H6. My practice supervisor(s) understood how my placement(s) related to the broader requirements of my course.

Open text question

29. Looking back on the experience, are there any particularly positive or negative aspects you would like to highlight?

Optional questions

Bank of optional questions

Response scale:

Definitely agree; Mostly agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Mostly disagree; Definitely disagree; Not applicable

B1. Personal development

1. The course has helped me to present myself with confidence.
2. My communication skills have improved.
3. As a result of the course, I feel confident in tackling unfamiliar problems.

B2. Students' union (association or guild)

1. The students' union (association or guild) has had a positive impact on my sense of belonging to the university or college.
2. The students' union (association or guild) has had a positive impact on the local community.
3. The students' union (association or guild) has helped me develop useful life skills.

B3. Careers

1. As a result of my course, I believe that I have improved my career prospects.
2. Good advice is available for making career choices.
3. Good advice is available on further study opportunities.

B4. Course content and structure

1. All of the compulsory modules are relevant to my course.
2. There is an appropriate range of options to choose from on my course.
3. The modules of my course form a coherent integrated whole.

B5. Work placements

Did your course involve any work placements?

- a. Yes (ask all questions in this section)
- b. No (skip this section)

1. I received sufficient support and advice from my institution about the organisation of my placements.
2. My placements were valuable in helping my learning.
3. My placements have helped me to develop my skills in relation to my course.
4. My placements have helped me to develop my general life skills.
5. The taught part of my course was good preparation for my placements.

B6. Social opportunities

1. I have had plenty of opportunities to interact socially with other students.
2. I am satisfied with the range of clubs and societies on offer.
3. I am satisfied with the range of entertainment and social events on offer.

B7. Course delivery

1. Learning materials made available on my course have enhanced my learning.
2. The range and balance of approaches to teaching has helped me to learn.
3. The delivery of my course has been stimulating.
4. My learning has benefited from modules that are informed by current research.
5. Practical activities on my course have helped me to learn.

B8. The physical environment

1. Security has been satisfactory when attending classes.
2. My institution provides an appropriate environment in which to learn.

B9. Welfare resources and facilities

1. There is sufficient provision of welfare and student services to meet my needs.
2. When needed, the information and advice offered by welfare and student services has been helpful.

B10. Workload

1. The workload on my course is manageable.
2. This course does not apply unnecessary pressure on me as a student.
3. The volume of work on my course means I can always complete it to my satisfaction
4. I am generally given enough time to understand the things I have to learn.

B11. Assessment

1. Teaching staff test what I have understood rather than what I have memorised.
2. Assessment methods employed in my course require an in-depth understanding of the course content.

B12. Learning community

1. I feel part of a group of students committed to learning.
2. I have been able to explore academic interests with other students.
3. I have learned to explore ideas confidently.
4. Within my course, I feel my suggestions and ideas are valued.
5. I feel part of an academic community in my college or university.

B13. Intellectual motivation

1. I have found the course motivating.
2. The course has stimulated my interest in the field of study.
3. The course has stimulated my enthusiasm for further learning.

B14. Entrepreneurial opportunities

1. If I was interested in starting my own business, I know where I could find support in my institution.
2. My higher education experience has helped me develop skills that could help me run my own business in future.
3. As a result of my higher education experience, I am more likely to consider running my own business in the future.

B15. Employability and skills

1. My higher education experience has helped me plan for my future career.
2. My institution offered activities and resources designed to prepare me for the next step in my career.
3. The skills I have developed during my time in higher education will be useful for my future career.

B16. Environmental sustainability

1. My institution encourages good environmental practice.

2. My course has encouraged me to think about environmental sustainability.
3. I have had opportunities to take part in activities supporting environmental sustainability.

B17. Student safety

1. I feel safe to be myself at university/college.
2. My institution takes responsibility for my safety.

Annex B: Guidance on the NSS 2026 for Higher Education Institutions

1. The National Student Survey (NSS) will be carried out in 2026 across higher education institutions in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland by the Office for Students (OfS), working on behalf of the UK funding and regulatory bodies.
2. The timetable for NSS 2026 will run as follows:
 - a. The NSS will launch on **7 January 2026**.
 - b. The survey fieldwork will take place between **8 January and 30 April 2026** and will be run by Ipsos.
 - c. The provisional date for publication of the NSS results on the OfS website is **8 July 2026** at **0930**. Detailed results will be disseminated to individual institutions through the NSS data dissemination portal provided by CACI Limited on the same date and time. The NSS 2026 results publication is subject to decisions and final agreement from the UK funding and regulatory bodies following the quality review of the data.
 - d. NSS results at course level will be published on the [Discover Uni website](#).¹³
3. This annex provides guidance specifically for UK higher education institutions.
4. The responsibilities of institutions in the successful management of the NSS are as follows:

Timely submission of the HESA Student record. The final submission date is **29 October 2025** for the Student Record 2024-25 (24056) collection.

- a. Ensuring good data quality by checking the NSS report (the target list) generated by HESA. Requests for any necessary changes that cannot be resolved by correcting the student data may be directed to Ipsos, for approval by the OfS or the relevant funding body as part of the annual additions and removals process.
- b. Timely issuing of NSS pre-notification email to eligible students. Further details can be found in the NSS 2026 set-up guidance, sent to institution contacts by Ipsos. The guidance document is also available on the Ipsos NSS extranet.¹⁴

¹³ See [Discover Uni Home](#) | [Discover Uni](#).

¹⁴ See [NSS extranet](#). [Please note](#): the NSS extranet is accessible to those in the ipsosgroup.sharepoint.com directory.

- c. Timely submission of student contact details (email addresses and telephone numbers) when requested by Ipsos (by **28 November 2025**).
 - d. Engagement with all guidance and requests issued by the OfS, UK funding and regulatory bodies, HESA, Ipsos and CACI Limited, and attending training and events run by them as necessary.
 - e. Submitting survey preferences to Ipsos by **28 November 2025**. This includes the timing of the survey and the choice of optional bank questions. Optional bank choices should be made in conjunction with the relevant students' union.
 - f. Institutions in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are required to promote the survey. Institutions in England are not required to promote the survey to students but can do so if they wish; this follows the same process as in NSS 2025. Institutions that promote the survey to their students must ensure that all activities meet the guidelines on marketing and promoting the survey and on avoiding inappropriate influence. Guidance on this is provided by Ipsos in the good practice guide, which is available on the NSS extranet.¹⁵
5. Institutions can access their target lists for NSS 2026 via the HESA data collection system. They should provide the requested contact details for students on these lists to Ipsos by **28 November 2025**. Further details can be found in the NSS 2026 set-up guide for institutions, sent to contacts by Ipsos. The guidance document is also available on the Ipsos NSS extranet.¹⁶
 6. If an institution feels that the target population does not accurately reflect the students currently in the final year of eligible courses, then it should engage with the additions and removals process as outlined in paragraphs 14-18. Any such requests for additions or removals must be submitted to Ipsos through identification in the sample template. The requested changes will be reviewed by Ipsos or the OfS prior to their inclusion in, or removal from, the final target list. Institutions should assume that all requested changes have been approved within eight working days of being submitted, unless they hear from the OfS.
 7. Eligible students may opt out of the survey at any stage during the fieldwork process.
 8. Institutions may choose up to six banks of optional questions and may include up to two additional questions specific to the institution. Institutions are asked to agree with students' unions their choice of optional banks of questions for inclusion. Institutions should submit their choice of optional banks and additional questions to Ipsos.

¹⁵ See [NSS extranet. Please note](#): the NSS extranet is accessible to those in the ipsosgroup.sharepoint.com directory.

¹⁶ See [NSS extranet. Please note](#): the NSS extranet is accessible to those in the ipsosgroup.sharepoint.com directory.

9. For NSS 2026, in addition to targeted follow-up, all institutions that are at risk of not meeting the publication threshold will be automatically put into the booster phase to send additional reminders to their non-responding students. This is additional promotional activity to encourage students to complete the survey. Institutions are not required to take any action in relation to the booster phase.
10. Institutions may access their detailed responses and results of the survey via the NSS data portal provided by CACI Limited. Public NSS data can be accessed from the OfS website and from the Discover Uni website (for students).

Scope and coverage of the survey

11. The following institutions are covered by the NSS 2026:
 - a. In **Scotland**, participation is a condition of the Scottish Funding Council's funding for higher education institutions.
 - b. In **England**, all institutions registered and regulated by the OfS will be expected to participate in the NSS as an ongoing condition of registration.
 - c. In **Northern Ireland**, NSS participation is a condition of funding as set out in the financial memoranda between universities and the Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland). Further education colleges in Northern Ireland take part in the NSS to meet quality assurance requirements.
 - d. In **Wales**, all regulated institutions and funded institutions are expected to participate in the NSS to ensure that the views of their diverse student populations are represented, in line with their duties to advance equality of opportunities, eliminate unlawful discrimination, foster good relations and promote equality. NSS outcomes will provide information to Medr, the Commission for Tertiary Education and Research, the regulator of tertiary education in Wales.
12. All full-time and part-time undergraduate students registered at participating institutions are eligible to undertake the NSS during their final year of study (or, for flexible programmes where the final year cannot be predicted, after they are expected to have undertaken more than one full-time equivalent and not before their fourth year of study), with the following key exceptions:
 - a. students on programmes that do not lead to undergraduate qualifications or credits
 - b. students on a course lasting one year or one full-time equivalent, or less
 - c. any students who were surveyed for NSS 2025 (whether or not they responded) and who remain at the same institution

- d. any students who we expect, by the end of the academic year 2025-26, to have completed one full-time equivalent year or less since they were last surveyed.
13. Students are included in the 2026 survey population if they are expected to complete their course between 1 February 2026 and 31 January 2027 inclusive.
 14. It is possible to add students to, or remove them from, the NSS target list if an institution feels that the target population does not accurately reflect the students currently in the final year of eligible courses (for example, if the length of a student's course has decreased after an institution has submitted its HESA Student return). The full criteria are in the NSS 2026 set-up guidance provided by Ipsos.
 15. Institutions will be able to make requests to add students or remove them from the NSS population once the target list has been finalised by the OfS. The additions and removals process will start approximately one week after the OfS receives final student data from HESA. Institutions will be notified ahead of the process opening. Requests will not be accepted after 27 February 2026.
 16. From NSS 2026, institutions only need to complete the sample template with a 'D' to request removals. **There will be no requirement to complete a separate removals template.** The OfS will review requests against future student data, once available, to verify accuracy.
 17. Addition requests should be submitted as soon as possible to ensure they can be processed prior to, or early in, the survey period. All requests must be made through the Ipsos NSS extranet and should be made in a single file, including the required level of detail.¹⁷ Ipsos or the OfS will review all requests for additions and may request further details from institutions where necessary. Submitting requests as early as possible and responding to queries in a timely manner will help expedite the process. It may be necessary for the OfS to prioritise approvals by survey start week, but we will endeavour to action all requests prior to the chosen survey start date.
 18. Institutions should assume that all requests have been approved within eight working days of being submitted, unless they hear from the OfS. It should not be expected that each request will be confirmed as previously.
 19. Except for students on enhanced first degrees, postgraduate students are not included in the NSS.

¹⁷ See [NSS extranet](#). [Please note:](#) the NSS extranet is accessible to those in the ipsosgroup.sharepoint.com directory.

Reasons for excluding individuals from the survey

20. We enable institutions to exclude specific groups of students from being contacted by Ipsos. These groups are:
 - a. Students who are deceased.
 - b. Students with serious health difficulties (including mental health difficulties), such that seeking a response may be distressing for them.
 - c. Students who, having been informed that their contact details will be passed on to the survey agency (Ipsos) for the purposes of the NSS, state that they do not wish to be contacted (students will also be able to opt out during the survey process).
21. Students in groups b and c will still be able to complete the survey if they wish, through the survey website.¹⁸
22. These are the only grounds on which students may be excluded from the target population. Institutions should code these students on their sample submission as category 'C' and institutions should not provide contact details for these students. More information on the process is in the NSS 2026 set-up guidance provided by Ipsos.
23. To enable us to monitor exclusions and verify their consistent application, institutions should retain evidence to support them. Where a student asks that their details are not passed on, we will expect institutions to retain evidence of this request. If the number of such requests at any institution is so high as to affect our ability to conduct the survey successfully, we will discuss this with the institution.
24. If the institution feels that the target population does not accurately reflect the students currently in the final year of eligible courses, then it should engage with the additions and removals process as outlined in paragraphs 14 to 18. Reasons for differences will usually be changes in the student's circumstances, such as taking a year out or retaking a year.
25. Although some students may withdraw in their final year, they will have had significant interaction with the institution, so their opinions are valuable and should be included. If students withdraw without engaging in their final year, it may be possible to remove them through the additions and removals process.
26. In exceptional circumstances, the reason for a change in the target population may be an error in the student data returned to the HESA Student record. In this case:

¹⁸ See www.thestudentsurvey.com/.

- a. English institutions may wish to review the data for these students and consider if they would like to submit a data error summary to the OfS for consideration.¹⁹ If on reviewing this summary we believe the errors are widespread and material, we may require the institution to submit a revised Student record to HESA.
- b. For institutions in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, the details of any potential data errors will be shared with the respective funding bodies for their consideration on any further action.
- c. It should be noted that HESA will apply a charge to meet the costs of processing such a change.

Process for supplying student contact data

27. Following submission of the Student record to HESA, a target list of students to be included in the NSS will automatically be generated. The institution should then supply contact details (email addresses and phone numbers), according to the standard template that will be supplied by Ipsos, for all eligible students on the list.
28. Students should be informed by the institution that their contact details may be passed on. Institutions can do this by sending a NSS pre-notification email to all students eligible to take part an NSS informing them that they will be contacted by Ipsos. Guidance and an email template are provided in the NSS 2026 set-up guidance issued to institutions by Ipsos. There is also text added to the HESA student data collection notice to explain this.²⁰
29. Institutions can define their own structure for receiving their NSS data, through one of two optional fields on the sample file to indicate the internal 'department code' for each student. These codes, where populated, will be used solely for providing feedback to the institution.
30. Institutions should submit the requested contact details for students on these lists to Ipsos by **28 November 2025**. Ipsos will provide guidance to its contacts on how to supply these lists as part of the NSS guidance document. The NSS achieves a high response rate, and to ensure this continues it is important that institutions submit complete and accurate contact details to Ipsos by this date.

¹⁹ See [Data amendments process - Office for Students](#).

²⁰ See [Collection notices | HESA](#).

Administration of the survey

31. The NSS 2026 survey fieldwork will be conducted from 8 January until 30 April 2026 and the provisional date for the publication of the NSS 2026 results on the OfS website is 8 July 2026. To avoid concerns regarding impact on internal surveys, Ipsos will continue to:
 - brand the NSS independently, which clearly distinguishes its purpose
 - manage the survey's distribution centrally, so that institutions are not involved in contacting students to complete the NSS.
32. Institutions will be invited to select one of five weeks when Ipsos can launch the survey to their students. This is to ensure that the survey can start at a time that fits with term timetables and does not clash with exams. Institutions may select a week between 5 January and 2 February 2026 for the survey to start. **We would advise institutions to make use of the earlier survey start weeks unless this would cause inconvenience to their students, so that there is the best chance of achieving a high response rate.** There will be no communication with students by Ipsos outside the times agreed with each institution; however, students will be able to access the survey through the survey website²¹ from 7 January 2026 onwards.
33. It is essential that all institutions start their surveys during the five-week 'starting window' to ensure that results can be published in time for prospective students to make informed choices. We will, however, consider individual requests for a start date outside the five-week window where the activities of students make it impractical to conduct the survey during that time. Any institution that wishes to make a case for a different survey start date should contact Ipsos by **28 November 2025**.
34. Ipsos will conduct the survey at each institution using a set sequence of email and telephone surveying. This will take up to eight weeks at each institution, although some targeted follow-up may be needed during and beyond this time to increase response rates. Ipsos will deploy the survey modes tactically, to personalise the survey to students and institutions and help increase online responses and reduce survey costs.

Promoting the NSS

35. To reduce the burden on institutions, the OfS has agreed that those institutions in England are not required to promote the NSS 2026 to their students, but they can do so if they wish to.

²¹ See www.thestudentsurvey.com/.

36. Institutions in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland are required to promote the survey, as agreed by the funding bodies in these nations.
37. Institutions that promote the survey are expected to review any internal campaigns to ensure that they meet with the guidance on marketing and promoting of the NSS and avoiding inappropriate influence (please see the NSS 2026 good practice guide).²²
38. The good practice guidance for NSS 2026 will be available from the Ipsos NSS extranet and includes comprehensive guidance on the promotion of the survey. It is important that institutions adhere to the guidance on avoiding inappropriate influence and raise any queries with Ipsos. The UK funding and regulatory bodies treat seriously any breaches of this guidance and may investigate and act where there is evidence of a breach. We undertake an annual review to ensure that the process we adopt to respond to allegations is fit for purpose, and to make any improvements to the process and guidance for institutions and students before fieldwork takes place. This allegations procedure guidance²³ is intended to be read in conjunction with the good practice guidance issued by Ipsos. We urge institutions to ensure that all staff who are responsible for the running of the survey are familiar with Ipsos's guidance and seek advice where needed on their approach to avoiding inappropriate influence.
39. A student guide on inappropriate influence²⁴ is available to help to raise awareness among students of the value of their honest views, what to expect from NSS promotion, what is and is not allowed, and where they should go for help and support if they are concerned about being influenced. Institutions are asked to inform students about this guide as part of their pre-launch survey plans. More details on this are provided in the NSS 2026 set-up guide issued by Ipsos.
40. Ipsos will produce NSS 2026 promotional materials and social media materials for institutions and students' unions to use locally. Institutions will be able to access the full suite of marketing materials from the Ipsos [NSS extranet](#). If an institution or students' union wishes to use the NSS branding to develop its own marketing material, it may do so and should discuss this with Ipsos, who will advise on good practice and offer guidelines to ensure a reasonable degree of consistency across the sector. When it contacts institutions, Ipsos will discuss who in the institution is best placed to coordinate promotional activity. Further information about marketing materials and promoting the

²² Available at [NSS extranet](#). Please note: the NSS extranet is accessible to those in the [ipsosgroup.sharepoint.com](#) directory.

²³ Available at [Promotion of the NSS - Office for Students](#).

²⁴ Available at [Inappropriate influence - Office for Students](#).

survey will be provided in the NSS 2026 good practice guide from Ipsos on 22 October 2025.²⁵

41. Ipsos will manage incentive schemes on behalf of those institutions who have selected the option to offer a prize draw to their students. More details about this are provided in the NSS 2026 set-up guide issued by Ipsos.

Questionnaire distribution

42. There are two main methods of data collection: online and telephone. Ipsos operates a live open-access website, where students can log in and complete the survey, in addition to the option to respond by following the link in a personalised email. The aim of the site is to verify the identity of students at the point of logging in; once students have completed the survey and their response is validated, they will be automatically removed from the target list and not contacted again. To enable this, and to enable efficient working of the survey more generally, institutions should adhere to the deadline for supplying student contact details.
43. Although there are two methods of data collection, we are committed to reducing the amount of telephone contact. However, telephoning remains an essential element of the survey and will continue, so all institutions are expected to provide each student's mobile phone number and any other alternative contact number that is held.
44. To monitor responses and to process data for analysis and reporting, we link all responses to students' numbers in the HESA Student record or known student identifiers. Telephone interviewers will have automatic access to identifiers. Once students have completed the survey, they will be removed from the target list and not contacted again.
45. Throughout the process, Ipsos will send reminders to students who have not responded.
46. Response rates, by institution and by subject area, will be monitored continuously during the process. During the telephone stage, response rates will be reviewed, and some areas may be identified for additional, targeted follow-up activity, to bring responses up to a sufficient level to report results. This additional activity will involve reminders by email and text message.
47. For NSS 2026, in addition to targeted follow-up, all institutions that are at risk of not meeting the publication threshold will be automatically put into the booster phase to send additional reminders to their non-responding students during survey fieldwork. This will be started automatically if an institution's response rate is below 43 per cent by

²⁵ Available at [NSS extranet](#). Please note: the NSS extranet is accessible to those in the [ipsosgroup.sharepoint.com](#) directory.

mid-March and will continue for some institutions until mid-April. An additional text reminder will be included in the schedule of contact to non-responding students during the booster phase.

48. At any stage during the survey process, students may opt out of the survey and will not be contacted again. To do this, students will need to verify their identity by providing some data, such as their date of birth.
49. Institution response rates will be shared by Ipsos during the fieldwork to help institutions monitor their survey progress. Institutions should not share this data more widely, and guidance on this is provided in the NSS 2026 good practice guide sent to institution contacts by Ipsos. National response rates data will not be made available to institutions.
50. The UK funding and regulatory bodies reserve the right to agree changes to the survey period with individual institutions that are at risk of not meeting institution-level or subject-level publication thresholds. The OfS will inform institutions of any approaches and actions that may be necessary. The completeness and accuracy of students' contact data, as supplied by institutions, will be a significant factor in achieving a publishable level of responses.

Publication of 2026 NSS results

51. A major purpose of the NSS is to provide information to help potential students and their advisers make choices about higher education. It also has a key role in improving the student experience, by helping institutions to identify areas for action or development.
52. The current publication threshold for NSS results is a 50 per cent response rate, with at least 10 students responding. Results that meet the [publication](#) threshold and criteria will be published on the Discover Uni website.²⁶ Data will also be published on the OfS website.
53. Detailed NSS data will also be available to institutions on the NSS data portal delivered by CACI Limited. The NSS data portal will allow institutions to access unpublished elements of their data, including optional bank questions, students' open text comments and data below the publication thresholds.
54. The OfS and UK funding and regulatory bodies may publish their own analysis of the data, including open text comments and optional banks. For data that is not available

²⁶ See [Discover Uni Home](#) | [Discover Uni](#).

publicly through the OfS website, this analysis will be at aggregate level and will not allow institutions, courses or individuals to be identified.