

A response to the
**NUS Future of the National Student Survey
Consultation**



UCLU welcomes the opportunity to respond to the NUS Future of the National Student Survey Consultation. UCLU is the representative body for students at University College London. UCLU represents over 20,000 students; of whom 40% are postgraduate and 30% are from 130 countries outside the UK.

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5. Do you have any comments on the Purpose of the NSS?

UCLU believes that in an ideal world, the NSS would not exist. We believe that the NSS has little real support beyond university managers and the NUS. UCLU understands the NSS not as a measure of the student experience, but as a blunt tool forced upon the sector by government.

However, when forced to accept the status quo, the core purpose of the NSS should be to provide information to prospective students to help inform their decision-making process. Ideally, this information is completely impartial as students provide it.

With regards to providing information for current students and HEIs; they should be grouped as a singular audience for this purpose. The relationship between students and their institution is complex and as such any value derived from the results of the survey should be of benefit to the academic community as a whole, rather than imposing unnecessary segregation.

Furthermore, UCLU has strong views on what the purpose of the NSS should not be. It should not be used to feed into league tables, nor for grandstanding, nor should it encourage a market in higher education. This would counteract the value of the survey results for prospective students.

UCLU broadly agrees with the thrust of the response to 'the Purpose of the NSS'. In particular we are in agreement that in practice the survey is simply a flawed measure of quality and its use in league tables and marketing materials is problematic because of this. Furthermore, we stated in our own response 'we do not believe the NSS provides a holistic indicator to use in league tables'.

6. Do you have any comments on the Content of the NSS: Student Engagement?

UCLU is encouraged by the position that NUS is taking that any reimagined NSS should be concerned with student engagement rather than student experience. We had stated in our own response that the NSS is currently not fit for purpose so any movement in this direction is welcomed.

Our only area of concern is that NUS only notes that student engagement can mean 'one of two things' when UCLU acknowledges three meanings - the final being 'engagement

monitoring for immigration control'. Further acknowledgment of this comes from the University of Sheffield as seen here: <http://www.shef.ac.uk/ssd/sam>.

7. Do you have any comments on the Content of the NSS: Student Experience?

UCLU believes that the NSS should not cover student experience as elements of the student experience can vary vastly between institutions. Academic engagement (and even academic experience) is easily comparable as institutions have commonality in that they educate their students. Many services that a campus based institution provides will be incomparable to a city based institution as many needs will be met by service providers in the area. To compare these experiences would be meaningless and unfair.

UCLU is in agreement with NUS that the broader Student Experience should not be covered in the NSS. However, we would like to highlight that the belief that the NSS should maintain its "core purpose of providing information to help institutions to improve the quality of teaching" is problematic considering the NUS position on question 23 which we elaborate on later in this response.

8. Do you have any comments on the Content of the NSS: Topics Covered?

Although UCLU acknowledges follow-up initiatives by institutions as a response to the NSS are a good idea, we are concerned that NUS doesn't provide any reason with why they believe national level contextualisation would be useful or why it would add value. UCLU is weary of adding this pressure on institutions and would see this as unnecessary as there is evidence of contextualisation existing at a local level already. UCLU is also in disagreement that any sort of qualitative analysis would be of value nationally as comments in the text entry fields are extremely HEI specific. Further to this, the triggers for what might cause a

student to fill something into those boxes would be different for every student. In relation to this, UCLU has concerns over any initiative that would make the NSS longer than its current form. Any initiative that would increase the length of the survey would need to add a significant amount of value.

UCLU believes that the survey population should be increased to include students from other year groups but not necessarily because of the reasons stated by NUS. It is unclear what benefit getting students familiar with the questions would offer. UCLU believes there would be merit in having the survey for students in every year of Undergraduate study. This comes from our belief that only using final year students perpetuates a positive bias as they are concerned with the reputation of their institution as their employment prospects will be a top priority. UCLU believes this is less prevalent in other year groups and their inclusion would go some way to mitigate this.

9. Do you have any comments on How the NSS is conducted?

UCLU would welcome a scoping exercise in ascertaining the impact of running the survey during every year of undergraduate study as this mirrors our own belief that value would be added through this. UCLU believes that only using final year students perpetuates a positive bias as they are concerned with the reputation of their institution as their employment prospects will be a top priority. We believe this is less prevalent in other year groups.

Further to this, UCLU opposes the five-point scale that NUS suggests maintaining. We do not see the point in allowing students to effectively not provide an opinion with a middle option. UCLU holds the belief that a middle vote reduces the value in the results.

10. Do you have any comments on Question 23?

UCLU is in disagreement with the NUS position on Q23. Using the logic of the response to why student experience shouldn't be measured in the survey, we are at a loss to understand how NUS takes the position that Students' Unions can be measured in such a survey. If 'the NSS should stay true to its core purpose of providing information to help institutions to improve the quality of teaching' any question relating to Students' Unions would contradict this.

As it is our position that student experience should not be covered in the NSS then we cannot take the position that any question on Students' Unions should appear in the same survey.

We would also like to note that the current wording of Q23 is grammatically incorrect.

11. Do you have any further comments?

No.