

STUDENT SURVEY.IE

The Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE)

Implementation of
the 2013 national pilot:
A summary report

A pilot national survey of students in higher education in Ireland was conducted in 2013. This is the first national survey of student engagement in Ireland and is the first system-wide survey of its kind in Europe.

The project is co-sponsored by the Higher Education Authority (HEA), Institutes of Technology Ireland (IOTI), the Irish Universities Association (IUA) and the Union of Students in Ireland (USI). The unique collaborative partnership structure put in place across the sector to manage, direct and implement the survey project proved highly effective.

This summary report describes how the project was implemented and provides an insight into the potential benefits of future national surveys. It also highlights how experiences gained during the pilot phase are being used to inform planning and implementation of future surveys of student engagement.



**A detailed report
of the pilot national
survey is available at
www.studentsurvey.ie**

Why is student engagement important?

The survey seeks to collect information on student engagement in order to provide a more valuable and informed insight into the experience of students. Student engagement with college life is important in enabling them to develop key capabilities such as critical thinking, problem-solving, writing skills, team work and communication skills.

Student engagement is enhanced through involving students in educational processes that enable them to construct their learning and knowledge. Measuring engagement can provide a means to develop a fuller understanding of the student experience above and beyond that ascertained through student satisfaction surveys.

What did students tell us about engagement?

More than 12,700 students responded to the pilot national survey in March-April 2013. This means that the national results are representative of the overall student voice, even at pilot stage. The project team is very appreciative of the participation of so many students in the 2013 pilot survey.

A detailed online survey was offered to first year undergraduates, final year undergraduates and postgraduate students on taught programmes. Twenty six institutions participated in the pilot including all Universities, all Institutes of Technology and most Colleges of Education.

Some Headline Results:

72% of all participating students reported *positive relationships with teaching staff* finding them to be available, helpful and sympathetic (a score of 5 or greater on 7 point scale)

73% of all participating students reported *quite a bit* or *very much* when asked if they were provided with the support needed to help them succeed academically

82% of all participating students reported *positive relationships with other students* finding them to be friendly, supportive and having a sense of belonging (a score of 5 or greater on 7 point scale)

62% of all participating students selected *often* or *very often* when asked if they were improving knowledge and skills that will contribute to their employability

60% of all participating students selected *quite a bit* or *very much* when asked if they were acquiring job-related or work-related knowledge and skills

50% of all participating students selected / reported *quite a bit* or *very much* when asked if they were solving complex real world problems

60%

60% of all participating students selected *often* or *very often* when asked if they used an online learning system to complete an assignment

58%

58% of all participating students selected *often* or *very often* when asked if they had conversations with students of a different ethnicity/nationality

25%

25% of all participating students selected *plan to* or *done* when asked if they were considering Study abroad/student exchange

79%

79% of all participating students selected *good* or *excellent* when asked how they would evaluate their entire educational experience at their institutional

84%

84% of all participating students selected *probably yes* or *definitely yes* when asked if would go to the same institution if they could start all over again

65%

65% of all participating students selected *often* or *very often* when asked if they applied theories or concepts to practical problems or in new situations

62%

62% of all participating students selected *often* and *very often* when asked if they discussed ideas from their coursework with other outside class including students, family member, co-workers etc.

76%

76% of all participating students selected *quite a bit* or *very much* when asked if they spend a significant amount of time studying and on academic work.

12,762
STUDENTS
RESPONDED

72%

have a positive
relationship with
teaching staff

84%

would go to the
same institution
if they could start
all over again

82%

have a positive
relationship
other students

What did students tell us about the survey?

A specific question was included in the survey to ask students for their views on the survey itself. Responses addressed satisfaction with the survey, length of the survey and the appropriateness of questions to different student groups. Examples of comments from students include:

"The survey was pretty interesting and made me reflect on my own academic year and my performance during classes. Overall it's a very good survey."

"I think the survey is a great idea. It is very important to allow the students to voice their opinion and I would appreciate it if the survey is asked to every student before they complete their studies."

"I think it would be important that the results would be made available not only to University staff but to students as well."

"I'm happy with this survey so far, and I hope the information provided will actually lead to action, more so than just providing the college with information."

What's the survey for?


The central objective of this project is to develop a valuable source of information about students' experiences of higher education in Ireland by asking students themselves. The survey seeks to collect information on how students engage with their learning environments. This information will support institutions to identify practice and provision that are effective and will inform discussion on aspects of existing practice that present particular issues or challenges. The results of the survey are intended to add value primarily at institutional level, while also informing national discussion and policy.

It is recognised that students have a major contribution to make in the design of curricula, and in reviewing and providing feedback on their experience of college. Good student feedback on engagement and satisfaction will contribute to students experiencing an education that is relevant and responsive to their personal development and growth as fully engaged citizens within society.

The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 (DES, 2011) recommended that higher education institutions should put in place systems to capture feedback from students to inform institutional and programme management, as well as national policy. It also recommended that every higher education institution should put in place a comprehensive anonymous student feedback system, coupled with structures to ensure that action is taken promptly in relation to student concerns.

How was the survey designed?

The ISSE is based on extensive research conducted in Australia, New Zealand and the US. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) has been in operation in the US, and beyond, since 2000. The Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) is based on the NSSE but has incorporated additional elements. It has been in operation since 2007 and is increasingly used in Australia and New Zealand. Both of these surveys are designed to measure student engagement. The ISSE is based closely on the AUSSE. Detailed pre-testing was undertaken with students to ensure that the questions used were understood in the Irish national context. The similarities between the three surveys will enable Irish higher education institutions to consider the experiences of their students compared to students in Australasia and the US.



...develop a valuable source of information about students' experiences of higher education in Ireland by asking students themselves.

What does the survey capture?

Students are asked over one hundred questions about their experiences of higher education. They respond by selecting the most appropriate response from the options provided. Each of these questions contributes to specific indices relating to **Engagement** or **Outcomes**. Questions offer different numbers of possible responses and different numbers of questions contribute to each index. This means that, while the indices have a 100 point scale, they cannot be read as simple percentages. The Indices are:

Engagement Indices

- **Academic Challenge:**
the extent to which expectations and assessments challenge students to learn
- **Active Learning:**
students' efforts to actively construct knowledge
- **Student – Staff Interactions:**
the level and nature of students' contact and interactions with teaching staff
- **Enriching Educational Experiences:**
students' participation in broadening educational activities
- **Supportive Learning Environment:**
students' feelings of support within the University ('college') community
- **Work Integrated Learning:**
integration of employment-focused work experiences into study

Outcomes Indices

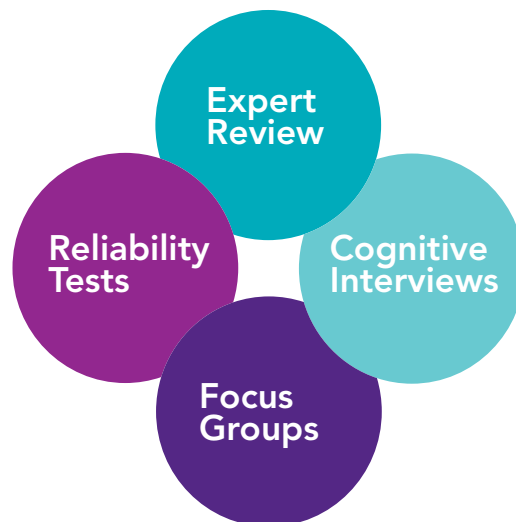
- **Higher Order Thinking:**
participation in higher order forms of thinking
- **General Learning Outcomes:**
development of general competencies
- **General Development Outcomes:**
development of general forms of individual and social development
- **Career Readiness:**
preparation for participation in the professional workforce
- **Overall Satisfaction:**
students' overall satisfaction with their educational experience

How did we test the validity and reliability of the survey?

A number of procedures were undertaken to test the validity and reliability of the ISSE. These included expert review, focus groups, cognitive interviews and post-fieldwork reliability tests.

Focus groups and cognitive interviews were conducted in four Universities, four Institutes of Technology and one College of Education in advance of the national pilot. The vast majority of students found no issues, or only minor issues, when completing or understanding the purpose of the questionnaire. The wording of some individual questions was amended to make them more culturally appropriate to the Irish higher education system. As research postgraduate students reported that the questions were generally not relevant to their experience of higher education, it was decided not to include that cohort in initial implementations of the survey. It is intended to develop an appropriate set of questions to meet the needs of these students in the future.

Post-fieldwork reliability tests demonstrate the overall reliability of the ISSE in the national context. The detail of this testing will inform further development of the survey instrument to maximise its value as a high-quality information source.



What did we learn from the implementation of the pilot survey?

Communication and Promotion

A series of communications resources, including website, posters and electronic updates, were developed for the pilot to (i) raise awareness and understanding of the project and (ii) support related activities at institutional level. The website www.studentsurvey.ie was designed as a central reference point for information about the survey and received a significant number of visitors, particularly when the survey was open for participation.

What's new for 2014?

- Direct access to the survey will be provided from the website
- An extensive set of resources will be provided to institutions and to local students' unions to support promotion at local level

Technical Delivery of the Survey

A number of technical delivery approaches were used during the pilot, with each institution engaging with a single approach. Each of the technical solutions used contributed to defining the preferred approach for the implementation of future surveys.

What's new for 2014?

- A single technical solution will be used nationally
- A single web link will be used to provide access to the survey. This will be widely promoted.

Timing of Fieldwork

Implementation of the pilot survey in March – April 2013 highlighted the variation in calendars between institutions. This presented challenges around promotion of the survey in many institutions and is likely to have had a negative impact on overall response rates.

What's new for 2014?

- Institutions will choose the most appropriate three week period during February – March 2014 for local fieldwork, taking account of other events and competing demands on students' time. This will allow each institution to maximise focussed promotion efforts and to minimise the effect of conflicting activities.

What about Response Rates?

A total of 12,762 valid responses to the pilot survey were collected. The profile of respondents closely matches the national student population. This means that results at national level and for each institution-type are statistically valid and can be regarded as reflective of the overall student voice, even at pilot stage. It is acknowledged that individual institutions will derive greatest value from the survey when there is a sufficiently high response rate to enable analysis of results for particular sub-groups of the student population within that institution.

Aim for 2014:

- To significantly increase response rates in the 2014 survey and to involve additional institutions.

How can I make a difference?

The central objective of this project is to develop a valuable source of information about students' experiences of higher education in Ireland. It is critical to the success of the ISSE that significant numbers of students participate. The greatest influence on student participation is the knowledge that the student voice is being listened to.

Aim for 2014:

- To increase the awareness amongst staff of the value and benefits of the data generated by the national survey so that they encourage greater student participation
- To ensure that relevant and timely feedback is provided to students and to staff
- To demonstrate that survey results are being used to improve the experience of students by influencing policy and planning.

IN JUST 15 MINUTES

you could...



Check facebook



try to memorise those notes



Cycle around the campus

<< or you could >>

MAKE A REAL DIFFERENCE

Log on to:

STUDENTSURVEY.IE

STUDENT SURVEY.IE
WE'RE LISTENING,
WE'RE LEARNING

YOUR OPINION MATTERS.

Studentsurvey.ie values your voice. Feedback on your student experience will help to build a better education system for Ireland.

NATIONAL SURVEY OPEN TO:

- First year undergraduates
- Final year undergraduates
- Taught postgraduates

