

CUSU Urges Students to Opt-Out of the NSS

Jacob Head— CUSU Education Officer

January 17, 2007

CUSU is urging all finalised to opt-out of the National Student Survey at the first opportunity. After several meetings with University Officers during Michaelmas, members of CUSU's NSS Working Party decided to reaffirm and reimplement CUSU 's current NSS Policy, as passed by CUSU Council in Michaelmas 2004 [See Appendix A].

Since its inception in 2004, the NSS has not improved and it remains an expensive white-elephant, wasting precious resources that should be spent on the many other underfunded areas of British Higher Education.

The questions remain over-simplistic to the point of meaninglessness [see Appendix B] and they still do not either reflect *the Cambridge Experience* nor encourage students to weigh the expectations of their undergraduate career against the actuality of it.

IPSOS-MORI, the company paid by the Higher Education Funding Council for England to carry out the survey has consistently refused to listen to concerns raised by students whilst continuing to publicise the NSS in an aggressive way. Students who have already opted-out have still been sent leaflets encouraging them to participate and college JCRs have been sent T-shirts to wear in support. Only one publicity concession has been graciously made: IPSOS-MORI will now cease to phone students after speaking to them eight times without getting a response, whilst in the past they would call them up to twelve times.

CUSU has been strongly lobbied to take part in the survey by the University. However, the reasons for this lobbying are not clear and CUSU has not been presented with any one explicit way in which the University will suffer from the lack of participation. Indeed, despite its non-participation in 2006, Cambridge was rated as being in the top-ten for "Best Student Experience" by the *Times Higher Education Supplement*.

A strong publicity campaign to encourage students to opt-out of the survey is being instituted [see Appendix C for Images] and JCRs will be encouraged to either mark their T-Shirts with "Opt-Out" or recycle them. CUSU will continue to lobby HEFCE to press for reform of the NSS and hopes that the principled non-involvement of a institution of such prestige as Cambridge will strongly highlight the problems of the survey and provide the strongest motivation for reform.

CUSU also hopes to move forward constructively: it will also lobby the University to institute a Cambridge-specific survey, carried out in a way to ensure statistical reliability. This would be of great benefit to students, the colleges and the University and help issues such as welfare, educational-reform and access.

Contacts

This press release can only cover a major issue in a little detail. Therefore, do contact any of the following, who available and very willing to participate in further discussion on this topic.

Mark Ferguson (president@cusu.cam.ac.uk)

Jacob Head (07746500410, education@cusu.cam.ac.uk)

Jacob Bard-Rosenberg (democracy@cusu.cam.ac.uk)

Kam Mohaddes (graduates@cusu.cam.ac.uk) — Former Warwick Sabbatical who instituted their hostile NSS policy.

Patrick Leonard (academic@cusu.cam.ac.uk)

Appendix A— CUSU's Current Policy

The National Students Survey

CUSU notes:

1. The attached copy of the National Student Survey
2. That the NSS is intended to be a useful source of information for prospective students in choosing where and what to study.
3. That completion of the NSS is a condition of grant.
4. That Student Unions are being asked to publicise the NSS and encourage their members to complete the survey.
5. That the consultation leading to the creation and the implementation of the NSS has cost millions of pounds.
6. The policy of opposition to this survey held by several members of the Aldwych Group
7. That HEFCE have, over the past 18 months, consulted with HE institutions and their Student Unions to formulate the NSS.
8. That the process of passing student contact details onto Ipsos UK (who are responsible for collecting the data for the NSS) will begin shortly.
9. That the University cannot give Ipsos UK much of the data that they require for the survey to be completed by a high enough proportion of students for the results to be reliable.
10. That a 60% response rate is necessary for the data to be classed as 'reliable' and displayed on the NSS website.
11. That all finalists will be emailed to begin with asking them to complete the survey early in Lent term.
12. That if students fail to respond, they will continue to be contacted, by email and then mail, until they complete or withdraw from the survey, for at least a 6 week period.
13. That it is possible for students to withdraw from the survey at any time, either by informing the University that they do not wish their details to be passed on to Ipsos UK, or by withdrawing at any point during the process.

CUSU believes:

1. That the NSS will not only be harmful to current internal feedback mechanisms, but will be of little use to prospective students.
2. That the NSS is a huge waste of government money, at a time when resources are tight across the HE sector.
3. That the data collection mechanisms are intrusive and will harass students during a very busy time of the academic year.
4. That the questions asked on the NSS are irrelevant to the Cambridge student experience.
5. That the proposed Cambridge exit poll is a more useful means to evaluate the Cambridge Experience.

CUSU resolves:

1. To express no confidence in the NSS.
2. To lobby the University to request that they do not pass on any contact details to those conducting the survey.
3. To encourage all CUSU members to withdraw from the NSS at the earliest op-

portunity.

4. To refuse to publicise the NSS.

5. To mandate the Academic Affairs Officer to write to the Pro-Vice-Chancellor for Education, HEFCE and the NUS expressing CUSU's views on the NSS.

6. To mandate the Academic Affairs Officer to work with like minded Student Unions in co-ordinating a campaign against the NSS

Proposed by Drew Livingston, CUSU Academic Affairs Officer

Seconded by CUSU Executive

Appendix B— The NSS

For each statement, show the extent of your agreement or disagreement by putting a cross in the one box which best reflects your current view of the course as a whole.

5 Definitely agree

4 Mostly agree

3 Neither agree nor disagree

2 Mostly disagree

NA Not applicable

The teaching on my course

1. Staff are good at explaining things.
2. Staff have made the subject interesting.
3. Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching.
4. The course is intellectually stimulating.

Assessment and feedback

5. The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance.
6. Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair.
7. Feedback on my work has been prompt.
8. I have received detailed comments on my work.
9. Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand.

Academic support

10. I have received sufficient advice and support with my studies.
11. I have been able to contact staff when I needed to.
12. Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices.

Organisation and management

13. The timetable works efficiently as far as my activities are concerned.
14. Any changes in the course or teaching have been communicated effectively.
15. The course is well organised and is running smoothly.

Appendix C— Images

Available in various formats and resolutions (including high resolutions and as .tiff files), from Jacob Head (education@cusu.cam.ac.uk).

**Opt-Out of
the National
Student
Survey**

**Can
the National
Student
Survey**

1. Demand students' mobile phone numbers from the University ?
2. Phone finalists, preparing for exams, up to eight times ?
3. Be used by Universities to suggest students support top-up-fees ?
4. All of the above ?

**Is
the National
Student
Survey**

1. Overly simplistic ?
2. Intrusive ?
3. A waste of government money ?
4. Irrelevant to the Cambridge experience ?
5. All of the above ?