

Advice for Staff

INAPPROPRIATE INFLUENCE

WHAT IS INAPPROPRIATE INFLUENCE AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO ENSURE THAT THERE IS NO UNDUE INFLUENCE IN PROMOTING THE NSS?

All those involved in the NSS should be aware of the guidelines regarding inappropriate influence. Staff can remind eligible students to complete the survey but they have a responsibility to ensure that their students are encouraged to give their honest feedback on their student experience in the NSS.

Students should not feel that they are being monitored or encouraged to answer the survey in a particular way.

Staff must not:

- Explicitly instruct students on how to complete the survey, such as explaining the meanings of questions or the NSS scale. The questions and scale are self-explanatory and students should be left to interpret these in a way they see fit. Institutions are not permitted to recommend that students respond in a certain way, e.g. 'I recommend that you select agree or mostly agree', or misrepresent the scale to students, i.e. defining the 'neither agree nor disagree' as a negative response.
- Link the NSS to league tables, job prospects and the perceived value of students' degrees. Institutions are **not** permitted to tell students that if their courses do not achieve good satisfaction scores, this will make their degrees look bad to future employers.
- Arrange compulsory sessions for students to complete the NSS. Completion of the NSS, while beneficial to institutions, is completely voluntary for students. While arranging completion sessions is allowed, institutions should not enforce them nor make students feel there may be consequences should they not attend.
- Take students through the survey on an individual basis. Institutions should not stand or sit beside students when they are completing the survey, or take them through their responses question-by-questions. Students should be given due privacy so they can respond with honesty.
- Compare the NSS scale to other scales with different purposes, i.e. assignment marking schemes.
- Look over students' shoulders when they complete the survey;

- Require students to provide evidence that they have completed the survey;
- Complete the survey on behalf of students.

It is crucial that local survey promotion is neutral and that:

- Students are targeted equally so that each eligible student is given a chance to express their views on their student experience;
- Students feel free to give honest feedback about their experiences without their responses being influenced by their institution;
- Students must not be encouraged to reflect in their answers anything other than genuine perceptions of their experience;
- Any promotional materials that are produced in addition to those provided by Ipsos MORI must be checked for suitability in accordance with NSS guidance. A senior member of staff should sign-off all materials before they are used.

Where a concern or allegation is raised, it will be investigated by OfS. If an investigation were to find that promotional activities and/or marketing materials had resulted in inappropriate influence, whether intentional or unintentional, the integrity of the NSS data could be called into question.

OfS (in partnership with the relevant funding partners) could take action to suppress the affected NSS data for the institution. This would mean that no NSS data would be published for the affected courses at the institution in the specific year and, as a result, it would not be available for marketing activities, learning enhancement work or inclusion on Unistats, the OfS website etc.

More information on the OfS concerns process, and how they deal with allegations of inappropriate influence, can be found in their guidance 'National Student Survey: Procedures for investigating allegations of inappropriate influence on survey results'.

RUNNING DEDICATED SESSIONS

Staff should be encouraged to run dedicated sessions where time is set aside to allow eligible students to complete the survey. Students should be encouraged to give their honest opinion. Please note that staff should not be 'standing over students' while they are completing the survey. Staff should make it clear that they are there to provide support on technical issues and not to monitor responses.