

# Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF)

## Update on the development of proposals for the future exercise

This document provides an update on the development of proposals to be the subject of consultation for the future Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF).

No decisions have yet been taken on the future approach. In autumn 2021, we intend to consult on a full set of proposals.

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## Introduction

1. The Office for Students (OfS) is developing proposals for consultation on the future TEF<sup>1</sup> as part of a coherent overall approach to regulating quality and standards. We intend to consult on the future TEF in autumn 2021 at the same time as consulting on the regulation of student outcomes.<sup>2</sup>
2. In developing these proposals, we are considering the recommendations of the independent review of the TEF<sup>3</sup> and the findings from the subject-level TEF pilots.<sup>4</sup> We are also having regard to the government's statutory guidance<sup>5</sup> following its response to the independent review.<sup>6</sup>
3. When we consult on the future approach to the TEF, we will also set out how we have had regard to our general duties contained in section 2 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA).
4. We will continue to consider advice from the TEF advisory group<sup>7</sup> when developing our proposals. This group has been meeting since February 2021. We will also consider advice from the TEF metrics peer review group,<sup>8</sup> which is focused on the use of statistics within the future TEF.
5. We are pleased to announce that Professor Sir Chris Husbands has agreed to continue to chair the TEF panel until the next exercise has been completed.

## Purpose of TEF

6. In developing our proposals, we are mindful that the independent review recommended that the student interest would best be served by using TEF to identify excellence and enhance the educational experience and outcomes for students. It also took the view that publishing TEF outcomes would help to incentivise improvement, by affecting providers' reputations.

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<sup>1</sup> While TEF's current name is used throughout this document, the name of the future scheme will be subject to consultation.

<sup>2</sup> Quality and standards: The road to more rigorous regulation: [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/blog/quality-and-standards-the-road-to-more-rigorous-regulation/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/blog/quality-and-standards-the-road-to-more-rigorous-regulation/).

<sup>3</sup> Independent Review of the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-of-tef-report/>.

<sup>4</sup> Findings from the subject-level TEF pilots: [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/teaching/future-of-the-tef/subject-level-pilots/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/teaching/future-of-the-tef/subject-level-pilots/).

<sup>5</sup> Guidance to the Office for Students (OfS) – Secretary of State's strategic priorities (February 2021): [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/guidance-from-government/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/guidance-from-government/).

<sup>6</sup> Government response to Dame Shirley Pearce's Independent Review of the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF): <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/government-response-to-the-independent-review-of-tef>.

<sup>7</sup> TEF advisory group - Office for Students: [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/teaching/future-of-the-tef/tef-advisory-group/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/teaching/future-of-the-tef/tef-advisory-group/).

<sup>8</sup> TEF metrics peer review group - Office for Students: [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/teaching/future-of-the-tef/tef-metrics-peer-review-group/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/teaching/future-of-the-tef/tef-metrics-peer-review-group/).

7. As we develop our approach to regulating quality and standards, we are also aiming to ensure that TEF forms part of a coherent overall quality system. The OfS's quality and standards conditions are designed to ensure a minimum baseline of protection for all students. We see the primary purpose of TEF as promoting improvement and the pursuit of excellence beyond the baseline quality requirements.<sup>9</sup> Together, these two parts of the overall quality system support our strategic objective<sup>10</sup> that every student, whatever their background, has a fulfilling experience of higher education that enriches their lives and careers.
8. We expect to propose that providers would have to satisfy our baseline quality and standards requirements in order to participate in the TEF.<sup>11</sup> The baseline conditions set a common set of requirements that apply to all students at all providers. Beyond these requirements, providers are free to pursue excellence and innovation as they see fit, reflecting the character of their own students, subjects and provision. In this context, TEF would aim to incentivise providers to improve and deliver excellence for their particular mix of students and provision.
9. TEF would incentivise excellence through expert judgements that signal the quality of a provider's teaching and learning, and the influence of published TEF ratings on providers' reputations, putting a spotlight on the quality of their learning and teaching and on their student outcomes, and influencing student choice.
10. In line with the independent review and the government's response, we aim to develop TEF in accordance with the principles of transparency, relevance, robustness and proportionality. We are likely to consult on a proposal for the ratings to be awarded at provider level and we are considering carefully the extent to which subject-level evidence could inform a provider-level TEF assessment, in a proportionate way.

## Scope of TEF

11. We expect to maintain the current position that participation in TEF will be mandatory for all registered providers with more than 500 students on higher education courses.<sup>12</sup> We will continue to invite providers in England with fewer than 500 students, as well as providers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, to participate in TEF voluntarily.
12. Our consultation will likely propose that it is appropriate to seek closer alignment between the range of students included within a provider's TEF assessment and the approach used for other elements of our regulation, particularly for quality and standards. This would mean we may consult on a proposal to include all students who are taught and registered with each provider within the TEF assessment.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Quality and standards – provider guide: [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/quality-and-standards-provider-guide](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/regulation/quality-and-standards-provider-guide).

<sup>10</sup> Office for Students Strategy 2018 to 2021: [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/office-for-students-strategy-2018-to-2021/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/office-for-students-strategy-2018-to-2021/).

<sup>11</sup> Providers in the devolved administrations would need to meet any quality requirements specified by the relevant funding or regulatory body.

<sup>12</sup> As required by condition B6 in the OfS's regulatory framework. See: [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/securing-student-success-regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/securing-student-success-regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/).

<sup>13</sup> Previous TEF exercises only covered taught students because a primary purpose of the TEF was to inform student choice. Including students both taught and registered at the provider would incentivise improvement

13. For the next exercise, we expect to propose that TEF should continue to focus on undergraduate courses only, at all levels.

## **What would be assessed?**

14. We are developing proposals for TEF to continue to focus on the quality of the student academic experience and student outcomes, but not the academic standards of awards.

15. The independent review recommended that assessment should focus on educational experience and educational outcomes, structured into four aspects: teaching and learning environment; student satisfaction; educational gains; and graduate outcomes. It recommended two of these should be based on nationally comparative data and two based on evidence that providers determine themselves, with the aim of rebalancing the roles of metrics and submissions in the assessment process.

16. We are considering these recommendations and having regard to the government's guidance on the structure of the assessment. We are likely to include proposals for an alternative approach of assessing two broader aspects, one covering the academic experience and learning environment, and the other covering educational gains and outcomes. Each of these aspects could bring together evidence submitted by the provider, its students and nationally comparable indicators, taking into account developments such as the NSS review and aligning with our proposed approach to our quality conditions of registration.

17. We will develop and consult on assessment criteria to underpin each aspect, against which providers would be invited to demonstrate excellence for their students and provision.

## **How would the assessment be conducted?**

18. We will consult on an assessment to be conducted by a panel of academic and student experts in learning and teaching, supported by a wider group of assessors. We would expect to appoint panel members and assessors after we have consulted on the TEF, and would aim for membership to reflect the diversity of the sector and the student population that TEF is intended to benefit.

19. Taking into account the findings of the subject-level pilots, the recommendations of the independent review and the government response, we expect the next iteration of TEF to operate at provider level. This would mean making judgements about the provider as a whole, rather than producing subject-level ratings.

20. We know, however, that there can be significant variability of performance between subjects within a single provider. We are considering options for how TEF at provider level could incentivise excellence at subject level in a proportionate way and without rating individual subjects. We also wish to ensure that TEF promotes equality of opportunity, through assessing the extent to which providers are delivering an excellent experience and outcomes for all of their students, including those from underrepresented groups. This could involve publishing the TEF data for each provider broken down both by subject and by student group. Such data

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for all students the provider has responsibilities for. Definitions of taught and registered students can be found at: [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/securing-student-success-regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/securing-student-success-regulatory-framework-for-higher-education-in-england/).

could inform providers' own improvement activity and their TEF submissions, and be taken into account by the TEF panel.

21. We expect to propose that the sources of evidence informing the TEF assessment would include the following elements, in line with the recommendations of the independent review and the government's response:
- a) **Provider submission** – which would allow the provider to present its educational mission and evidence of how far it succeeds in providing the distinctive academic experience, learning environment, educational gains and outcomes it aims to deliver. This submission would be self-evaluative and include evidence determined by the provider as relevant to its own students and provision.
  - b) **Independent student submission** – this would provide students with a greater opportunity than before to contribute evidence to their provider's assessment.
  - c) **Nationally comparative indicators** – which would focus primarily on how well the provider performs for its particular mix of students and provision. Alongside these measures of benchmarked (expected) performance, we are likely to propose ways in which a provider's absolute (actual) performance could also be taken into consideration.
  - d) **Data about the overall size and shape of provision** – which would reflect some key aspects of the character of the provider's higher education students, subjects and provision.
22. Following the recommendations of the independent review, informed by the ONS's review of the statistical elements of TEF,<sup>14</sup> we are developing proposals for TEF indicators that would not be 'flagged' or generate an 'initial hypothesis' as they did in the past. Instead, we are aiming to equip assessors to interpret the data, taking into account levels of uncertainty and each provider's particular mix of students and provision.
23. Our intention is to consult on TEF proposals at the same time as our consultation on a revised approach to regulating student outcomes (through condition B3), and a consultation on a set of proposed indicators which would underpin the proposals for condition B3 and the use of data in TEF.
24. We are likely to propose that panel members and assessors use all the sources of evidence to assess how far each provider delivers excellence for its students and provision, and to rate the provider on a scale that signals degrees of excellence. We envisage that greater weight would be placed on evidence presented in providers' and students' submissions than previously, to improve the balance between national and institutionally-determined evidence. Our consultation will include consideration of potential limiting factors that could apply to the overall rating.

## What would be the outcomes?

25. The independent review recommended expanding the current rating scheme to include four rating categories, and that each aspect should be rated as well as the provider as a whole.

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<sup>14</sup> Evaluation of the Statistical Elements of the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/evaluation-of-the-statistical-elements-of-tef>.

26. Our likely proposals would aim to deliver this additional granularity within the ratings. We are likely to include proposals for a fourth, lowest, category where there is insufficient evidence of excellence, and proposals for how this category would interact with our baseline quality requirements. For example, the award of this lowest category could be used as an indicator to identify cases where further investigation of compliance with the baseline conditions for quality may be necessary.
27. We expect to consult on outcomes that would include a narrative statement of the TEF panel's findings, which could be published alongside the TEF ratings. This could highlight each provider's own strengths and areas for improvement while enabling providers to identify good practice elsewhere in the sector.
28. TEF indicators would be compiled and published annually as official statistics, with the aim of supporting improvement, transparency and accountability before, during and beyond the TEF assessments.

## **How would outcomes be communicated?**

29. One of the ways in which TEF could achieve its primary aim of incentivising excellence is through publication of the outcomes described above. As now, we expect that all the evidence used to inform the assessment would be published on the OfS website alongside the provider's ratings and a narrative statement of findings.
30. We consider that the publication of outcomes would support the primary aim of incentivising excellence above baseline quality requirements through its effect on providers' reputations, putting a spotlight on the quality of their learning and teaching and on their student outcomes. We envisage publishing the outcomes on the Discover Uni website<sup>15</sup> as one part of the more detailed information to inform student choice.
31. We will consult on the names of the rating categories, and on the name of the scheme.

## **What would be the timeline?**

32. We aim to consult on a full set of proposals for future TEF and the associated indicators in autumn 2021.
33. Our provisional timeline for the implementation of the revised TEF scheme involves opening the submission window by summer 2022 and announcing outcomes in early 2023, although this timeline will itself be subject to consultation. This provisional timeline is designed to allow the new approach to the TEF to be aligned with our wider consultation on quality and standards. We also want to minimise the number of consultations at the same time for providers and students, and to enable proper consideration of the impact of the disruption to higher education resulting from the coronavirus pandemic, both within provider submissions and the TEF assessments.

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<sup>15</sup> Discover Uni website: <https://discoveruni.gov.uk/>.

34. All current TEF awards – which had been due to expire in summer 2021 – have been extended until the outcomes of the next TEF exercise are published.<sup>16</sup>
35. We will likely put forward proposals for TEF to be conducted periodically, on a four-year cycle. Within this cycle there could be an interim assessment point, for example to enable the participation of providers that were not registered or did not take part in the main exercise, or those that grow to reach 500 students.

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<sup>16</sup> See [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/letter-to-providers-tef-update/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/letter-to-providers-tef-update/).