



OfS consultation on the National Student Survey
**Response from the Chartered Association of
Business Schools**

31st August 2022

OfS consultation on the NSS – Chartered ABS response

Section one: Scope of the NSS

Q1. Do you agree we should retain the current criteria for NSS core questions?

Answer: Agree

Section two: Changes to the NSS questionnaire

Q2. What are the consequences - both positive and negative - of changing to the use of direct questions for the NSS? By 'direct questions' we mean questions which elicit respondents' views on an issue of interest by asking about it directly. The questionnaire response options are tailored specifically to match the question.

Comment: The Chartered ABS recognises and endorses the intention behind the shift to direct questions, which has the potential to improve the quality of results gathered from the survey by improving respondent understanding of questions and addressing core concepts being tested more directly.

However, one significant drawback is the resulting incommensurability between surveys. Granting that the shift to direct questions would be worthwhile, we would therefore stress that this change be very rigorously tested before any change is implemented to ensure that further changes will not be necessary in the very near future, rendering additional future surveys incommensurable with one another.

Q3. What are the consequences – both positive and negative – of removing the summative question for England only?

Comment: The Chartered ABS advises against the removal of the summative question for England only, as we believe the negative consequences outweigh the positive in this instance. The reasons given for the removal of the question seem to take for granted that the preceding questions cover the full breadth of the student experience. The use of the word "summative" in this instance could mean summative of the preceding questions, summative of the student experience, or both. While they are indeed thorough, it would demand a great deal of confidence to assert that the preceding questions in the survey can be taken as entirely representative of the student experience. Even if the preceding questions do cover the breadth of the student experience, it does not cover depth, or how important each aspect might be to each individual student. To remove the question therefore would be to undermine the actual value of the overall experience of individual students. We are therefore hesitant to remove the question because it has the potential to capture something that the rest of the survey might not have done, and is for that reason very valuable.

There are further concerns regarding consistency across nations and affecting the ability of providers to benchmark their performance against peers in England, as touched upon in the consultation document.

Finally, the consultation document highlighted concerns about the use of the summative question in media as a reason for its removal without substantiating why this is necessarily a bad thing. It stands to reason that the question is highlighted in media due to its salience and accessibility to wider audiences. By removing the question explicitly for its use in media, the OfS seems to be intentionally making the survey less accessible to wider audiences.

Q4. Should we retain the current summative question for Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales or move to the revised question with a focus on quality not satisfaction?

Answer: Unsure

Comment: No strong opinion

Q5. Should a question on freedom of expression be offered as an additional question after the core questionnaire?

Answer: Yes

Q6. Should a question on mental wellbeing provision be offered as an additional question after the core questionnaire?

Answer: Yes

Q7. What are the unintended consequences of asking a question about students' awareness of mental wellbeing services where no support to respondents can be offered?

Comment: We don't see any unintended consequences, although the information gathered will not determine the quality of the services available, and there is no sensible way of doing this in this type of survey. One additional possibility would be to make available a different version of the survey excluding this question to providers which are unable to provide such services.

Section three: Periodic review of the NSS

Q8. Do you agree that the NSS should normally be reviewed every four years? Is the proposed timing between reviews a sensible balance between developing insight and maintaining capacity to change?

Answer: Yes

Comment: The Chartered ABS generally agrees that adopting a four-year review cycle would be suitable for the NSS, striking a balance between flexibility and currency versus stability and commensurability. We suggest the OfS might conduct focussed reviews of potential unintended consequences immediately following substantial changes to the NSS.

Section four: Survey fieldwork timing

Q9. What would be the impact on students and providers of the fieldwork period running from mid-February to the end of April for all providers?

The Chartered ABS supports the proposed change, given the positive feedback from various stakeholders, including student unions. Some of our members have also reported that their own trials of later start dates have not significantly affected response rates.

About the Chartered ABS

The Chartered ABS is the voice of the UK's business and management education sector and our members consist of 120 business schools and higher education providers across the UK, as well as affiliate stakeholders, corporate members and international partners. Our membership is diverse in terms of type of institution, geographic region, the staff they employ and students they teach. The UK's business and management education sector represents 1 in 5 university students and contributes £3.25bn to the UK economy. Its management students go on to lead global businesses and its entrepreneurs contribute to our dynamic economy. Its research has an impact across society and helps to turn our capacity for invention into viable businesses.