

Update on Development and Implementation of the Irish Survey of Student Engagement 2013-17

November 2017

This *Forum Insight* traces the development of the Irish Survey of Student Engagement (ISSE) since its introduction in 2013. The Insight also provides an overview of how those working in teaching and learning in higher education might make best use of the data provided by the ISSE.

What is ISSE?

ISSE is an online survey offered to first year undergraduate, final year undergraduate and taught postgraduate students each February/March. The survey explores how students engage with their learning and their learning environments. Student engagement may be defined as students' involvement in activities and environments that are likely to generate high-quality learning. Students are ultimately responsible for their own learning, but this depends on institutions and staff creating an environment that encourages and promotes student involvement in educationally-relevant activities.



Why does it exist?

- To develop an additional valuable source of information about students' experiences of higher education in Ireland.
- To add value for staff and students at institutional level by contributing to an evidence base, by supporting effective feedback and by enabling institutions to analyse data for their own students in the context of similar institution types and all institutions nationally.
- To inform perspectives and practice of teaching and learning, quality assurance, or other organisational units such as faculties and student support units.

How has ISSE developed since 2013?

Annual national reports have been published since 2013 and are available at studentsurvey.ie.

Response rates continue to increase, with 15.6% of the target cohorts taking part in 2014 and 27.2% in 2017.

2016 fieldwork saw the first use of a revised set of questions in ISSE. These questions were also used in 2017 and will remain unchanged for the foreseeable future.

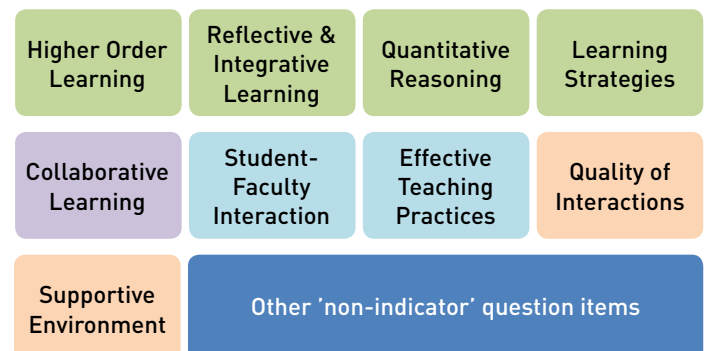
Table 1 Development of ISSE

Year	Survey	Respondents
2013	National Pilot	59,965 students
2014, 2015	Initial ISSE Survey	
2016, 2017	Revised ISSE Survey	65,023 students

Development of a specific survey for postgraduate research students is underway with a national online pilot survey planned for spring 2018.

Responses and indicators

Percentage responses are provided for each individual question. In addition, questions are grouped into overarching "indicators" relating to student engagement. These indicators provide one possible approach to access the data that is of greatest interest/relevance to local discussions and considerations by selecting a smaller subset of questions. The current indicators are:



Using ISSE data to enhance teaching and learning

Data is structured for each institution, each institution type (universities, institutes of technology, other institutions) and collated data for all participating institutions nationally.

Students have a guarantee of confidentiality. Data files returned to institutions have been 'cleaned' to replace student IDs, to remove dates of birth and to delete any names that may have been included in free-text responses.

Detailed interpretation of results requires appreciation of the local context. Staff and students within individual institutions are therefore best placed to 'own' and to interrogate institution-level data.

The following are useful steps to take and questions to ask in using ISSE data to enhance teaching and learning:

1. Request the data set that you need and that reflects your local context.
2. Focus on the question responses that you feel are important to your department/unit.
3. Check the number of responses to ensure that responses can be regarded as representative.
4. What is the data actually saying and are you happy with this? (Think about the way your courses are delivered)
5. If not, what profile of responses would be acceptable?
6. What can be done at a department level to help achieve this outcome?
7. Are any differences between first year and final year and final year and taught postgraduate as you would expect?
8. Can you explain why similarities and differences are observed? Any surprises?
9. Compare data trends at your institution with national data for the same institution type. Are there any differences?
10. If so, can you explain them? Are they important to address? How?
11. What can be done at a department level to help achieve this outcome?
12. Look at the responses to open-ended questions to further inform your understanding of student engagement at your institution.

Video commentaries from academic staff on how they are using ISSE data and on its potential to inform enhancement activities have been published at studentsurvey.ie/survey-results/uses-of-isse-data/

The national collaborative partnership adopted to implement the ISSE is committed to continued development. Support is available for institutions undertaking analysis of their own data.

Some messages from ISSE

In common with comparable surveys of student engagement internationally, results from the ISSE demonstrate that there is much greater variation *within* institutions than exists *between* institutions.

Higher response rates offer greatest potential for individual institutions to analyse data on the experiences of sub-groups of the student population at institution level – for example, different faculties or schools.

By demonstrating that they are attending to and acting on student responses, institutions increase the likelihood of students participating in the survey.

The 2017 national report includes consideration of results of the revised survey in 2016 and 2017 and notes that results for *Student-Faculty Interaction* are the most positive since the ISSE began in 2013.

The report also explores ISSE results for students pursuing STEM subjects and examines first year students' open-text responses regarding the best aspects of student engagement, and the aspects that would benefit from improvement.

ISSE and the National Forum facilitate annual workshops held in April/May which focus on helping staff in higher education to use national discipline-specific data to enhance teaching and learning.
See teachingandlearning.ie/ISSE