NSS Matters

Introduction from the President of Dundee University Students’ Association (DUSA) and the Vice-Principal for Learning and Teaching

The aim of producing this fact sheet is to provide information to students and staff on what the National Student Survey (NSS) is all about and why it’s important for students in their final year of study to participate. Whilst the format is mainly presented in the style of ‘frequently asked questions’ for students and is primarily addressed to students, it is equally applicable as an information guide for staff.

The NSS is an important driver for the continual improvement of the student experience at the University of Dundee. We are committed to enhancement of the quality of the student experience through a partnership approach, and we were one of the first universities in Scotland to develop a Student Partnership Agreement. Several of the agreed long- and short-term goals described in the partnership agreement are informed by feedback received from the NSS, so participation in the survey by our final year students makes a real contribution to positive changes.

The University and DUSA evaluate both ‘satisfaction score’ results and freestyle comments from the NSS, and proactively ensure that there are opportunities at School and University level to share good practice and address areas for development identified through this important student feedback survey. We therefore strongly encourage all eligible final-year undergraduate students to participate in the NSS and to give a balanced and constructive view of their experience at the University. Every student response makes an important contribution!

Student feedback helps us to identify where we are doing well and where we could do better. Student participation in the NSS makes a real difference.

In recognition of the value that we set on the feedback that we receive from the NSS, we would like to reward all students who participate in the survey by an automatic entry to a prize draw for a chance to win an iPad or a ticket to the Graduation Ball.

The University and DUSA have put 10 iPads and 10 Graduation Ball tickets into a prize draw for all of our students who complete the NSS.

We hope that this factsheet will address any queries about the NSS, so that our eligible final year students can participate in (or indeed opt-out from) the NSS in an informed way.

Iain MacKinnon, DUSA President 2014-15, president@dusa.co.uk
Karl Leydecker, Vice-Principal for Learning and Teaching, k.leydecker@dundee.ac.uk

What is the NSS?

The NSS (National Student Survey) is a survey of undergraduate students who are usually in their final year. It focuses on the quality of courses and the learning environment. All publicly-funded Higher Education Institutions in Scotland, England, Northern Ireland and Wales participate in the NSS. This is an opportunity for you to voice your opinion on what you liked about your time here as well as areas that could be improved.
How is the NSS structured?

There are 23 standard questions that are put to final year undergraduate students studying at UK higher education providers. They all relate to the quality of the student experience and fall under 8 headings:

- the teaching on your course
- assessment and feedback
- academic support
- organisation and management
- learning resources
- personal development
- overall satisfaction
- satisfaction with your Students’ Union/Association.

You will be asked to give a score for specific statements (e.g. Feedback on my work has been prompt) using a five point scale that ranges from Definitely Disagree (1) to Definitely Agree (5). There is a ‘Not Applicable’ option too.

It is important that where you feel that a question is not applicable to you that you choose the ‘Not Applicable’ option, as a response of ‘(3) Neither Agree Nor Disagree’ is interpreted by the poll administration reporting tool as a lack of satisfaction.

Details of the statements are available at [http://www.thestudentsurvey.com/about.php](http://www.thestudentsurvey.com/about.php) by following the link to ‘The National Student Survey Questionnaire’. The questionnaire will also give you the opportunity to make comments on both positive and negative aspects of your experience at the University.

In addition to the standard UK-wide questions, DUSA and the University have asked for two additional questions to be included in order to get constructive feedback on our approach to:

- advisors of studies, and
- reading lists.

The survey is administered by Ipsos MORI, which is an independent research agency. All of their work complies with the Data Protection Act and the Market Research Society Code of Conduct.

How long will it take to complete the survey?

Feedback from our students who have participated previously suggests that it takes 5-10 minutes to complete.

Who can take part in the survey?

All final-year undergraduate students are asked to complete this survey. Students on flexible part-time programmes (whose final year cannot easily be predicted) will normally be surveyed during their fourth year of study. Students who have withdrawn from study during their final year will be included in the survey as their feedback is equally valuable. Students who are repeating their penultimate year will be surveyed – but NOT when they eventually progress to their final year.
When and how does the survey take place?

Eligible students are asked to complete the survey online during Semester 2, 2015. Emails are sent out inviting you to take part, and Ipsos MORI will follow-up non-respondents to the online survey by post and then by telephone. Schools and DUSA will also be encouraging students to participate. It’s important to get as many students as possible to participate in order to get a robust, representative view of the quality of the student experience at Dundee. You may opt out of the survey if you wish to do so - at any stage that Ipsos MORI emails or contacts you directly you can reply and say you do not wish to take part.

How are the NSS results used – will anyone actually read/respond to the results of this survey?

Summary information from the NSS is published on the Unistats website (http://unistats.direct.gov.uk/) and contributes to Key Information Sets (KIS) that help prospective students and their advisors to make informed choices of where and what to study.

Most importantly, the NSS results are used to improve practice and to enhance the quality of the student experience here at Dundee. The NSS results are carefully considered at all levels within the University – degree programmes, Schools, Colleges, central support services, Senate and Court, with major input from DUSA and our student representation structures. The NSS results are examined and action points are developed to promote enhancement of the student experience at Dundee. Your constructive participation in the NSS will help current and prospective students with their University experience.

Are my responses anonymous?

Yes. All results are anonymous and are only released well after the final exam results. The publicly-available results are presented in the form of statistical summaries reported by subject (based on the ranking score described under How is the NSS structured? above). All of the data, including the free-style comments you provide about the positive and negative aspects of your experience at Dundee, are provided to the University after your final exam results have been confirmed¹. In making comments on positive and/or negative aspects of your experience at Dundee, it is important to think about preserving the anonymity of yourself and teaching/support staff, and you should not make comments that could enable yourself as an individual to be identified, name individuals or make references that could identify an individual. Comments that identify individuals are redacted by Ipsos Mori, and therefore do not provide any useful feedback to the University community.

Are there other routes to contribute the student view of good lecturing and learner support?

Yes. In addition to student feedback mechanisms at module, programme and School levels, and our student representation structures through class representatives, School Presidents and the Students’ Representative Council, DUSA has a series of awards for lecturers and other staff members who inspire their students. Visit the DUSA website (www.dusa.co.uk) or email the DUSA Deputy President (deputypresident@dusa.co.uk) for more information.

¹ There are occasional exceptions to this (e.g. students on flexible learning programmes or where there has been ‘time-out’ from study), but anonymity is preserved in all instances.
You said, we did…..Examples of actions taken as a result of NSS Feedback

The NSS results have a substantial influence on practice at the University and are a driver for positive change. Positive actions are taken in response to your feedback by Schools and central student support services. Some examples of the responses by Schools and services (and DUSA) are given below.

- there have been major improvements in the quality of learning spaces in the main Library and at the Medical School
- WiFi coverage across the campuses, including the halls of residence, has been significantly improved
- student-staff workshops are being held to examine issues arising from the NSS, resulting in the development of action points to improve the student experience
- the University is taking forward TESTA (Transforming the Experience of Students through Assessment) methodology to enhance the learning experience of students
- in response to concerns about the timeliness of feedback, University policy is being developed to set maximum expected time limits for feedback on coursework
- at the request of Schools, the Library and Learning Centre have delivered a series of staff training sessions and workshops to develop good practice in assessment and feedback
- access to careers information has been improved
- Schools have developed plans to improve communication to students and minimise problems with timetabling
- the University has opened a new Enquiry Centre for students, which is a facility to provide students with advice on a variety of matters including study support, accommodation, wellbeing, money issues, and accommodation
- a helpdesk to provide comprehensive IT and library services support for students has been opened in the Library.

Contacts for further information

Technical queries (e.g. eligibility, communications) should be directed to the relevant School Secretary or Dawn Ingham (d.k.ingham@dundee.ac.uk) in the first instance.

Other questions not covered in this factsheet can be addressed to:

- the Director of Quality Assurance (l.i.mclellan@dundee.ac.uk)
- the President or Deputy President of DUSA (president@dusa.co.uk or deputypresident@dusa.co.uk)
- the Vice-Principal for Learning and Teaching (k.leydecker@dundee.ac.uk).