



MEG response to OfS NSS Phase Two Consultation

Question 1: Do you agree we should retain the current criteria for NSS core questions?

Answer 1: Agree. Making successive changes to the survey can lead to more confusion and restrict year on year comparisons which providers use for continuous assessment/improvement in teaching and learning/student experience.

Question 2: What are the consequences – both positive and negative – of changing to the use of direct questions for the NSS?

Answer 2: Direct questions will probably benefit students' understanding and reduce ambiguity in interpretation of questions. This should result in clearer responses. Presumably any such changes will/have been tested before introduction?

We still remain concerned however that too many students studying on higher level skills programmes are excluded from the survey, irrespective of the wording of questions, namely those who study on one-year courses which are not currently in scope. We strongly believe that students on one year courses such as CertHE, HNCs, HNDs and top-up degrees should be eligible as they form an important, often sizable part of individual providers' student cohorts.

By excluding such students, OfS is increasing the bureaucratic burden on providers as this , in effect, requires them to administer parallel surveys to ensure all students' views are considered. For the NSS survey to be truly reflective of the diverse HE sector it should include students on one year, two year and three year courses studying on a full time and part time basis.

Question 3: What are the consequences – both positive and negative – of removing the summative question for England only?

Answer 3: If we are to have summative questions for other nations, why not England? Providers as well as students and parents across the four nations should be able to draw comparisons based on the summative question. The use of data drawn from responses will inevitably differ between students, providers and regulators.

We broadly agree with changing the word 'satisfaction' to something more akin to 'quality'. Both alternatives are , of course, open to interpretation.

Question 4: 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?

Answer 4: We urge OfS to retain a consistent approach to all students, irrespective of nation of study.

Question 5: Should a question on freedom of expression be offered as an additional question after the core questionnaire?

Answer 5: *We have no strong view either way on this proposal however we are concerned that its inclusion will unnecessarily broaden the scope of the survey which, in our view, should be kept as short and as tight as possible. Will students understand the wider political implications of the question?*

Question 6: Should a question on mental wellbeing provision be offered as an additional question after the core questionnaire?

Answer 6: *Neither agree nor disagree. To some students, the question may appear irrelevant; to others it will not. If the question relates strictly to assessing signposting to support and services, this should include communication of information and signposting of external support offered by NHS and charitable organisations for example. It is also worth noting that some providers will assess the mental health of their students without any overt reference to 'mental health and well being'. For example, asking students if they have made friends relates to their mental well being without the need for any overt reference to mental health.*

Question 7: What are the unintended consequences of asking questions to students on the awareness of mental wellbeing services where no support to respondents can be offered?

Answer 7: *This could confuse and generate misleading responses.*

Question 8: Do you agree that we develop a process where the NSS is reviewed on a four-year cycle? Is the proposed timing between reviews a sensible balance between developing insight and maintaining capacity to change?

Answer 8: *Broadly agree. Changing the questions too frequently hinders year on year comparisons and quality assessments. Regular review however does allow the survey to reflect changing concerns.*

Question 9: 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?

Answer 9: *We believe shortening the survey period would affect the response rates and therefore the usefulness of NSS results. A rigid survey window combined with a shorter survey period can disproportionately affect smaller providers that already struggle to meet the publication thresholds. Based on the academic terms, providers should be offered the flexibility to choose the most appropriate period between January and April rather than setting a rigid time frame that will fail to meet the needs of the diverse sector. Again, this proposal reflects the bias of the survey towards the assessment of students on taught, full time programmes.*

Question 10: 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:

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

Answer 10: *The proposals seem sensible.*

Question 11: 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:

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

Answer 11: *Ditto 10 above.*

Question 12: Did you find any aspects of the proposals unclear? If so, please specify which, and tell us why.

Answer 12: *None.*

Question 13: In your view, are there ways in which the objectives of this consultation (see paragraph 7) could be delivered more efficiently or effectively than is proposed here?

Answer 13: *The timing of this consultation is unhelpful if your intention is to attract the maximum number of responses as staff at most institutions will be on leave between end of July and August and may miss the deadline therefore.*