

WHAT IS THE

National Student Survey

AND WHY SHOULD
WE CARE?

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What is the NSS?

Survey of all final year undergraduates at all publicly funded HEI's in the UK

All responses are confidential and anonymised

Commissioned by the Office for Students on behalf of the UK funding bodies

28 core questions and selection of optionals

2022 NSS

Open from: January 6th - 30th April 2022

Results released: June or July 2022

A brief history of the NSS in Oxford

2006 - NSS is launched. Oxbridge boycott from the early days, saying the survey is "too simplistic"

2009-2016 - Oxford SU policy on NSS to improve response rates

2016 - NUS pass a motion to boycott the NSS in AY16/17

2016 - NUS campaign saw 25 Students' Union's participate in the boycott

2017 - 12 of these institutions did not meet the 50% threshold required to make NSS data publishable - Oxford being one of these
Oxford has not reached the 50% rate in all years following

Why boycott the NSS?

In 2016, a HE White Paper introduced the TEF (Teaching Excellence Framework), which would assess HEI's on their teaching standards (awarding them with Bronze, Silver, Gold). HEI's that met the minimum standards for TEF would be allowed to raise fee's to above £9,000.

NSS results began to be used as a metric for TEF.

This meant that student feedback was being used to increase tuition fees.

But... things have changed

In 2017, the government announced that tuition fees would no longer rise with inflation, and stopped at £9,250. Had they continued to increase fees are predicted to have been over £10,000 now.

Despite the fee and NSS link not currently being active, NSS is currently still used as a data metric for TEF. TEF itself is controversial due to the ways that it pits institutions against each other and is seen as a tool to market education.

But... things have changed

On top of this, both NSS and TEF are under review.

Following an independent review of TEF, and a 'subject level TEF' pilot, the OfS will produce a 'Future of TEF' for 'Autumn 2021'.

As well as this NSS is currently being reviewed, and the changes are due to be piloted in 2022 NSS.

The full changes will come into force in 2023 NSS.

Question 26

Most discussions of the NSS and Students' Unions will look at Question 26. From the core questions NSS asks students, Question 26 is the only one that mentions Students' Unions.

This question is often deemed to be an inadequate measure of Students' Unions impact on the student body, and is often unfairly used to monitor SU performance (and in some cases linked to the value of the block grant)

The students' union
(association or guild)
effectively represents
students' academic
interests.

Response scale: Definitely agree; Mostly agree; Neither agree nor disagree; Mostly disagree; Definitely disagree; Not applicable

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What does this miss?

RepComs
Campaigns
Advice
Wellbeing
Sabbs Projects
Commercial
Events
Campaigning on any non-
academic student issue
e.g. mental health

Barriers to good scores on Q26

- Academic Rep should be a partnership with the SU and University
- Students don't know how the SU represents them
- Students don't Academic Rep involves the SU
- The SU has less influence in colleges

The students' union (association or guild) effectively represents students' academic interests.

Optional SU Questions

These questions do go further than Q26 to addressing what an SU does, however they still don't really encompass the range of support that we offer students.

1. The Students' Union (Association or Guild) had 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.

Are NSS results useful for the SU?

The majority of HEI's now regularly get results on NSS, therefore NSS results can be a useful benchmarking tool to understand where we sit with other SU's

Although regular feedback is nice and useful for the SU, the NSS is a space to be careful in. For some institutions NSS scores on SU questions are taken very seriously by universities (often linked to amount of block grant received). When considering all of our provision that is missed from these questions, this appears like shakey ground to operate in.

Student Barometer

Survey to all students (although moving to just UG's in 2022)

2021 survey will launch this month

Really useful resource for the SU to use. Good detailed results by department, division and college.

More education focused than NSS. Not much experience.

International Student Barometer is available, but Oxford does not run this.

PTES / PRES

PTES yearly, PRES every other year

Explores specific postgraduate experience. Very new to Oxford. The first survey's were poorly completed due to COVID.

Although currently doesn't include questions on the SU, it is possible to request that the university adds these questions.

Not as risky as NSS, as not as nationally respected.

So, what next?

HE Policy is messy at the moment, and we are waiting on a lot of changes in this space. It is hard to know what any of this will look like.

Despite this NSS will continue on, and we need to decide a stance on boycott for this year.

Currently no active policy on NSS either way.

University got very close to 50% response rate last year, and seem to have noticed SU boycott campaigns are dwindling.