OfS Postgraduate Survey

Information for students

What is the Office for Students and what does it do?

The Office for Students (OfS) is an independent public body, established by the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 to regulate higher education in England on behalf of students.

What is the OfS Postgraduate Survey?

This survey forms part of a programme of research that we are undertaking to develop a way for taught postgraduate students to provide feedback about their course experience and their university/college directly to us at the OfS.

It takes a similar approach to the National Student Survey (NSS) of undergraduate students, which you might be familiar with if you have previously studied an undergraduate course in the United Kingdom.

The first trial of this survey is being launched in 2019 in cooperation with over 60 participating universities and colleges.

What is being asked in the survey?

The survey asks taught postgraduate (PGT) students to provide feedback on their course and university/college. It includes questions on these aspects of the postgraduate experience:

- Motivation for postgraduate study
- Information
- Course design
- Teaching and learning
- Assessment and feedback
- Learning facilities and resources
- Academic support
- Wellbeing
- Value for money

Why should I complete the survey?

At the OfS, as the independent regulator for higher education in England, we are dedicated to ensuring a high-quality experience of higher education for all students on all courses. To help in this we want to hear directly from postgraduate students about their course experience.

This is a sample survey, but it will provide us with a broad insight into what it is like to be a postgraduate student at an English university/college.
Also, by taking part in the survey, you will be helping us with our research to develop an effective tool in future for collecting postgraduate students’ feedback – a tool that we want to use, as a regulator, to ensure that you receive a high-quality academic experience.

**How do I complete the survey?**

The survey can be completed online using a computer, tablet or mobile device. A link to the survey will be sent to you in an email by your university/college on or just after 17th April 2019.

**How long does it take to complete the survey?**

The online survey only takes around 10 minutes to complete.

**Why is the OfS Postgraduate Survey being conducted?**

It is very important to us as the OfS that we understand students' views on their higher education experience in England, at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. The National Student Survey is a well-established mechanism to discover what undergraduates think about their experience, but our ways to gather feedback from postgraduate students are currently more limited.

At the same time, a recent poll found that 83% of postgraduates would like to give their views directly to us at the OfS – a rate higher than that of undergraduates (YouthSight Poll).

This 2019 survey is a stepping-stone to producing a future resource that can:

- Provide information that contributes to the quality assurance and public accountability of higher education;
- Provide information to help us fulfil our regulatory duties under the Higher Education and Research Act 2017; and
- Gather student feedback that could potentially be used by universities and colleges to help them improve their taught postgraduate courses, facilities and learning experience (without identifying individual students).

**How will the results be used?**

Results from this survey will give both universities/colleges and the OfS a greater understanding of students’ perceptions of their postgraduate course experience and what is most important to them.

Summary results of the survey will be shared with your university or college, enabling them to identify strengths and weaknesses in their current PGT offer. **No individual students will be identifiable in the data** that is shared with participating universities and colleges.

We will use the findings to understand the priorities of taught postgraduate students, field-test the survey questions, assess the long-term feasibility of launching the survey nation-wide, and contribute to the future development of a regular PGT experience survey that is relevant to PGT students across England.

The findings from this year’s survey will be published online but no individual students or universities/colleges will be identifiable in any published data.

**Will the results of this survey be linked with the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)?**

No – the TEF only covers undergraduate teaching and there are currently no plans to extend it to postgraduate teaching.
Who is eligible to complete the survey?

Anyone who is currently a student on a taught postgraduate course at one of the 60+ participating universities and colleges can take part in the OfS Postgraduate Survey.

I’m studying a postgraduate research degree at a participating institution – can I take the survey?

No – this survey only applies to students currently on taught postgraduate courses. Postgraduate research degrees programmes are beyond the regulatory scope of the OfS and are instead overseen by UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

Will my responses be confidential?

Yes, your responses to the survey will be strictly confidential. No individual students will be identifiable in the data that is shared with participating universities and colleges.

Information is used in compliance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Can I use this survey to raise specific concerns?

The OfS postgraduate survey in 2019 is a research exercise, part of developing and testing a possible future questionnaire.

Because of this, please do not use this survey to raise concerns about your own personal circumstances. If you are worried about any aspect of your studies, or have a complaint, in the first instance you should raise it directly with your university or college – for example through the course leader, student representative, welfare officer or official complaints procedure.

If you have done this but are not satisfied with the response you can contact the Office of the Independent Adjudicator (OIA):

   Online: www.oiahe.org.uk/contact-us/
   Telephone: 0118 959 9813

What is the difference between this survey and the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey (PTES)?

The PTES is an annual survey of taught postgraduate students, owned and run by AdvanceHE. Participating universities and colleges use the survey to help them understand how they can improve the courses they offer to students. It is not connected to the OfS postgraduate survey.

Your university or college may have decided to take part in both surveys. Participation in both surveys is voluntary, so whether you choose to complete one or both is your choice.

Who should I contact if I have a query?

If you have a question about the OfS postgraduate survey that has not been answered by these FAQ’s, please feel free to email pgt@officeforstudents.org.uk.