

The logo for the CIPR PRIDE AWARDS 2019 Gold Winner. It features the text 'CIPR PRIDE AWARDS 2019' in white on a black background, followed by 'GOLD WINNER' in large, multi-colored letters (pink, orange, yellow, green, blue, purple).

Category: Internal Communications Campaign

Company: Solent University

Entry title: NSS Campaign

Brief and objectives:

The National Student Survey (NSS) is an annual census of almost half a million UK final-year students, conducted by Ipsos Mori.

The NSS provides an influential source of public information about Higher Education, contributes to league table rankings, and allows students to feedback on learning and teaching.

The brief received by internal communications required us to:

- Promote completion of the survey among our current students
- Promote changes that have resulted from previous student feedback.

Our communications objectives were to:

- Achieve a survey completion rate of 80% or above
- Support the achievement of an 83% or above satisfaction score.

The idea, research and planning:

The internal communications team has supported the promotion of the NSS since 2017. During this time the response rate has increased by 16%, and the student satisfaction score by 2%.

As the percentage of students engaging with the survey has increased year-on-year, we decided to use the same branding as our 2018 campaign, which saved us design-time and cost.

Our learnings from 2018 suggested that we improved consistent promotion of the survey across campus to capture a wider audience. To do this, we audited our main locations to help us identify areas of high student footfall where we could display our messaging in a more creative way.

We conducted internal research by speaking to our academic colleagues to discover how we could better support them to promote the survey to their students and achieve a high student satisfaction score. They told us that they would like support to communicate changes made as a result of previous student feedback. We also asked each school to share their NSS action plan with us, so that we could align our activities to their individual plans to ensure cohesiveness and consistency.

In addition, we analysed the survey response rates from 2018 to see which subject areas perhaps needed extra support to increase completions. The insights from all these activities informed our planning and strategy creation.

Strategy, tactics, creativity and innovation:

Our strategy for the NSS 2019 campaign was to provide tailored support to our academic colleagues, as well as to make better use of key campus locations to increase awareness of the survey and encourage completion.

To support this, we created an innovative communications plan that outlined our objectives, timelines and tactics, and addressed how we would measure our activity.

Here's a look at the main tactics that featured in our campaign:

- Digital communications, including intranet and newsletter articles, targeted banner ads, organic social media posts and slides on our digital screens.
- An academic toolkit containing survey guidance, promotional material, PowerPoint slides to show to students, and videos showing positive comments from the previous NSS
- Printed promotional materials – posters and leaflets that were displayed at high-footfall locations and shared with academic colleagues
- Vinyl designs for windows, doors, walls, floors and lifts in areas of high student footfall.

This was a new, creative approach to student communication at Solent and we had to gain approval for it from senior leadership.

A face-to-face launch event for academic colleagues to share communication plans, timelines and details of support available.

The creation of an incentive to encourage students to engage with the campaign and complete the survey.

'You Said We Listened' messaging (digital and printed), targeted by school to raise awareness of changes resulting from previous student feedback, designed to support an increase in student satisfaction.

Delivery:

September onwards:

- 'You Said We Listened' promotional materials published – tailored messaging for schools.

January:

- Launch event for academic colleagues to share comms plan and introduce academic toolkit.

Monday 21 January:

- Solent NSS launch
- Implementation of campus branding and digital communications
- Launch of incentive.

Ongoing on a weekly basis:

- Response rates by school/course provided by Ipsos Mori
- Check ins with academic colleagues
- Measurement of digital channels
- Adaptation of activity according to insights.

May:

- Wash-up meeting and feedback from colleagues and students.

Measurement and evaluation:

Our main method of measurement throughout this campaign was the weekly survey response rate, which helped us to understand whether we were on track to meet our first objective.

This rose steadily throughout the first few weeks of the survey, aligning with the introduction of our promotional materials around campus and was broken down by school, which allowed us to offer more tailored support where needed.

The University's final response rate was 86% - its highest-ever.

To determine whether we were meeting our second objective, we met with our academic colleagues throughout the campaign to understand what was/wasn't working from their perspective, and how we could adapt activities to address any student concerns.

We measured our digital communications to monitor performance and found mixed results. These will inform next year's campaign; however, we plan to introduce a student app in September, providing us with a more effective method of digital communication.

Final student satisfaction scores will be released by Ipsos Mori in July.

We organised a wash-up meeting for May to review and evaluate the campaign, making suggestions for future improvements. This involved collating feedback from around the University and sharing a round-up of the campaign with our senior leadership team. This evaluation exercise has already started to shape our plans for 2020's campaign.

Budget and campaign impact:

The total budget used for this campaign was £2,600. Most of this was spent on the printing of promotional materials (£2,050) and the purchase of prizes for the survey incentive (£550.00). We saved money by using the same artwork as we had in previous years and making some small changes to this in-house.

This was a relatively small budget that we believe was very impactful, as it resulted in a 6% increase in response rate from 2018. Performance since 2017 suggests that an increase in response rate correlates with increased student satisfaction (please see below).

If this continues to be the case, a greater satisfaction score could place Solent higher in the league tables, potentially encouraging more student applications which would likely lead to a significant return on investment.

NSS performance at Solent University 2017 – 2019:

- 2017 - response rate 75%, satisfaction score 81%
- 2018 - response rate 80%, satisfaction score 83%
- 2019 - response rate 86%, satisfaction score TBC.