

# Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF): Findings from the subject-level pilot 2018-19

## Annex I: TEF subject-level pilot glossary

This report was completed in autumn 2019 following the conclusion of the pilot.

The following terms are used within the Office for Students' (OfS's) report, Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF): Findings from the subject-level pilot 2018-19. The report and its annexes are available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/tef-findings-from-the-second-subject-level-pilot-2018-19/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/tef-findings-from-the-second-subject-level-pilot-2018-19/).

## **Absolute values**

We refer to very high or very low absolute values. These are defined to be absolute values that fall within the top or bottom 10 per cent of providers for that metric.

## **Accountable officer**

The accountable officer is the person, normally the head of the provider, who reports to the OfS on behalf of the provider. The responsibilities of an accountable officer are set out in Regulatory advice 10: Accountable officers.<sup>1</sup>

## **Additional evidence**

Evidence on teaching and learning quality included in the submission from a higher education provider applying for a TEF rating. Additional evidence can be quantitative or qualitative and should address the criteria.

## **Alternative provider**

Alternative providers are higher education providers that do not receive recurrent funding from the OfS or other public body and are not further education colleges.

## **Attainment gaps**

Attainment in higher education considers the academic outcomes achieved by students. There are identified gaps in degree outcomes for underrepresented groups when compared with their peers. We refer to this difference as the attainment gap. The OfS has set ambitions for itself and the sector to eliminate the unexplained gap in degree outcomes (firsts or 2:1s) between white students and black students by 2024-25, and to eliminate the absolute gap (the gap caused by both structural and unexplained factors) by 2030-31.

## **Attainment differentials**

Attainment differentials refers to the differences in outcomes between different groups of students.

---

<sup>1</sup> Available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-advice-10-accountable-officers-guidance-for-providers-on-the-responsibilities-of-accountable-officers/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/regulatory-advice-10-accountable-officers-guidance-for-providers-on-the-responsibilities-of-accountable-officers/).

## Aspects of quality

Areas of teaching and learning quality against which providers will be assessed. These are: Teaching Quality (TQ), Learning Environment (LE), and Student Outcomes and Learning Gain (SO).

## Basket of metrics

See core metrics.

## Benchmark

The benchmark is a weighted sector average where weightings are based on the characteristics of the student at the higher education provider. The benchmarking factors currently accounted for in the TEF are:

- subject of study
- entry qualifications
- age
- ethnicity
- sex
- disability
- educational disadvantage
- qualification level
- the year of data used.

## Calibration

A process using a subset of submissions to run a trial assessment process for panel members as part of the training programme.

## CAH2

The subjects assessed in the subject-level pilot are based on the HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) Common Aggregation Hierarchy at level 2 (CAH2).

## Contextual data

Data on the nature and operating context of a provider, such as size, location and student population, which is used by panel members in interpreting performance against the core metrics and additional evidence. Contextual data does not itself form the basis of any judgement about excellence.

## Core metrics

Measures deriving from national surveys and data returns which have been reported as a key part of the evidence used in provider-level and subject-level assessments. There are nine core metrics reported separately for full-time and part-time students and as an average over three years.

## Criteria

Statements against which panel members will make judgements.<sup>2</sup>

### Disability

Disability is self-declared on HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) or ILR (Individualised Learner Record) student records. Under the Equality Act 2010, a person has a disability 'if they have a physical or mental impairment, and the impairment has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on his or her ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities'.

### Eligibility

The requirements that must be met in order for higher education providers to be eligible to receive a TEF rating. For the subject-level pilot, the eligibility requirements were the same as for TEF Year Four.

### Employability

Employability in the context of progression of graduates refers to the skills and competencies that a student gains as they progress throughout higher education to ultimately enhance their chances of finding meaningful and sustained employment.

### Enhancement

The policies, structures and processes that higher education providers have in place to improve the quality of the learning opportunities for their students.

### False positives (Type I errors)

A type I error is a statistical term which means the rejection of a true null hypothesis. Usually a type I error leads to the conclusion that a supposed effect or relationship exists when in fact it does not. In TEF, this would be equivalent to the flagging of a unit (a metric or split) when, in reality, the performance of the unit is no different to the benchmark.

### False negatives (Type II errors)

A type II error is a statistical term which means the failure to reject a false null hypothesis. In TEF, this would be equivalent to the failure to flag a unit (a metric or split) that is known to have a statistically significant performance difference to the benchmark.

### Flag

Metrics receive a flag when the difference between the indicator and the benchmark is significant and material. Flags denote either a positive or negative difference.

---

<sup>2</sup> See: TEF subject pilot guide (pages 24–25), available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/teaching-excellence-and-student-outcomes-framework-subject-level-pilot-guide/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/teaching-excellence-and-student-outcomes-framework-subject-level-pilot-guide/).

## **Franchised provision**

An arrangement between higher education providers where one or more provider delivers all or part of a programme of study designed and accredited by another provider.

## **Full scale**

A full scale exercise refers to the magnitude of resource required to assess subject-level provision at all UK higher education providers, with over 500 students.

## **Further education college**

Further education colleges are financially supported by the government to provide study after secondary education that's not part of higher education (that is, not taken as part of an undergraduate or graduate degree). Some further education colleges provide higher education and are eligible for TEF.

## **Gaming**

A process by which providers attempt to improve their TEF rating by making changes to improve their performance in the core metrics. This improvement does not always result in actual enhancement.

## **Grade inflation**

An unexplained upward trend in the firsts and 2:1 grades awarded to students completing higher education. For further details on this, see Analysis of degree classifications over time<sup>3</sup>, published by the OfS in July 2019.

## **Granularity**

The scale and level of detail within a data set.

## **Higher education provider**

A higher education provider (or provider) is an organisation that delivers higher education. A provider can be an awarding body. The term encompasses higher education institution, further education colleges and alternative providers.

## **Indicator**

A higher education provider's value for a particular TEF metric, expressed as proportion, such as the percentage of students that indicated they were satisfied with teaching and learning.

## **Independent panel**

TEF awards are judged by an independent panel of assessors, including students, academics, and experts in employment and widening participation.

---

<sup>3</sup> Available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/analysis-of-degree-classifications-over-time/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/analysis-of-degree-classifications-over-time/).

## **Information, advice and guidance (IAG)**

Information, advice and guidance provided by higher education providers plays an important role in students' choices from pre-entry to higher education, throughout their studies and through to progression into employment or further study.

## **Initial hypothesis**

Quantitative evidence (the core metrics) is considered by assessors to form an initial hypothesis of the rating of Gold, Silver or Bronze. This initial hypothesis may be modified by the additional evidence.

## **Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD)**

The Index of Multiple Deprivation, commonly known as the IMD, is the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in England.

## **Lead student representative (LSR)**

Pilot providers were asked to nominate a student representative to engage in the process, as well as an alternative student contact. This could be a staff member from the students' union or equivalent. The lead student representative was responsible for completing the student declaration and coordinating feedback from student contributors at the provider.

## **Learning Environment (LE)**

One of the aspects of quality (see [aspects of quality](#)). Learning environment is described in the TEF Subject-level pilot guide.<sup>4</sup>

## **Main panel**

The main panel is a decision-making body for TEF subject-level pilot assessments. It is formed of higher education specialists including student representatives, senior academics, professional statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRB) representatives and employment representatives. The main panel is responsible for deciding provider ratings.

## **Material difference**

In relation to the metrics, a provider's indicator is considered to be materially different from the benchmark if the difference is at least two percentage points.

## **Mature learners**

Mature students are typically defined as those aged 21 or over when they enter higher education. Mature learners are more likely than their younger counterparts to have characteristics associated with underrepresentation in higher education.

---

<sup>4</sup> See TEF subject pilot guide (pages 24–28), available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/teaching-excellence-and-student-outcomes-framework-subject-level-pilot-guide/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/teaching-excellence-and-student-outcomes-framework-subject-level-pilot-guide/).

## Metrics

These are measures of institutional performance derived from national surveys and data returns, which are a key part of the evidence used in TEF assessments.

## Model

The model encompassed the criteria, framework and process of assessment used to reach TEF subject-level and provider-level ratings.

## National Student Survey (NSS)

The National Student Survey (NSS) is aimed at mainly final-year undergraduates in the UK and gathers opinions from students about their time in higher education. The survey asks for honest feedback on what it has been like to study their course at their university or college.

## POLAR

POLAR (Participation of Local Areas) is a classification of small geographical areas across the UK according to the participation of young people in higher education.

There have been several iterations of POLAR, which are referred to as POLAR1, POLAR2, POLAR3 and POLAR4. The second TEF subject-level pilot uses POLAR4.<sup>5</sup>

## Protected characteristics

The personal characteristics against which it is unlawful to discriminate. The characteristics are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- marriage and civil partnership
- pregnancy and maternity
- race
- religion and belief
- sex
- sexual orientation.

## Provider level

TEF provides information about teaching at higher education providers to help prospective students choose where to study. Provider-level TEF gives a single rating for an institution as a whole.

---

<sup>5</sup> For more information on POLAR, see [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/young-participation-by-area/).

## Provider-level rating

The provider-level rating is the overall holistic judgement of Gold, Silver or Bronze, given to a higher education provider taking part in the pilot. The rating refers to the overall provision against the TEF subject-level pilot criteria. See also '[subject-level rating](#)'.

## Provisional TEF award

A TEF rating given in the full TEF exercise (TEF Year Two, Three, Four) but not in the subject-level pilot. A TEF rating of Provisional is given to a provider that opts into TEF and is eligible but does not have suitable data to inform assessment. Provisional awards are only given at provider level and were not used in the subject-level pilot.

## Quality assessment

Quality assessment is a collective term used to refer to arrangements for ensuring higher education providers meet baseline expectations for academic quality and standards. There are different arrangements in operation in different parts of the UK and, in some parts, for different types of providers. In all cases, expectations are underpinned by the UK Quality Code for higher education.

## Significant difference

In relation to the metrics, a higher education provider's indicator is considered to be significantly different from the benchmark if the Z-score is +/-1.98: this is a measure of statistical significance.

## Split metrics

Each metric is split into subcategories to show how a provider performs with respect to different student groups, in different years.

## Statement of Findings (SoF)

A brief written statement that outlines the reason for the rating awarded to a particular higher education provider. The lead reviewer of each assessment was responsible for noting the main points agreed in the panel meeting to use as a basis for drafting a Statement of Findings to explain the rationale for the rating to the providers that took part.

## Student declaration

The student declaration was an independent document completed and submitted by students to indicate how they were involved. The document was submitted directly to the OfS.

## Student Outcomes and Learning Gain (SO)

One of the aspects of quality. Student Outcomes and Learning Gain is described in the TEF Subject-level pilot guide.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/teaching-excellence-and-student-outcomes-framework-subject-level-pilot-guide/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/teaching-excellence-and-student-outcomes-framework-subject-level-pilot-guide/) (pages 24–28).

## **Stages (of assessment)**

The assessment process was divided into three formal stages: individual assessment, recommendations, and decision and outcomes.

## **Steps (of assessment)**

At each stage of the assessment, panel members followed a three-step method of reviewing the available evidence and arriving at a rating. The same method will be used for provider- and subject-level assessment, but there were some differences in the information used at provider- and subject-level in particular steps.

## **Subject-level**

Subject-level TEF is designed to produce TEF ratings for each subject within a provider. This will be in addition to the current provider-level TEF, which rates the college or university as a whole.

## **Subject-level rating**

The subject-level rating is the overall holistic judgement of Gold, Silver, Bronze or no rating, given to a participant provider's subject provision. See also 'provider-level rating'.

## **Subject panel**

The subject panel is a decision-making body for TEF subject-level pilot assessments. It is formed of subject specialists including student representatives, senior academics, professional statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRB) representatives and employment representatives. The subject panels were responsible for deciding subject ratings.

## **Suitable metrics**

The minimum set of core metrics that a provider needs to have data for in order to be eligible to make a provider submission and receive a TEF rating.

## **Supplementary metrics**

Supplementary metrics are considered during Step 2 of an assessment. The supplementary metrics are not part of the eligibility requirements for an assessment.

## **TEF contact**

This is the person nominated by a provider to be the main point of contact for TEF matters. For some providers, this might be the same individual as the accountable officer.

## **Teaching provider**

The higher education provider where a student spends the majority of their first year. For franchised provision, students are included in the metrics of the teaching provider.

## Teaching Quality (TQ)

One of the aspects of quality (see aspects of quality). Teaching Quality is described in the TEF Subject-level pilot guide.<sup>7</sup>

### TEF award

In reference to the TEF provider-level exercises, a TEF award is made up of the TEF rating (see TEF rating) and a brief statement of findings.

### TEF rating

In reference to the TEF provider-level exercises, a TEF rating is the level of excellence achieved by a higher education provider under the TEF. There are three possible ratings: Bronze, Silver, Gold and Provisional. For the subject-level pilot, ratings were Bronze, Silver and Gold.

### Unistats

A web-based resource that compares UK higher education data. In September 2019, this was replaced by Discover Uni.<sup>8</sup>

## Widening participation (WP)

Widening participation is the overarching term used to refer to strategies and approaches to improve equality of opportunity in student access, success and progression in higher education. It is generally used in relation to groups of students who are currently underrepresented in higher education.

### Written submission

The submission is a document written by the higher education provider that includes additional evidence (qualitative or quantitative) against the criteria.

### Z-score

In relation to metrics, the Z-score denotes the number of standard deviations that a higher education provider's indicator is from the benchmark and is used as a measure of statistical difference.

---

<sup>7</sup> Available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/teaching-excellence-and-student-outcomes-framework-subject-level-pilot-guide/](http://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/teaching-excellence-and-student-outcomes-framework-subject-level-pilot-guide/) (pages 24–28).

<sup>8</sup> See <https://discoveruni.org.uk/>.

<b>Acronym or abbreviation</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>BAME</b>	Black, Asian and minority ethnic
<b>BME</b>	Black and minority ethnic
<b>CAH</b>	Common Aggregation Hierarchy
<b>CAH2</b>	Common Aggregation Hierarchy Level 2
<b>CPD</b>	Continuing Professional Development
<b>DfE</b>	Department for Education
<b>DLHE</b>	Destination of Leavers from Higher Education (survey)
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FE</b>	Further education
<b>FTE</b>	Full-time equivalent
<b>GSS</b>	Government Statistical Service
<b>GO</b>	Graduate Outcomes
<b>GOS</b>	Graduate Outcomes Survey
<b>GTQ</b>	Gross Teaching Quotient
<b>HE</b>	Higher education
<b>HECoS</b>	Higher Education Classification of Subjects
<b>HEFCE</b>	Higher Education Funding Council for England
<b>HEI</b>	Higher education institution
<b>HERA</b>	The Higher Education and Research Act 2017
<b>HESA</b>	Higher Education Statistics Agency
<b>ILR</b>	Individualised Learner Record
<b>IMD</b>	Index of Multiple Deprivation
<b>JACS</b>	Joint Academic Coding System
<b>KEF</b>	Knowledge Exchange Framework
<b>LE</b>	Learning Environment
<b>LEO</b>	Longitudinal Education Outcomes (survey)
<b>NAO</b>	National Audit Office
<b>NSS</b>	National Student Survey
<b>NUS</b>	National Union of Students
<b>OfS</b>	Office for Students
<b>ONS</b>	Office for National Statistics
<b>PG</b>	Postgraduate

<b>Acronym or abbreviation</b>	<b>Definition</b>
<b>POLAR</b>	Participation of Local Areas (classification groups )
<b>PSRB</b>	Professional, statutory and regulatory bodies
<b>QAA</b>	Quality Assurance Agency
<b>QEF</b>	Quality Enhancement Framework
<b>REF</b>	Research Excellence Framework
<b>RSS</b>	Royal Statistical Society
<b>SO</b>	Student Outcomes and Learning Gain
<b>SOC codes</b>	Standard Occupational Classification codes
<b>STEM</b>	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
<b>TEF</b>	The Teaching Excellence and Students Outcomes Framework
<b>TQ</b>	Teaching Quality
<b>UCAS</b>	The Universities and Colleges Admissions Service
<b>UG</b>	Undergraduate
<b>UUK</b>	Universities UK
<b>WP</b>	Widening participation



© The Office for Students copyright 2020

This publication is available under the Open Government Licence 3.0 except where it indicates that the copyright for images or text is owned elsewhere.

[www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/](http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/doc/open-government-licence/version/3/)