

John Blake  
Director for Fair Access and Participation  
Office for Students  
Bristol  
BS34 8SR



Dear John,

We're writing to provide feedback on the current implementation of the sexual misconduct survey (SMS).

AMOSSHE, The Student Services Organisation, represents the collective voice of Student Services leaders across the UK. Our members are uniquely positioned in holding strategic oversight of student experience in UK universities, whilst implementing student support that responds to the evolving sector landscape and diverse student needs. Our feedback has been formulated through discussions with members and our Executive Committee. Feedback falls into two areas: the twinning of the SMS with the National Student Survey (NSS), and communication and publication of information relating to the SMS.

### Twinning the NSS and SMS

Early into the announcement of the SMS, our members voiced concerns about linking both surveys. As the NSS offers students prizes for its completion, twinning both surveys has the potential of negatively affecting students because of its explicit and triggering language. A clinical psychologist on our Executive Committee raised the possible distressing nature of recalling a traumatic event after reflecting on one's university experience. As providers heavily rely on NSS results as a key indicator of success, linking the two poses a risk of students not completing the process thus being potentially detrimental to an institution's reputation.

The initial Ipsos guidance implied that the non-completion of the SMS would result in the loss of a student's submission. Providers are encouraged to have their students complete the survey, and to guarantee this, some providers encourage its completion on-campus to improve submission rates. The implication that the two surveys needed to be completed together meant that one provider had increased their staffing. This step was taken to ensure a member of the wellbeing team would be on hand for students, should they find the content of the SMS distressing.

Ipsos later clarified that the surveys did not have to be completed at the same time, but this wasn't immediately reflected in the guidance for staff and providers. Keeping students safe is at the heart of student service provision, but the oversight in providing clear guidance from the start increased strain on staffing and service delivery. We'd recommend that guidance explicitly outlines the requirements for the sexual misconduct survey if they're to be twinned in future.

Linking the SMS to the NSS caused some logistical challenges for providers. The OfS requested for providers to submit information about the available support for students, and for some of our members it was communicated to the wrong contact. The request was communicated to the institutional contact for the NSS, who is usually located outside of Student Services. This resulted in some of our members not receiving the information as well, or institutional colleagues consequently submitting inaccurate information.

In response, we collaborated with the OfS in December 2024 to encourage Ipsos to extend their deadline for providers to submit their information. In the future we recommend that the survey provider shares information with the NSS contact, Head of Student Services and relevant member organisations. This would help increase and improve the accuracy of information provided regarding available student support.

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### Communication and publication of SMS

The initial Ipsos guidance for providers was published on SharePoint with access only granted to providers. Membership organisations like AMOSSHE were therefore unable to support the sector in digesting and implementing the requirements. The OfS and their delivery partners should make any future SMS guidance publicly available to prevent barriers in helping staff implement their conditions. We recommend that future guidance also notes if any changes have been made to help providers alter their approach.

When the survey was initially announced to the sector in Autumn 2024, it was unclear how the data would be used. Members were unsure if the data could be used to investigate potential breaches of the OfS E6 condition. The OfS has since published their intended approach to using the SMS data, but public facing material still doesn't explicitly advise that the data could be used as a source of regulatory intelligence. We recommend that this information be clearly communicated to providers to avoid further misinterpretation.

### Future steps

AMOSSHE welcomes the commitment from the OfS in their proposed 2025 to 2030 strategy to work in partnership with the sector. A united sector will foster a favourable student experience and improve diversity, inclusion and innovation. We've welcomed opportunities to verbally raise these issues with the OfS and our members valued our recent webinar with your organisation. They gained valuable insights, and it provided an opportunity for our members to directly ask questions about the E6 condition and sexual misconduct survey.

As many of our members oversee services which include accredited Sexual Violence Liaison Officers (SVLO's), we're happy to be involved in any future opportunities to engage constructively with the sexual misconduct survey. We'd be delighted to be involved in any future consultation about how to tackle this issue, particularly regarding the survey's design and the dissemination of the survey findings.

Please don't hesitate to get in touch if you have any questions about the issues raised in this letter.

Kind regards,

John Bloomfield

Executive Director, AMOSSHE