



Student Survey.ie

International Comparators Factsheet

Introduction to the periodic review

The StudentSurvey.ie Steering Group agreed in 2015 that the StudentSurvey.ie (Irish Survey of Student Engagement) survey instrument should undergo thorough periodic review, initially with the view to implement a revised version of the survey in the next fieldwork period, and approximately every five years thereafter. This led to the introduction of an updated survey instrument for fieldwork 2016, which was shorter than the original survey, and also included refinement to the retained questions.

The StudentSurvey.ie Steering Group initiated the next periodic review of the StudentSurvey.ie survey instrument in early 2021. A newly constituted StudentSurvey.ie Survey Review Group was formed for the 2021 review. This group will operate for a fixed term of March-December 2021 and the primary deliverable will be an appropriately revised survey instrument for fieldwork 2022. The StudentSurvey.ie Survey Review Group membership reflects the needs and expectations of the survey respondents, the users of StudentSurvey.ie data, and harnesses the experience and expertise of the StudentSurvey.ie Steering Group, Communications Group, and Analysis and Impact Group.

Objectives of the periodic review

The objectives of the Survey Review Group are:

- i. To conduct desk-based research on international developments relating to similar student surveys in higher education.
- ii. To review the current StudentSurvey.ie survey instrument to identify relative strengths and weaknesses in the national context, for each of the cohorts of students (first year undergraduate, final year undergraduate and taught postgraduate), and in light of the experiences of staff and students in completing the survey and analysing the data. This review will also include re-examining objectives of the survey, and the reliability and validity of the instrument.
- iii. To develop and test a revised survey instrument to be used in fieldwork 2022 and in multiple subsequent iterations, including the possible development of optional question banks, and/or the establishment a formal policy on the use of bespoke optional questions.
- iv. Make recommendations to the StudentSurvey.ie Steering Group about optimal delivery of the survey following consideration of related aspects of the survey administration, including (but not limited to) which cohorts of students should be invited to participate; how eligible respondents are notified of the survey, how frequently the survey should be implemented; which formats the results should be presented in to encourage effective and efficient analysis; and the appropriateness of the methods in light of recent updates to data protection obligations.

This International Comparators Factsheet is the first output from the work of the StudentSurvey.ie Survey Review Group 2021 and relates to objective i., which is to conduct desk-based research on international developments relating to similar student surveys in higher education and, in particular.

Part 1: Other NSSE-rooted surveys worldwide:

USA & Canada

Australia & New Zealand

UK

South Africa

Chila

China

South Korea

Indonesia

USA & Canada

Name of survey: National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) & NSSE Canadian English Version

Background: NSSE obtains, on an annual basis, information from four-year colleges and universities nationwide about student participation in programs and activities that institutions provide for their learning and personal development, or student engagement. Administered by the Center for Postsecondary Research at Indiana University-Bloomington since 2000, NSSE has attracted nearly 1,500 four-year institutions in the United States and in Canada to participate in the annual survey.

The survey was reviewed in 2013 and the results of this review were incorporated into the StudentSurvey.ie survey instrument during the last periodic review in 2016.

Relevance to review of StudentSurvey.ie - NSSE: The NSSE surveys remains of key relevance to StudentSurvey.ie, as the StudentSurvey.ie survey instrument is rooted in NSSE and contains many of the same questions. A possible development for StudentSurvey.ie could be to incorporate NSSE Topical Modules into the survey instrument. The topics available for inclusion are:

- Academic Advising
- Career & Workforce Preparation
- Civic Engagement
- Coping with COVID
- Development of Transferable Skills
- Experiences with Online Learning
- Experiences with Writing
- First-Year Experiences and Senior Transitions
- Global Learning
- Inclusiveness and Engagement with Cultural Diversity

Relevance to review of StudentSurvey.ie - NSSE Canadian English Version: This survey contains some questions not included in StudentSurvey.ie, which could be considered for inclusion in a revised survey instrument. They include the following:

Which of the following categories best describes your ethnic or cultural background?

Do you have a disability or condition that impacts your learning, working, or living activities?

During the current school year, about how often have you had discussions with people from the following groups?

- a) People of a race or ethnicity other than your own
- b) People from an economic background other than your own
- c) People with religious beliefs other than your own
- d) People with political views other than your own

About how many of your courses at this institution have included a community-based project (service-learning)?

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?

- a) I feel comfortable being myself at this institution.
- b) I feel valued by this institution.
- c) I feel like part of the community at this institution.

Australia & New Zealand

Name of survey: Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE)

Background: The Australasian Survey of Student Engagement (AUSSE) was run by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) in conjunction with participating higher education institutions. The AUSSE was designed to help stimulate evidence-focused conversations about students' engagement in university study and provide institutions with information that they can use to monitor and enhance the quality of education they provide to their students. The AUSSE was run for the first time with Australian and New Zealand universities in 2007 with 25 institutions. In 2012, this number had increased to 32 institutions. The AUSSE has formative links with the USA NSSE and AUSSE results can be benchmarked with NSSE results. Institutions which participated in the AUSSE could also run the Postgraduate Survey of Student Engagement (POSSE) with their postgraduate coursework students and the Staff Student Engagement Survey (SSES) which is a survey of academic staff about their students' engagement.

The AUSSE has not run since 2013.

Relevance to review of StudentSurvey.ie: Australian institutions are now using the data from the University Experience Survey (see Part 2 of this Factsheet) to power a university comparison website, including data from the Student Experience Survey, Course Experience Questionnaire and Graduate Outcomes Survey. This includes breakdowns by subject area.

Also, of relevance are the AUSSE Enhancement Guide templates. They are still available here: <https://www.acer.org/gb/ausse/enhancement>. These Enhancement Guide templates were intended to assist staff and students with the enhancement of student engagement with learning. Templates available for download include:

- Enhancement guide for senior managers
- Enhancement guide for quality assurance staff
- Enhancement guide for planning managers
- Enhancement guide for academic development staff
- Enhancement guide for course/program coordinators
- Enhancement guide for institutional researchers
- Enhancement guide for marketing departments
- Enhancement guide for librarians and libraries
- Enhancement guide for academic skills staff
- Enhancement guide for career guidance staff
- Enhancement guide for undergraduate students
- Enhancement guide for international students
- Enhancement guide for parents and partners of students
- Developing a graduate engagement statement
- Broadening staff involvement in student learning
- Developing institution-wide approaches to student engagement
- Engaging students in the AUSSE survey
- Enhancing interactions between students and staff
- Establishing student expectations
- Learning more about student engagement
- Monitoring quality data over time

UK

Name of survey: UK Engagement Survey (UKES)

Background: UKES is run by Advance HE, which is the same organisation which runs the PRES survey (which PGR StudentSurvey.ie draws from) in partnership with participating institutions. UKES aims to provide confidential results to help drive enhancement of teaching and learning. UKES was piloted during 2013 and 2014. Unlike the National Student Survey (NSS, see Part 2 below), which collects data in an undergraduate student's final year, the UKES takes place across all years of an undergraduate degree. This allows time to reflect on student responses and implement changes that will benefit students while they are in their institution.

There are seven overall engagement sections (five of which are compulsory and two optional), 12 items covering skills development (optional), and sections measuring time spent on academic work (two question items – both optional) and extra-curricular activity (five question items – optional).

Relevance to review of StudentSurvey.ie: The project produces shorter reports than StudentSurvey.ie but do not include the same depth of results. Key findings from their 2021 report (Neves, 2021) include:

- Students surveyed since the spring lockdown report higher levels of engagement in four out of seven areas. Most notably, there is higher engagement in partnering and interacting with staff, two of the areas of engagement where students have reported generally less positively than other aspects.
- Students responding during lockdown are in fact 2% less likely to have considered leaving their course, which is a positive endorsement of how they have been supported, as well as how they have adjusted and adapted to learning under lockdown.
- In new analysis, students who live away from campus and/or other students show high levels of engagement which indicates that geography and living arrangements do not need to be a barrier to the quality of learning.

Skills development items

Some of the analysis in this report groups together the skills development items into two overall categories of six items each – Learning skills/Creative and social skills. These categories are specified below.

Skills development item	Category
Writing	Learning skills
Speaking	
Thinking critically	
Analysing	
Career skills	
Independent learning	
Being innovative and creative	Creative and social skills
Working effectively with others	
Developing personal values or ethics	
Understanding people of other backgrounds	
Exploring complex real-world problems	
Being an informed and active citizen	

South Africa

Name of survey: South African Surveys of Student Engagement (SASSE)

Background: The SASSE is a survey that gathers comprehensive information from universities relating to high-impact experiences and behaviours identified as having an influence on the teaching and learning experience. The questionnaire collects information about

- Students' participation in dozens of educationally purposeful activities;
- Students' interaction with lecturers and their peers, and the degree to which they engage with diversity;
- The way students perceive the university environment;
- Estimates of educational and personal growth since starting higher education; and
- Background and demographic information.

Relevance to review of StudentSurvey.ie:

Cohorts identifiable in the results

Strydom, Kuh, G and Mentz (2010) examined the psychometric properties of the South African Survey of Student Engagement (SASSE), providing a sound basis on which to promote large-scale studies of student engagement-related interventions. A key finding was that student engagement appeared to exercise a **compensatory effect for minority and historically underserved students**. By engaging in effective educational practices, the performance of at-risk students in terms of grades and persistence significantly improves. Thus, one key to improving student success and institutional effectiveness is to enact policies and practices that channel student energies toward appropriate activities.

"Positive relentlessness" & faculty reports

Institutions that are effective at engaging and nurturing success are characterised by 'positive relentlessness'. The Quality Enhancement Project of the Council on Higher Education with its appreciative inquiry approach provided a systemic example of how institutions can build on and develop confidence in their initiatives through the use of evidence to continuously improve and contextualise interventions to be effective and efficient. By integrating student engagement data into monitoring and evaluation frameworks, institutions can monitor the improvement in the student experience.

Internal reflection has resulted in detailed faculty reports, developed by Student Development and Success, to help faculties identify and develop interventions that can help to improve engagement and to further improve the conditions required for student success. For example, SASSE findings have resulted in critical engagement in the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences regarding curriculum reform. A further example is the use of SASSE results to inform student affairs projects such as the university orientation programme for first years.

Extract from *Engaging the #StudentVoice Report 2016* (Centre for Teaching and Learning in the University of the Free State, 2016, p. 24):

Chile

Name of survey: Chilean version of NSSE

Background: The Chilean version of NSSE was launched in 2018 in the Universities of Valparaíso, Católica and Chile. It is sponsored by the National Council of Education (CNED). It was piloted in 2017 with Nursing, Psychology, Design, Commercial Engineering and Chemistry and Pharmacy students. When piloting, rather than seeking representativeness, maximum heterogeneity was sought in the context of Chilean universities. The Chilean version of NSSE has 140 items and can be accessed [here](#). Zapata, Leihy and Theurillat (2018) examined the adaptation and validation and deemed reasonable the addition of a greater number of variables to the questionnaire, which better respond to local characteristics.

Relevance to review of StudentSurvey.ie: Zapata, et al (2018) noted that, considering the relevance of the subject of student aid in the country, some new questions were incorporated regarding the socioeconomic background of the students, based on previously validated question formats and scales, but do not specify what these questions were.

China

Name of survey: NSSE-China

Background: The NSSE-China project is a research project initiated at Indiana University in collaboration with Tsinghua University in China (Cen, 2012). The NSSE survey was translated into Mandarin and adapted to the Chinese context by a research team from Tsinghua University and Indiana University (Wu, Parkay & Pitre, 2016). The instrument was pretested in China with pilot surveys in six institutions in Beijing in 2007 and further tested in five institutions of various types and in different regions in China in 2008 (Luo, Ross, & Cen, 2009; Ross, Luo, & Cen, 2008). In 2009, the survey was first used nationwide, and about 27 higher institutions participated. By 2013, this had increased to 77 (Wu et al, 2016).

Relevance to review of StudentSurvey.ie: There are some research papers available which examine the psychometric properties of NSSE-China and its suitability for use. However, many, for example Luo, Guo & Shi (2018), examine quite China-specific variables.

South Korea

Name of survey: Korea National Survey of Student Engagement

Background: The K-NSSE questionnaire was jointly developed by the Korea Basic Education Center and Leading University Council for Advanced Undergraduate Education, affiliated with the Korea University Education Council, to conduct research into the status of undergraduate education (Sang-Hoon Bae, Hye-Jung Kim, 2012). It is a web-based survey which runs once a year among undergraduate students. It is run by the Korea Council for University Education.

Relevance to review of StudentSurvey.ie: There is not a lot of information available online about the use of the K-NSSE or its effectiveness.

Indonesia

Name of survey: Indonesian Survey of Student learning Activities

Background: The Indonesian adaptation of NSSE, entitled ISSLA (Indonesian Survey of Student learning Activities), was funded by United States Agency for International Development as a research activity in the Higher Education Leadership and Management (HELM) project (Sutton, 2018). It was piloted in 2015 and expanded in 2016 to 50 universities.

Relevance to review of StudentSurvey.ie: There is not a lot of information available online about the use of the ISSLA or its effectiveness.

Part 2: Other surveys of student engagement:

UK

EU

Portugal

Australia

USA

USA

UK

Name of survey: National Student Survey (NSS)

Background: The National Student Survey is an annual census of all final year undergraduate students at UK universities. It has been conducted since 2005 and attracts a response rate of around 70% annually. The survey is conducted between January and April each year before most students have completed their final exams or assessments. The NSS currently asks 27 questions covering various aspects of the student academic experience. It also has the potential to ask additional topical questions.

Relevance to review of StudentSurvey.ie: A review of the National Student Survey by the Office for Students (OfS) is ongoing, with the goal of reducing bureaucratic burden while ensuring the NSS remains an important indicator of students' opinions and experiences. The review follows a request by the universities minister to address concerns about how survey may be creating burden and impacting on standards, while ensuring the NSS remains an important indicator of student opinion.

The OfS Board approved the following conclusions from phase one of the research:

An annual census is the most appropriate level at which the NSS could continue to provide reliable data on the student perspective on their subjects, their providers and the wider system.

Phase two will review current questions to ensure they remain fit for purpose and stand the test of time. This will include the removal of the term 'satisfaction' from any summative question or aggregate score to replace question 27.

The continued publication of the NSS results in line with the robust requirements official statistics whilst retaining the right not to publish in exceptional circumstances, in accordance with the OfS scheme of delegation for data publication.

The OfS should improve user guidance to providers and students' unions on responsible statistical use of NSS results. The OfS should also improve the data dissemination site to help remove burden on providers.

The OfS should raise student and students' union awareness of the allegation of inappropriate influence process, including what may constitute inappropriate influence.

Extract from the *NSS Review Report (Phase 1)*

In phase two of the NSS review, there will be extensive discussion across the UK with students, universities, colleges and the UK funding bodies and regulators about possible new questions for the survey, including consulting with the management of StudentSurvey.ie to inform considerations with evidence from the success of StudentSurvey.ie. The possible new questions and revised data dissemination site is planned for launch in time for the 2023 survey results.

EU

Name of survey: Eurostudent

Background: Irish higher education institutions also participate in the Eurostudent survey. The most recent survey took place in 2019. The survey is run by the HEA, and analysis is conducted by Insight Statistical Analysis. One of the primary purposes of the Eurostudent project is to collate comparable data to enable cross national comparisons. As such, it is necessary for the student populations in each country (and there were over 30 in 2019) to be comparable. For the purposes of the Eurostudent project, all students that are enrolled in programmes at NFQ Level 6, 7, 8, and 9 at the time of the survey make up the survey population. Approximately 20,000 valid student responses were collated in 2019. This represented a response rate of 9.8% of all students (almost identical to the response rate of 10% achieved for Eurostudent VI, 2016).

The survey examines the social and living conditions of higher education students in Ireland (Erskine & Harmon, 2019). Topics included include College Entry Route, Transition and Access; Course Characteristics – including satisfaction with their choice of course; Income and Expenditure; Accommodation; Course Workload, Student Employment and Time Budget; Student Support; Student Mobility.

Relevance to review of StudentSurvey.ie: Eurostudent has a different focus and rationale compared to StudentSurvey.ie. Reviewing these topics, in the knowledge that many of the institutions that participate in StudentSurvey.ie also participate in Eurostudent, should assist the Survey Review Group in deciding which topics to include in StudentSurvey.ie in any future iterations of the survey. Topics should not be included in StudentSurvey.ie that result in the creation of the same feedback generated by Eurostudent, e.g., time management, income and expenditure, or student mobility.

There is already some overlap with Course Characteristics questions and Student Support questions. Further work could be done to compare the results for these similar questions as a method of validation of the results, in order to capitalise on the existence of similarity between some of the questions.

Portugal

Name of survey: University Student Engagement Inventory (USEI)

Background: The University Student Engagement Inventory (USEI) is a 15 item, self-report, Likert type inventory which measures the behavioural, cognitive and emotional dimensions of academic engagement of third level students (Maraco et al., 2016). The behavioural dimension is related to positive class behaviours such as attending class and arriving on time. The cognitive dimension is related to students' thoughts, perceptions, and strategies related to the acquisition of knowledge or development of competencies to academic activities, such as their study methods, and learning approaches. The emotional dimension relates to positive and negative feelings related to the learning process, class activities, peers and teachers, such as a sense of belonging, enthusiasm and motivation (Sinval, Casanova, Morocco, & Almeida, 2018).

Relevance to review of StudentSurvey.ie: Assunção et al (2020) argue that the behavioural aspect of student engagement dominates the variance attributed to the USEIs global score. In addition, Morocco et al. (2016) suggest a limitation of the USEI is that it comprises no items relating to life in on-campus residence which may be an important aspect of the college experience and as such may miss an important aspect of a students' academic experience. University of Maryland (n.d.) also suggest that, while the instrument is not as campus-centric as NSSE, it would still require additional adaptation for use with students who are predominantly working adults pursuing their degrees part-time online.

USA

Name of survey: Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) & Survey of Online Student Engagement (SOSE)

Background: Established in 2001, CCSSE works in partnership with NSSE to provide a student engagement survey specifically designed for community and technical colleges. The five key indices are used are 1) Active and Collaborative Learning; 2) Student Faculty-Interaction; 3) Student Effort; 4) Support for Learners; and 5) Academic Challenge. The Survey of Online Student Engagement (SOSE) is an online companion to the CCSSE. SOSE helps community and technical colleges gather engagement data from online-only students at their institutions by asking questions that focus on aspects of student engagement in the online learning environment.

Relevance to review of StudentSurvey.ie: CCSSE includes optional questions on topics including Academic Advising and Planning; Academic Mindset; Assessment and Placement; Information Literacy; Student Financial Health; and The Working Learner.

A review of the questions was carried out in 2016-2017. The scale of responses on some questions was amended to eliminate ambiguity in the old response scale

Table 1. Response scale changes for Part 1 of item 12.

Old responses	New Responses
0 = Don't know / N.A.	0 = Never
1 = Rarely / Never	1 = 1 time
2 = Sometimes	2 = 2-4 times
3 = Often	3 = 5 or more times

USA

Name of survey: Student Experience in the Research University (SERU)

Background: The Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) Undergraduate Survey is designed as census and online survey that offers a systematic environmental scan of the student experience within major research-intensive universities. It employs a modular design in order to include a greater number of items, and to decrease individual response times. It has a set of core questions administered to every respondent, as well as five unique modules of additional questions that are randomly assigned. There are several items designed to gather information on students' academic and civic engagement, students' learning and development, and students' participation in other areas of campus. Additionally, students respond to items that provide insight into students' perceptions of the campus climate for diversity, students' overall satisfaction, and students' evaluation of their academic major. It provides insight into students' academic and co-curricular engagement (or disengagement). The diversity in responses provides the opportunity to explore students' experiences through a variety of lenses. There is also customisable module available whereby colleges and universities can create items that reflect topics and issues of particular interest to them.

GradSERU is an on-line, census survey of all graduate students. Developed in collaboration with North America and International member campuses, the design of the survey recognizes the complexity of the graduate student experience within institutions, and the differing structures and cultures of graduate programs, in the US and internationally.

Relevance to review of StudentSurvey.ie: This survey contains some questions similar to those included in StudentSurvey.ie, but which are phrased slightly differently, and this phrasing could inform decisions to revise existing StudentSurvey.ie questions. This survey also contains some questions not included in StudentSurvey.ie, which could be considered for inclusion in a revised survey instrument.

Australia

Name of survey: University Experience Survey (UES)

Background: The UES focuses on aspects of the student experience that are measurable, linked with learning and development outcomes, and for which universities can reasonably be assumed to have responsibility (Radloff, Coates, Rebecca Taylor, James & Krause, 2012). The survey yields results that are related to outcomes across differing institutional contexts, disciplinary contexts and modes of study (e.g. distance, mature age, part-time students). Also prioritised was the development of a set of key non-core items and scales in consultation with the higher education sector to allow universities access to items and scales to assist with their individual continuous improvement needs. A final key goal was to develop qualitative analysis software to analyse responses to open ended questions in the instrument.

Relevance to review of StudentSurvey.ie: Australia ceased using the AUSSE in favour of the UES.

Institutions and stakeholders are increasingly unresponsive to results from student surveys, which in many instances are detached from lived practice, increasingly used for external purposes and reinforce approaches convenient to institutions rather than serving students... As a result of these and other muddles, we seriously lack insights into just who students are, how people approach higher education, the ways in which they learn and how people change as they progress

Coates, Kelly, Naylor & Borden, 2016

Survey method

The Australian Council for Educational Research has worked with higher education institutions internationally and in Australia to build capacity and confidence in scientific sampling as a viable and encouraged method of gathering data (Radloff et al, 2012).

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