

TOP TIPS FOR IMPROVING NSS RESULTS



UNIVERSITY OF
PLYMOUTH

Teaching & Learning
Support

A resource produced by colleagues for colleagues

Ideas from outside:

Focus your efforts on those areas that students value most: 'organisation and management' and 'teaching quality'^{1,4}. Show students that you care and support your staff accordingly.

Use data in decision making, e.g. scan open comments and take action as necessary^{2,5}.

Ensure students know what kind of assessment feedback to expect and when; provide feedback that explains clearly how students can progress to a higher grade².

Provide online sample assignments for students to review².

Provide collaborative learning spaces so students want to stick around².

Collaborate with UPSU to increase student representation, e.g. in curriculum design and development².

Focus on longer-term strategies rather than quick fixes².

Tell students about the importance of the NSS, that you take the results seriously and that they inform future planning and decision-making. Provide examples³. This should encourage students to complete the survey.

Spend more time with students from day 1: get to know them, talk and listen to them; ensure they know that their opinion counts⁴.

To improve teaching quality, increase peer observations in your area or in how these are carried out, e.g. identify issues, allocate peer pairs/triads strategically, and ensure good practice is shared⁴.

Review the marketing and promotion of the survey in-house to determine its effectiveness and to identify improvements, i.e. is there a link between the marketing and the NSS response rates?⁷

Communicate the benefits and importance of the NSS to your students but stay objective and do not influence inappropriately, e.g. do not explicitly instruct students on how to complete the survey.^{8,9}

Ideas from outside:

Promote the NSS in your practice, e.g. reminders during lectures; targeted emails; access via DLE, etc. ⁸

References

¹ Burgess, A., Senior, C., and Moores, E. (2018) A 10-year case study on the changing determinants of university student satisfaction in the UK. Available online at <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0192976> [Accessed 3 December 2018].

² Swain, H. (2017) How can universities ensure their students are satisfied? Available online: <https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2017/sep/11/how-can-universities-ensure-their-students-are-satisfied> [Accessed 3 December 2018].

³ Berg, J. (2015) Five ideas... for increasing your institution's NSS response rate. Available online at <https://www.nusconnect.org.uk/articles/five-ideas-for-increasing-your-institutions-nss-response-rate> [Accessed 3 December 2018].

⁴ Race, P. (2010) Increasing Students' Satisfaction. *Reflections*. Queen's University Belfast. Available online at <https://www.qub.ac.uk/directorates/AcademicStudentAffairs/CentreforEducationalDevelopment/FilestoreDONOTDELETE/Filetoupload,624234,en.pdf> [Accessed 3 December 2018].

⁵ Kovacs, S., Grant, L., and Hyland F. (2010) A study of the use of the National Student Survey to enhance the Student Experience in Education Departments. Bristol: ESCalate: The Higher Education Subject Centre for Education.

⁶ Watson, S. Closing the feedback loop: Ensuring effective action from student feedback *Tertiary Education and Management* 2003; 9: 145-157.

⁷ HEFCE (2018) Evaluation of the implementation of the new National Student Survey in 2017. Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE). Available online at <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/1388/evaluation-implement-new-nss-2017.pdf> [Accessed 14 January 2019].

⁸ Ipsos MORI, Office for Students. Q&A UNIVERSITIES/COLLEGES. Available online at <https://www.thestudentsurvey.com/institutions.php> [Accessed 14 January 2019].

⁹ HEFCE (2017) National Student Survey: Procedures for investigating allegations of inappropriate influence on survey results. Higher Education Funding Council (HEFCE). Available online at https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/1169/nss_allegations_procedure.pdf [Accessed 14 January 2019].

Ideas from UoP colleagues:

To improve Assessment & Feedback, use an assignment template for the entire school and carry out regular moderations of assignment briefs. (School of Engineering)

Be polite to all students around campus. Treat them with respect, say hello / acknowledge them out of class. Plymouth is friendly. (School of Engineering)

Echo NSS key terms in messages (including module evaluation) to students about all aspects of their experience to raise awareness of relevance of aspects of experience to the later NSS. This is not telling students how to complete the survey. Instead, it frames their experience, over three years, in ways that may benefit later completion. (School of Psychology).

Address NSS areas of concern directly and strategically through change to procedures and added allocation of effort. To illustrate, Marking and Feedback was identified as an area of underperformance over several years. Our marking and moderation procedures have been updated and made more robust, as has the communication of these procedures to students. For example, coursework cover sheets prompt students to identify strengths and weaknesses of their work and to reflect on how they have responded to previous feedback. Improvement of our procedures has led to better performance on this NSS measure. Learning Community is a current area of concern. This has received increased attention and effort (social media, staff/student interaction) in the current year. (School of Psychology).

Run stage-4 in-class (break time) drop-in 'listening' sessions in which the PL, AHoS T&L, Student Advocate, and AHoS Student Experience take a few minutes to chat to students about how they view the programme and any concerns they have. Identify the most pressing for action and subsequent communication. These sessions make students feel listened to and are a chance for staff to set the framework of understanding by using key NSS terms. For example, during a discussion of stage-4 project experience the staff member could ask students whether they have found that their project allowed them to study ideas in depth, bring information and ideas together, and apply what they have learnt throughout their degree. These are key NSS terms. Discussion of experience in these terms can identify issues to be addressed and also make students aware of these aspects of their experience. (School of Psychology)

NSS questions were passed on to student reps, following checking with PU Media and Communications for guidance, to increase student-rep awareness of the general context in which the School operates and thus make their work more effective. (School of Psychology)

Ideas from UoP colleagues:

To avoid students thinking that it is 'yet another' market research exercise, let them know what the survey is for and how it is used. They have a right to know exactly what it is all about. Leaving it to Ipsos MORI might make the survey less meaningful. Chatting to students about it (ten minutes is all it takes) helps them engage more with it. (School of Medicine)

Organise slots where you can go and meet groups of students. Shortly into the NSS students start getting phone calls and reminders from anonymous individuals, it is nice to add a personal touch: drop into a session and see if they are getting the calls yet and remind them that filling it in now will mean less calls later. (School of Medicine)

Respect the students who want to wait until the end of their course to complete the NSS. (School of Medicine)

Communicate honestly and regularly to students, even when things are not going according to plan. Students are generally much more understanding of issues such as IT and technical problems, etc, when situations are explained to them (Geography, SoGEES).

Regular 'You said, we did' via posters and as PDFs/jpgs that the student reps can readily post on social media can help enhance the feeling of staff/student community (Geography, SoGEES).

In addition to individual student feedback, provide generic feedback on an assignment, highlighting overall comments and thoughts. Make sure any feedback given to students is clearly labelled 'feedback'! (Geography, SoGEES)

Consider bullet-pointing three short, clear, key actions for future work on student feedback at the end of a summary of the work, in addition to all the comments on the work. Otherwise, students may lose the key message amongst other feedback. Remember to still give key points for improvement on first-class work; how does a student turn a 75% piece of work into an 80% piece of work? (Geography, SoGEES)

Embed a feedback strategy in your programme(s) to introduce students to the contexts and concepts of the student voice. Model the NSS questions and sections so that students understand its purpose and how it works. (School of Dentistry)

Ensure internal feedback strategy includes ways of 'closing the loop'⁶ to demonstrate to students that faculty is listening and acting where appropriate and relevant. Explain *why* when the answer is 'no'. Ensure feedback responses are published to the students who responded. (School of Dentistry)

Embed a non-defensive ethos to student feedback. Ensure appropriate training for student and faculty for giving and receipt of feedback. (School of Dentistry)

Ideas from UoP colleagues:

Be clear about how assessments work from the beginning. To include explaining how progression from year to year works, how marking will be done and by whom, how marks are allocated, what happens if marks are disputed, how second marking or benchmarking works, etc. (School of Dentistry)

Involve students in faculty decision making as much as possible – not just through student representatives and staff-student liaison committees (SSLCs) but by opening out discussions (like in the year meetings) and offering involvement in focus groups etc. (School of Dentistry)

During the delivery of the module, ask the students what they want from the course, what they like and what they think can be improved, and then immediately modify the module accordingly. The students really appreciate this. (School of Computing, Electronics and Mathematics)

To get good student feedback, make sure you have a really good understanding of what you teach yourself and this will assist good delivery of the module, which will lead to good feedback. (School of Computing, Electronics and Mathematics)

Emphasise that the NSS survey is about all three years of their degree and all aspects of it; including lectures, lab practicals, fieldwork, field courses, workshops, tutorials. The survey will help us know what they think about all of this, in the round, over three years of study. (School of Biological and Marine Sciences)

If students want more information on how the NSS is conducted and what it is used for, they can take a look at the publically available external NSS website (<https://www.thestudentsurvey.com/>). (School of Biological and Marine Sciences)

Academics should be available within a reasonable timeframe and (at all times) try to be approachable. Students will learn more and more effectively if they feel that they can discuss their studies with lecturers who are interested in their questions and what they have to say. (School of Biological and Marine Sciences)

Actively involve and nominate students for projects and awards that are either locally or nationally recognised. For example, Student Leadership Programme (Council of Deans); Nursing Times Student of the Year award, local hospital Trusts promote student activity and initiatives: promote these within the Student Bulletin so that all students can see what is open to them and that we value this wider experience. (School of Nursing and Midwifery)

Provide an opportunity in every programme to go through last year's results (or even the last two years) as soon as possible after release. This session could go through the questions; ask them how they would respond (e.g. by show of hands or use of clickers); ask them what they think questions mean; introduce any new questions

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and what they think they mean etc. Another session at the end of term/January could be held to see how things are going. Put your best people on this – experience tells us this needs to be done in a non-defensive way (and is not ‘coaching’).

(Business School)

Promote the ‘you said-we did’ examples more widely, e.g. website/ social media/ posters. (Business School)

Notify students who their dissertation supervisor is and provide early opportunity to meet with them. Ensure students receive early feedback (by January) on dissertation progress. Provide clear, detailed, and useful Dissertation guidance on the DLE.

(Business School)

Avoid bunching of assessment deadlines in semester 1. Provide some grades/feedback before Christmas (prior to students completing NSS). Ensure students understand that the 20 working days for return of feedback means a working day is a day when the university is open). Provide feedback on exams.

(Business School)

If there is assessed group work, explore with students how this is set up, how they are supported, how conflict and fairness can be managed - help them to gradually develop their team working skills. (Business School)

Identify if there are any crunch points in staff workload for Stage 3 sem 1 modules and take appropriate action, e.g. provide additional resources. (Business School)

Invite final year students to meet regularly with their personal tutor during semester 1. There should be a follow-up meeting in January. (Business School)

Inform students of support available re careers & employability both centrally and in faculty/school, e.g. <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/student-life/your-studies/academic-services/careers-and-employability>. There is a specific website providing advice for staff: <https://www.plymouth.ac.uk/student-life/your-studies/academic-services/careers-and-employability/staff-information>. Sign-post to up-coming events (see for example <http://www.eventbrite.co.uk/o/plymouth-university-careers-amp-employability-service-8667276189>) and/or consider local one-off events focussed on employability before the end of Semester 1. (Business School)

Consider organising a social event bringing all final year students together before Christmas. (Business School)

Encourage all final year Semester 2 Module Leaders to post information on their Moodle sites earlier to alleviate any anxiety about transitioning to them. This could

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involve completing the Module Information Box, providing a welcome statement and (best of all perhaps) posting the Module Handbook, with information about assessment. (Business School)