



TEF update

Issue

1. This paper updates the board on recent developments to the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF), and sets out how we anticipate taking the TEF forward following the outcomes of the Independent Review of the TEF.
2. Dame Shirley Pearce, who has been appointed by the Secretary of State for Education to conduct the Independent Review, will give an oral update to the board alongside this paper.

Recommendations

3. The board is invited to note the updates contained in this paper.

Further information

4. Available from Graeme Rosenberg (graeme.rosenberg@officeforstudents.org.uk), Head of TEF.

Member's interests

5. As TEF outcomes directly affect providers, any member of the board with a registered interest in a higher education provider as listed here: www.officeforstudents.org.uk/about/who-we-are/our-board-and-committees, is considered to have an interest in the contents of this paper.
6. Two members of the board are involved in the TEF decision making process:
 - a. Gurpreet Dehal is the chair of the TEF Appeals Panel.
 - b. Martha Longdon served as a deputy chair in the 2017-18 TEF subject-level pilot, and is currently a member of the TEF Appeals Panel.
7. As this paper deals with general policy development and not action in relation to specific providers, we do not consider it necessary for any board members to recuse themselves from discussion of this paper or the oral update.

Background

8. Under the current TEF, higher education providers in the UK are rated as gold, silver or bronze for the quality of their undergraduate provision (or receive a 'provisional' award where there is not yet enough data to give a rating). The awards are decided by an independent expert panel including students, academics and employer representatives. The assessments are based on a combination of metrics produced by the OfS using existing national datasets, and submissions made by each provider.

9. The current TEF scheme has now completed its third and final year of operation. Assessments have been undertaken each year from 2016-17 to 2018-2019, with the most recent outcomes published by the OfS on Wednesday 19 June 2019.

10. In total, 282 UK higher education providers now hold a TEF award: 76 are rated gold, 132 are rated silver, 60 are rated bronze and a further 14 hold a provisional award. These awards will all remain valid until 2021. The full set of outcomes are available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/teaching/tef-outcomes/.

11. The TEF scheme in its current form was designed and developed by the Department for Education (DfE) and implemented initially by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

12. On 1 January 2018 the DfE commenced section 25 of HERA, which gave the OfS the power to make arrangements for a scheme to give ratings. The TEF is the scheme that the OfS formally adopted under section 25 of HERA, with the aim of recognising and rewarding excellent teaching in UK higher education providers and incentivising improvement across the sector. In April 2018 the OfS assumed responsibility for implementing the current TEF scheme in accordance with the DfE's TEF specification. In future the OfS will be responsible, under section 25 of HERA, for determining and implementing a revised scheme, taking account of the subject-level TEF pilots (see below) and the outcomes of the Independent Review of the TEF.

13. To date, participation in the TEF has been voluntary, but from academic year 2019-20 all registered providers in England with over 500 higher education students will be required to participate in the TEF as an ongoing condition of registration with the OfS (condition B6).

14. Conditions B1 to B5 ensure providers meet a threshold for quality and standards. The TEF complements these conditions by recognising and incentivising excellence above the threshold, with TEF ratings differentiating degrees of excellence.

15. Participation in TEF remains voluntary for providers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. HERA (section 25 (1) (b)) enables the OfS to give TEF ratings to these providers where they apply for an award and their government has given the appropriate consent for them to do so.

Discussion

Subject-level TEF pilots

16. The current TEF assesses undergraduate provision at ‘provider-level’. It assesses overall performance across the whole university or college, producing a single rating for the provider. The May 2016 White Paper ‘Success as a knowledge economy’¹ set out the government’s intention to undertake TEF assessments at subject-level in future, with the intention of making TEF more useful to potential applicants.

17. OfS has carried out two years of subject-level pilots on behalf of the DfE to test and develop ways of producing TEF ratings at subject-level. In conducting these pilots, we have involved a wide range of providers and panel members from across the UK.

18. **Annex A** provides further details and an update on the subject-level pilots.

Independent Review of the TEF

19. Section 26 of HERA required the Secretary of State for Education to appoint a suitable independent person to prepare a report on the operation of TEF. Dame Shirley Pearce was appointed to conduct this review, and her work is supported by an advisory group.

20. HERA sets out the scope of the report as follows:

‘The report must cover the following in the case of each scheme—

- (a) the process by which ratings are determined under the scheme and the sources of statistical information used in that process,
- (b) whether that process, and those sources of statistical information, are fit for use for the purpose of determining ratings under the scheme,
- (c) the names of the ratings under the scheme and whether those names are appropriate,
- (d) the impact of the scheme on the ability of higher education providers to which the scheme applies to carry out their functions (including in particular their functions relating to teaching and research),
- (e) an assessment of whether the scheme is in the public interest, and
- (f) any other matters that the appointed person considers relevant.’

21. Dame Shirley will give an oral update on the Independent Review to the OfS board alongside this paper. Throughout the review Dame Shirley has gathered and commissioned evidence from a wide range of sources. Among these, we have reported the emerging findings of the subject-level pilot, as outlined in Annex A.

¹ www.gov.uk/government/publications/higher-education-success-as-a-knowledge-economy-white-paper

Future role of the OfS and next steps

22. Exempt from publication.
23. Exempt from publication.
24. Exempt from publication.
25. Exempt from publication.
26. Exempt from publication

Resource implications

27. The TEF programme including OfS staff costs are currently funded through additional grant from DfE, currently agreed annually according to the scope of activity each year. The programme of work for financial year 2018-19 was delivered within the agreed budget. We have agreed a budget of £2,478,000 for the first half of the 2019-20 financial year for activities to complete the current provider-level TEF exercise and the subject -level pilots. We will work with DfE to agree the future budget for the activities outlined in paragraph 24, in the coming weeks.

Risk implications

28. To date we have reported TEF delivery risks through the TEF Project Board. Some delivery risks related to tight timescales crystallised during the early stages of the 2018-19 pilot but were sufficiently mitigated so that overall delivery remained on track.

29. DfE has thus far maintained oversight of strategic and policy-related risks, reporting to its TEF Delivery Group (which includes OfS representation).

30. In terms of risks related to the future exercise, the Independent Review provides an opportunity to address risks (such as credibility amongst some stakeholder groups). Following the outcomes of the Independent Review we will revise our risk register and report on it regularly through the new governance group.

Communications and engagement

31. The outcomes from the final year of the current TEF exercise were published on 19 June 2019.

32. DfE will publish the Independent Review report and its response. We plan to publish the full pilot findings in the autumn and will, as soon as is practicable, provide the sector with further information about the timing of the next exercise.

33. We anticipate communications in the next stage of TEF will focus on engaging multiple stakeholders in development and consultation activities.

Paper publication date

34. The shaded paragraphs 22 to 26, and Annex A paragraph 5, concern policy in development and are exempt from publication until the Independent Review report is published.

Annex A

Subject-level pilots

Update on subject-level pilots

1. The first pilot took place in 2017-18. We tested two models, designed to produce ratings at both subject and provider-level. The DfE designed these models with the intention of limiting the burden on providers, by not requiring a submission for every individual subject. The first pilot found that, whilst ratings could be successfully generated, neither model was fit-for-purpose and that to produce robust ratings at subject-level a submission would be needed for each subject.²
2. The first pilot ran alongside a government consultation which put forward detailed proposals on the design of subject-level TEF. The DfE also commissioned research on the potential for subject-level TEF to inform student choice. All these activities informed the design of the second pilot year, which commenced in October 2018 and is due to report in autumn 2019.
3. The second pilot is testing a more comprehensive model (using metrics and a separate submission for each subject), as well as a number of other refinements and issues, including:
 - a. An expanded basket of metrics.
 - b. An increased focus on student partnership and student involvement throughout the process.
 - c. An increased focus on widening participation issues (including differential attainment).
 - d. The implications of data limitations that occur at subject-level (such as missing metrics and small sample sizes).
 - e. How panels can provide feedback to providers beyond the gold, silver and bronze ratings.
 - f. The scalability of assessment processes.
4. The pilot panels have recently completed their assessments, comprising 675 submissions from 45 providers. We are currently evaluating the process and plan in the autumn to publish the findings, including reports from each of the panels, the student perspective, and independently commissioned feedback from the participating providers.

Emerging findings from the second pilot

5. Although the pilot evaluation is not yet complete, we can at this stage reporting emerging findings based on feedback gathered during the process from participating providers, their student representatives, and the panels (including student panel members):

² www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/teaching-excellence-and-student-outcomes-framework-findings-from-the-first-subject-pilot-2017-18

- a. Exempt from publication.
- b. Exempt from publication.
- c. Exempt from publication.
- d. Exempt from publication.
- e. Exempt from publication.
- f. Exempt from publication.
- g. Exempt from publication.
- h. Exempt from publication.
- i. Exempt from publication.
- j. Exempt from publication.