

From: John MacInnes
Sent: 15 September 2016
To: Authority Enquiries
Subject: Fwd: HEA - 'Contact us'

Dear Sir or Madam

I'd like to raise a number of queries about the design and use of the **National Student Survey**, and urge the UKSA to consider reviewing it as part of its monitoring and assessment activity.

Since its introduction I and other colleagues have tried to raise awareness of the limitations of this survey. Because of the relative importance of variance at the level of the individual student, as compared to universities/providers or departments or units within these providers, it is difficult to draw inferences about the relative performances of individual universities, let alone individual departments within them. Yet this is the major use, in practice of the survey results.

I believe HEFCE issued guidance, after receiving complaints about its misuse, that NSS results should not be used in 'league table' formats. As far as I'm aware this advice has been universally ignored, both by the media, and by individual university managements. I've appended a typical example (from the HEA) at the end of this email.

The recent technical review of the NSS by ONS makes clear that inferences about groups of students (whether type of student, or by degree programme) are unsound. Earlier work by Marsh and Cheung and others reached similar conclusions.

In addition to the problem of unwarranted inferences, there appears to be a problem with data quality, rooted in the way individual students are allocated to degree programmes, especially students on joint programmes. This often means that there is little relationship between results attributed to a department or other unit, and the students who were actually taught by that unit. I speak here from my personal experience at the University of Edinburgh, but it has been confirmed by colleague from other institutions.

It is now clear that NSS metrics will be a key part of the higher education Teaching Excellence Framework. I am concerned that the NSS is not fit for this purpose, and its use is liable to lead to public funding being poorly allocated, or students/fee payers, basing their choice of higher education provider on systematically misleading information.

Yours sincerely

John MacInnes