



Senate

Paper Title	Teaching Excellence Framework
Outcome requested	Senate is asked to note the update on the Government's response to the TEF Technical Consultation and the detailed specification for TEF 2.
Points for Senate members to note and further information	QMUL has established a working group on the Teaching Excellence Framework. The group's remit will cover the TEF and the metrics that feed into the TEF and UK league tables.
Questions for Senate to consider	
Regulatory/statutory reference points	Government white paper, <i>Success as a knowledge economy: teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice</i> Higher Education and Research Bill
Strategy and risk	2.01 Student Experience 7.01 Design and delivery of high quality portfolio of programmes 9.01 Reputational development and external relations 11.01 Sustainable income streams for activities 13.01 Maintain effective and constructive governance 14.01 Failure to develop and implement strategic development projects in support of QMUL's overarching strategy.
Reporting/consideration route for the paper	n/a
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Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)

1. Summary

1.1 The Government's response to the TEF Technical Consultation was published on 29 September 2016 along with a detailed specification for TEF Year Two. The Government reports there was broad support for the proposals set out in the Technical Consultation. There was a strong recurring message on the need to retain high standards and ensure the reforms protect the value of the UK degree and world class reputation and quality of UK higher education.

1.2 Key points to note:

- The incorporation of a Highly Skilled Employment and Further Study metric, using employment in SOC (Standard Occupational Classification) 1-3 as a measure of highly skilled employment.
- Other metrics are as previously outlined, covering teaching quality, learning environment and student outcomes/ learning gain.
- Assessors must be careful not to overweight information coming from the NSS bearing in mind that stretching and rigorous course design, standards and assessment, could adversely affect NSS scores.
- TEF ratings will be Gold, Silver and Bronze and detailed level descriptors are included. In summary:
 - Gold - provision is consistently outstanding and of the highest quality found in the UK Higher Education sector with outstanding outcomes and levels of stretch.
 - Silver - provision is of high quality, and significantly and consistently exceeds the baseline quality threshold expected of UK Higher Education
 - Bronze - provision is of satisfactory quality with most students achieving good outcomes.
- NOTE: Initial gold rating is defined as 'three or more positive flags and no negative flags' on the metrics, bronze is defined as 'two or more negative flags' (regardless of the number of positive flags), and then silver includes all other providers (including those with no flags at all). Flags apply where the difference between an indicator and the benchmark is at least two standard deviations and at least two percentage points.
- TEF metrics will be averaged over three years. Where reportable, the metrics data will also include the flags for each of the three contributing years.
- TEF results themselves will last for 3 years.
- Commendations will not be issued as part of the TEF Year Two process. A 'lessons-learned' exercise for Year Two will be used to identify where Commendations might be most useful, including considering new areas where appropriate, with a view to possibly introducing Commendation in the future.
- A student voice will be included – but not as a mandatory part of the TEF process. Strong supporting evidence for a provider may be usefully given by the

student body, and the provider will be given the option to allow student representatives to write part of the submission.

- There will be a process of collaborative design involving stakeholder groups and the TEF Delivery Group in moving forward to a discipline level TEF and this will be informed by a number of pilots.

2. Background

2.1 The Government has now published its response to the TEF Technical Consultation and has also set out the specification for year 2 of TEF in more detail:

- Technical consultation response:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/teaching-excellence-framework-year-2-technical-consultation>
- TEF2 specification document:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-excellence-framework-year-2-specification>

2.2 The consultation applied to the operation of the TEF in Year Two, which providers will apply for by January 2017. TEF awards made in Year Two will be published in spring 2017 and will therefore be primarily relevant to the decision-making of the cohort of students applying in autumn 2017 for courses starting in autumn 2018 and beyond. Year Two of the TEF will be delivered by HEFCE, working with the QAA, on behalf of the Government.

2.3 As set out in the [White Paper 2016](#), Year Two of the TEF will be a trial year. Outcomes in Year Two will not be associated with differential fee uplifts for providers in England – rather, all those achieving a rating of Bronze or higher will receive the full inflationary uplift. However, these awards will be used from Year Three onwards to inform differentiated fees, unless a provider chooses to re-enter TEF in Year Three or future years to obtain a new award, in which case the latest TEF award will be used.

2.4 We responded in private to the consultation and raised concerns about the data, metrics and benchmarks being used to measure the TEF in Year Two, and the need for a longer period of piloting. The Government's proposed TEF delivery timetable is in **Annex A**.

3. TEF criteria

3.1 The TEF criteria will remain substantively the same as proposed in the consultation although a number of minor amendments to clarify language and to reflect providers with 'non-traditional' students have been made.

3.2 The Government recognises concerns raised about the potential for duplicating aspects of the Quality Assurance system and believes there is clear room to demonstrate excellence above the baseline.

3.3 For providers in England undergoing the Annual Provider Review (APR), some of the same data that will be used to monitor quality as part of the APR process will be used to assess performance in the TEF. As these data sets are collected centrally, providers taking part in the TEF will not need to complete additional returns, thus reducing the administrative burden on institutions.

4. Rating descriptions

- 4.1 The Government has reconsidered the previous ‘outstanding’, ‘excellent’ and ‘meets expectations’ ratings and instead will use Gold, Silver and Bronze. Apparently, this is to avoid any risk of confusion of the different levels and will continue to uphold the reputation of UK HE internationally.
- 4.2 Initial ratings will be determined on the number and type of ‘flags’ received on the core metrics – and then panels will decide if these ratings should be amended based on other contextual evidence received. Flags apply where the difference between an indicator and the benchmark is at least two standard deviations and at least two percentage points. Initial gold rating is defined as ‘three or more positive flags and no negative flags’ on the metrics, bronze is defined as ‘two or more negative flags’ (regardless of the number of positive flags), and then silver includes all other providers (including those with no flags at all).
- 4.3 The rating descriptors are set out in **Annex B**. Student engagement at the ‘forefront of research’ is included in each descriptor. For example in gold: “Students are consistently and frequently engaged with developments from the forefront of research, scholarship or practice, and are consistently and frequently involved in these activities”.
- 4.4 In the Technical Consultation, the Government indicated a likely distribution based on performance against the core metrics (approximately 20% of participating providers would receive the lowest rating, approximately 20-30% would receive the highest rating and the remaining 50-60% would receive the intermediate rating). The response confirms this distribution is only indicative and not a quota and the TEF Panel will not be expected to force an allocation of providers to categories based on these proportions. HEFCE will use the indicative distribution as a guide in assessor training to calibrate individual standards of assessment.

5. Highly Skilled Employment Metric

- 5.1 The Government has confirmed it will incorporate a Highly Skilled Employment and Further Study metric, using employment in Standard Occupational Classification groups 1-3 as a measure of highly skilled employment.
- 5.2 The highly skilled employment and further study metric will be benchmarked to ensure it takes account of the students taught by that provider. In addition to the benchmarks used for the more general employment or further study metric, the highly skilled employment and further study metric will be benchmarked by POLAR and disability. This should ensure that providers are not penalised for offering certain courses or for taking on students from disadvantaged areas or with characteristics associated with less successful outcomes.

6. TEF Metrics

- 6.1 The TEF metrics have been confirmed as:
 - NSS questions on ‘Teaching on my course’
 - Employment/further study (measured by DLHE)
 - Highly-skilled employment/further study (measured by DLHE)
 - NSS questions on ‘Academic support’
 - Non-continuation (measured by HESA PIs)

- NSS questions on 'Assessment and feedback'
- 6.2 TEF metrics will be averaged over the most recent three years of available data. Of the options considered, this approach is considered by the Government as the most likely to ensure that small providers are not disadvantaged. In using multiple years of data the Government says that it has balanced the benefits of using aggregated data against the desire to use the most recently available data. Where reportable, the metrics data will also include the flags for each of the three contributing years.
- 6.3 In terms of the balance between metrics and contextual evidence, panels will look at metrics to develop an initial hypothesis about where an institution is at gold, silver or bronze level and then adjust accordingly once other evidence is considered. Contextual data will be used to support interpretation of performance but does not itself form the basis of any judgement.
- 6.4 The Government response confirms that the decision of the TEF Panel will be the final determinant of a provider's rating. Neither HEFCE nor DfE/the Minister are referenced as being part of this process.

7. Metric splits

- 7.1 Metrics will be split by the following characteristics:
- Level of Study
 - Age
 - POLAR
 - Ethnicity
 - Disability
 - Entry Qualifications
 - Domicile
 - Sex
- 7.2 The benchmarks will be calculated specifically for each split and split metrics will only be provided where minimum reporting thresholds are met. Any gaps will not be interpreted negatively or positively by assessors and providers do not need to attempt to "fill" gaps through their submission. However, providers may wish to provide additional data in their submissions that illustrates good performance.
- 7.3 The Government considers POLAR to be the most appropriate proxy for social disadvantage in England however has agreed with the Devolved Administrations that alternatives will be used for their providers because they have not adopted POLAR for Widening Participation.
- 7.4 Assessors have been encouraged to give particular weight to the core and split metrics on retention and highly skilled employment since students should expect to be supported to complete their studies and attain a job appropriate to their qualification and skills.
- 7.5 Assessors will be directed not to overweight information coming from the NSS and ensure that positive performance on these metrics is triangulated against performance against the other metrics and additional evidence. There is also recognition that stretching and rigorous course design, standards and assessment could adversely affect NSS scores and assessors should bear this in mind.

8. Contextual Information

- 8.1 The contextual information previously proposed will be used in TEF with only minor alterations.
- 8.2 The Government has outlined an intention to work with each of the Devolved Administrations and HEFCE to ensure information on the national operating context for HE within each country is made available to assessors, so they have a greater appreciation of the contextual circumstances of each provider.

9. Provider Submission

- 9.1 The Government's view is that 15 pages is a manageable and a reasonable starting point for Year Two for institutions of all sizes. No fixed template will be provided.
- 9.2 HEFCE will issue guidance as to the type of elements and potential structure that a submission might include, while being clear that a provider is free to adopt a different approach if they desire (or even include no additional evidence). Providers will not be penalised for the approach they decide to take.
- 9.3 The role of the student voice is highlighted in providing additional information about a provider's teaching. Guidance in this area in the Year Two specification makes it clear that in many cases presenting the student voice may serve as strong supporting evidence for a provider. This could involve allowing student representatives to write part of the submission.

10. Additional Evidence

- 10.1 The Government has concluded that they will use the examples of additional evidence as set out in the Technical Consultation and has flagged that both contact hours and GPA have merit as methods of demonstrating the impact of a provider's teaching.

11. Commendations

- 11.1 The Government has decided that the TEF should not include Commendations in Year Two. The Government believes this will make the task of the Panel simpler in what is intended to be a trial year, allowing the Panel to focus on the core task of determining providers' TEF ratings.
- 11.2 It is noted that Commendations could have a place in a future iteration of TEF and Government will use the lessons-learned exercise for Year Two to identify where Commendations might be most useful.

12. Timetable

- 12.1 The timetable is given in **Annex A**.

13. Duration of Awards

- 13.1 The response confirms that TEF awards given in Year Two will be valid for three years (subject to a provider continuing to meet eligibility requirements).
- 13.2 The Government has maintained that those who do not have three full years of metrics should receive a shorter award, to reflect the number of years of core metrics they have

available (i.e. if a provider has one year of complete data, the award will last for one year and if they have two years of complete data, their award will last for two years).

14. Engagement and implementation

14.1 The Government confirms in their response that it will be carrying out an extensive process of active engagement with the sector, stakeholder groups and others involved through DfE's TEF governance to design the assessment framework for subject-level TEF, prior to conducting subject level pilots in Year Three.

14.2 Postgraduate taught provision will be included in the TEF from Year Four at the earliest.

Annex A - TEF delivery timetable

Activity	Date
Response to Technical Consultation is published	Sept 2016
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Guidance for providers is published • Providers' core and split metrics are made available for them to preview • Applications window opens 	Late Oct 2016
Provider briefing events	Mid Nov – early Dec 2016
Application window closes	Late Jan 2017
Assessment takes place	Feb – May 2017
TEF ratings are announced	End of May 2017
Appeals window opens	June 2017
Appeals window closes	June 2017
Results of appeals published	July 2017

TEF Year	Assessment results announced	To inform students applying in...	...and entering in ...	Affects fees from...
1	2016	Autumn 2016	Autumn 2017	Autumn 2017
2	2017	Autumn 2017	Autumn 2018	Autumn 2018
3	2018	Autumn 2018	Autumn 2019	Autumn 2019
4	2019	Autumn 2019	Autumn 2020	Autumn 2020

Annex B - TEF Descriptors

Gold: The Panel will award a provider a rating of Gold if it appears likely, based on the evidence available to the Panel, that provision is consistently outstanding and of the highest quality found in the UK Higher Education sector; that is:

The provider achieves consistently outstanding outcomes for its students from all backgrounds, in particular with regards to retention and progression to highly skilled employment and further study. Course design and assessment practices provide scope for outstanding levels of stretch that ensures all students are significantly challenged to achieve their full potential, and acquire knowledge, skills and understanding that are most highly valued by employers. Optimum levels of contact time, including outstanding personalised provision secures the highest levels of engagement and active commitment to learning and study from students. Outstanding physical and digital resources are actively and consistently used by students to enhance learning. Students are consistently and frequently engaged with developments from the forefront of research, scholarship or practice, and are consistently and frequently involved in these activities. An institutional culture that facilitates, recognises and rewards excellent teaching is embedded across the provider.

Silver: The Panel will award a provider a rating of Silver if it appears likely, based on the evidence available to the Panel, that provision is of high quality, and significantly and consistently exceeds the baseline quality threshold expected of UK Higher Education; that is:

The provider achieves excellent outcomes for its students, in particular with regards to retention and progression to highly skilled employment and further study. Course design and assessment practices provide scope for high levels of stretch that ensures all students are significantly challenged, and acquire knowledge, skills and understanding that are highly valued by employers. Appropriate levels of contact time, including personalised provision secures high levels of engagement and commitment to learning and study from students. High quality physical and digital resources are used by students to enhance learning. Students are engaged with developments from the forefront of research, scholarship or practice, and are sometimes involved in these activities. An institutional culture that facilitates, recognises and rewards excellent teaching has been implemented at the provider.

Bronze: The Panel will award a provider a rating of Bronze if it appears likely, based on the evidence available to the Panel, that provision is of satisfactory quality; that is: Most students achieve good outcomes; however, the provider is likely to be significantly below benchmark in one or more areas, in particular with regards to retention and progression to highly skilled employment and further study. Course design and assessment practices provide sufficient stretch that ensures most students make progress, and acquire knowledge, skills and understanding that are valued by employers. Sufficient levels of contact time, including personalised provision secures good engagement and commitment to learning and study from most students. Physical and digital resources are used by students to further learning. Students are occasionally engaged with developments from the forefront of research, scholarship or practice, and are occasionally involved in these activities. An institutional culture that facilitates, recognises and rewards excellent teaching has been introduced at the provider.