



Faculty Reps' Briefing: National Student Survey

This Faculty Reps' Briefing is designed to give student representatives an opportunity to consider how their Faculty might respond to findings from last year's National Student Survey (NSS). This document contains background on the survey itself and a summary of the results for both the University and the Faculty.

If you have further questions on NSS, would like to discuss other ways in which CUSU might assist with your work, or have comments to make about the way we work, please get in touch.

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The **CUSU Education Team** is lead by the Education Officer who is one of the six sabbatical (full-time) Officers.

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WARNING

These data are for internal use only: they must not be published (e.g. on websites or in student guides) or shared outside of Cambridge University.

If you are unsure how to make use of the data, please contact the CUSU Education Officer.

National Student Survey

What is NSS?

It is a survey of final year BA students (not 4th-year MEng, MSci or Part III Maths) which takes place across Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in the UK. It is designed to give a measure of 'satisfaction' in a number of areas: the main bank of questions is sent to all students while each HEI has an opportunity to select additional questions for its own purposes. See www.thestudentsurvey.com for more details.

What is the history of NSS at Cambridge?

In order to meet a threshold for publication, any HEI must have over 50% of its students respond to the survey. 07-08 was the first time that Cambridge made this threshold, with a 53% response rate, since the start of NSS in 2005.

What is the University's stance on NSS?

The University is under external pressure to perform well in the survey; it has been an embarrassment that we have not made the threshold before. NSS data are used by a number of league-table compilers and so having no data from us has led to underperformance in these tables.

How does NSS work?

Students are asked to rate their responses to statements on a 5-point scale from definitely agree to definitely disagree. They are also given an opportunity to make free-text comments (one negative, one positive). While subject data are published on a national level only if over 50% of students respond, the internal data have relaxed rules which mean that we can see the responses if ten or more people completed the survey for any given subject.

What is CUSU's stance on NSS?

CUSU has been actively opposed to the NSS in the past but last year adopted a neutral policy. The main concerns about the survey were that students were pressured into completing it so that the University would achieve the threshold and that some of the questions are meaningless, especially given that, in Cambridge, education and other services are provided at both a College and University level. As you can see from the question lists on the following pages, some are more useful than others.

What can student reps in Departments and Faculties do with NSS?

While there are still concerns about NSS, these data can be useful in identifying shortcomings in particular Triposes which, hopefully, can lead to improvements. By raising these points at your Faculty Boards or Staff-Student Committees, you can take an active role in improving education provision in the University.