

Consultation

**Office for
Students**



Consultation on the future approach to quality regulation

This consultation runs from 18 September
to 11 December 2025.

Reference: OfS 2025.60

Enquiries to: TEF@officeforstudents.org.uk

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The Office for Students is the independent regulator for higher education in England. We aim to ensure that every student, whatever their background, has a fulfilling experience of higher education that enriches their lives and careers.

Our four regulatory objectives

All students, from all backgrounds, and with the ability and desire to undertake higher education:

- are supported to access, succeed in, and progress from, higher education
- receive a high quality academic experience, and their interests are protected while they study or in the event of provider, campus or course closure
- are able to progress into employment or further study, and their qualifications hold their value over time
- receive value for money.

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About this consultation

The Office for Students (OfS) is proposing to change the way it regulates and assesses the quality of higher education in the regulated English higher education sector. This consultation sets out the background to our proposals, the reasons we are proposing to make these changes and what we expect those changes to achieve.

This consultation sets out proposals for the aims and approach of the OfS's future quality system. It sets out proposals on:

1. Modifications to the overall quality system.
2. Modifications to the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).

Timing	Start: 18 September 2025 End: 11 December 2025
Who should respond?	<p>We welcome the views of all types and size of higher education provider, especially those that have not previously participated in the TEF.</p> <p>We are interested in hearing from students, staff, academics and leaders at higher education providers that will be engaging in the new arrangements resulting from this consultation.</p> <p>We are also interested in the views of further education colleges, employers, third sector organisations, policy bodies, and others with an interest in understanding and promoting quality in higher education.</p>
How to respond	<p>Please respond by 11 December 2025.</p> <p>Please use the online response form available at https://survey.officeforstudents.org.uk/s/consultation-on-quality/</p>
How we will treat your response	<p>We will summarise or publish the responses to this consultation on the OfS website (and in alternative formats on request). This may include a list of the providers and organisations that respond, but not personal data such as individuals' names, addresses or other contact details.</p> <p>If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please tell us but be aware that we cannot guarantee confidentiality in all circumstances. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not be regarded by us as a confidentiality request.</p>

The OfS will process any personal data received in accordance with all applicable data protection laws (see our privacy policy).¹

We may need to disclose or publish information that you provide in the performance of our functions, or disclose it to other organisations for the purposes of their functions. Information (including personal data) may also need to be disclosed in accordance with UK legislation (such as the Freedom of Information Act 2000, Data Protection Act 2018 and Environmental Information Regulations 2004).

Next steps

We will publish a summary of responses to this consultation in spring 2026. We will explain how and why we have arrived at our decisions, and how we have addressed any concerns raised by respondents. We will then consult on more detailed proposals for the future system in autumn 2026.

Enquiries

Email TEF@officeforstudents.org.uk.

Alternatively, call our public enquiry line on 0117 931 7317.

We are holding a series of consultation events in **October and November 2025**. These events will provide an opportunity for you to find out about the proposals and ask any questions you may have to support you to give feedback. For more information about the events and how to register, see <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/news-blog-and-events/events/ofs-future-approach-to-regulating-quality-have-your-say/>.

If you require this document in an **alternative format**, or you need assistance with the online form, contact TEF@officeforstudents.org.uk. (**Please note:** this email address should **not** be used for submitting your consultation response.)

For more information about our work to date on regulating quality, please visit the OfS website: www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-providers/quality-and-standards/how-we-regulate-quality-and-standards/.

¹ Available at OfS, '[OfS privacy](#)'.

Executive summary

1. The Office for Students (OfS) is consulting on changes to our regulation of the quality of higher education. These proposals aim to integrate our targeted assessment activity with the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). The proposed system would see the TEF assess the level of quality delivered by all higher education providers, and whether they meet or exceed our minimum quality requirements. The proposed system would run on a cyclical basis, with the frequency dependent on a provider's rating and ongoing risk monitoring.
2. Quality is at the heart of what students expect from higher education. They want high quality teaching, strong academic support, access to the resources they need and tailored learning experiences. They want to acquire knowledge and skills that lead to good jobs and other opportunities. High quality higher education also contributes to skills that support the future economy, and provides long-lasting value on public investment.
3. The proposals focus on securing positive higher education experiences for all students. Every student – regardless of their background, circumstances or pathway – should benefit from high quality education that meets their needs and equips them to succeed. We want a system that helps to drive quality improvement across the sector. While much provision is already excellent, there is room to improve further and where quality falls short the system will hold institutions to account.
4. We currently assess quality through two separate streams of activity:
 - a. Targeted assessments where we have concerns about a provider meeting our requirements on course quality, assessment, resources, academic support and student outcomes (our B conditions of registration).
 - b. Recognition of excellence through the TEF, which rates a provider's undergraduate provision, looking at the student experience and student outcomes.
5. The independent public bodies review of the OfS recommended that our quality assessment activity should be brought together to form a more integrated assessment system. It also recommended a stronger focus on driving improvements in quality across all providers.
6. Independent evaluations of our approach to regulating student outcomes and the early impact of the 2023 TEF also highlighted areas that we could build on to develop a system that delivers more value and complements and strengthens providers' work to enhance student experiences and outcomes.
7. We also want students to have clearer information and to have confidence in their expectations of the quality of education and outcomes they receive.
8. Since early 2025, we have engaged with sector and student groups to discuss options for a more integrated approach that would drive continuous improvement for the benefit of students across all providers in England's diverse sector. For this reason, rather than an open call for evidence, we are consulting initially on proposals for the principles, scope and structure of a revised system. We expect to consult further next year on the detailed content, methods, data and guidance.

Proposals

9. The initial proposals involve the following:

- a. A more integrated overall system
- b. Modifying the TEF
- c. Revising our minimum requirements for student outcomes
- d. Managing risks and incentivising improvement
- e. Implementation and ongoing development of the system

A more integrated overall system

10. We propose to modify the overall quality regulatory system to ensure that it is coherent, that assessment activities are more integrated, to reduce burden where possible, and to provide a clear view of the quality delivered by different providers.
11. Equality of opportunity would be embedded in the new approach, to ensure that students from all backgrounds can experience high quality education and achieve positive outcomes.

Modifying the TEF

12. As a central part of the future integrated system, we propose to assess and rate all providers registered with us through a modified TEF. This would be done on a cyclical basis, with rolling assessment cycles focusing on undergraduate provision in the first cycle of assessments. It would expand to include postgraduate taught provision from the second cycle onwards.
13. We propose to continue to assess and rate the quality of the student experience and of student outcomes. The ratings would show whether a provider meets or exceeds our minimum requirements on quality.
14. We would assess and rate the student experience based on submissions from providers, National Student Survey (NSS) responses and further input from students. We are interested in alternative means of gathering student input from providers where the NSS data is limited, or it is impractical for students to make their own submission.
15. We propose to assess and rate student outcomes in an efficient way, using available data to measure how far students succeed in and beyond their studies. We are interested in a more rounded set of measures of what students do after they graduate, and how to make sure the measures take different contexts into account. Where a provider's data is too limited, we propose not to rate its student outcomes.

Revising our minimum requirements for student outcomes

16. We propose to simplify our minimum requirements for students achieving positive outcomes, and to test that each provider is meeting these as part of its TEF assessment, rather than through a separate assessment.

Managing risks and incentivising improvement

17. The overarching aim of the new system is that every provider registered with the OfS delivers high quality education and outcomes for its students, and seeks to continually improve its offering.
18. To support this, we propose published ratings and a set of strengthened incentives and interventions that would drive improvement across the sector. Providers that deliver the highest quality would be rewarded and encouraged to continue their work. Those that are just meeting our minimum quality requirements would be pushed to improve through stronger incentives and regulatory interventions. Where quality falls short of the minimum requirements we would intervene as appropriate to ensure improvements are made.
19. Our proposed approach to the assessment seeks to minimise cost and burden on providers that deliver high quality, with increased scrutiny where the risks to students are greater.
20. We propose to monitor risks to quality in between a provider's TEF assessments, in a timely and transparent way. This is so providers understand why they might face more scrutiny, and so we can respond more rapidly if students are at increased risk of receiving poor quality.

Implementation and ongoing development of the system

21. We propose further consultation on the details of the approach during 2026-27, and to carry out the first full cycle of assessments under the new scheme over three years starting in 2027-28. Providers with existing TEF awards (from the 2023 exercise) would retain them until replaced by ratings from the new scheme.
22. We propose that the new system would provide clear information for students about the level of quality delivered by different providers. We would develop and test how to communicate future TEF ratings as part of a wider package of student information.

This consultation

23. We are consulting initially on proposals for the principles, scope and structure of the future system, until 11 December 2025. We welcome views from all types and sizes of higher education provider, including those that have previously participated in the TEF and those that have not. We are also interested in the views of students and their representatives, awarding bodies, third sector organisations, policy bodies, and others with an interest in the quality of higher education. Respondents are also encouraged to consider the potential for any unintended consequences of the proposals on particular types of provider or students, on the basis of their protected characteristics. Respondents do not need to add a response to every question, and can just comment on the areas of specific interest. We will continue to engage with sector and student groups and listen to their views throughout the consultation period, including through feedback sessions.
24. We plan to publish our decisions on the broad approach after considering consultation responses, in spring 2026. We then plan in autumn 2026 to consult in more detail on the methodologies, guidance, data issues and how the assessments would work in practice, and on the detail of changes to the relevant conditions of registration.

Background

25. Our current approach to regulating quality for providers registered with the OfS aims to secure a minimum level of quality for all students, and to drive improvement above this level. It involves the following activities:
- a. We **set requirements for quality and standards**, expected of all providers and courses (known as the B conditions of registration). These were defined through consultations from 2020 to 2022. When registering with the OfS, providers are tested for their readiness to meet these quality requirements. In summary, the ongoing B conditions for providers registered with the OfS set out requirements for:
 - i. Condition B1: Appropriate course content that is effectively delivered.
 - ii. Condition B2: Sufficient resources, staffing and academic support to enable students to succeed; and sufficient engagement with students in the development of provision.
 - iii. Condition B3: Sufficiently positive outcomes for students in and beyond their studies.
 - iv. Condition B4: Effective and reliable assessment that maintains the credibility of awards over time.
 - v. Condition B5: Appropriate setting and application of the standards for awards.
 - b. We carry out **targeted quality assessments**, if we identify potential concerns about a registered provider continuing to meet these requirements. We take a risk-based approach to prioritising these assessments, which are currently of two types:
 - i. Qualitative assessments through targeted visits to providers to assess the experience students receive on the ground. We have to date completed 11, focused on particular subject areas.
 - ii. Quantitative assessments that focus on positive student outcomes. We have completed 12 of these.
 - c. The **Teaching Excellence Framework** incentivises excellence above the requirements of the B conditions. Following consultation in 2022, we ran a TEF exercise in 2023. This rated providers for the quality of the student experience and student outcomes, focusing on undergraduate provision. Assessments were desk-based, using data alongside provider and student submissions. Condition B6 required all providers with more than 500 undergraduate students to participate; smaller providers could choose to take part. The published ratings cover 227 providers and last for four years or until the next exercise supersedes them, whichever is the longer.
26. The independent public bodies review of the OfS recommended that these quality assessment activities should be brought together to form a more integrated assessment system.² It also recommended a stronger focus on driving improvement in quality across all providers. Since

² See Gov.UK, '[Fit for the future: Independent review of the Office for Students](#)'.

that review we have engaged with provider and student groups to discuss options for an integrated quality system. Our proposals have been informed by that engagement, as well as evaluations of our existing approach.

27. A summary of the public bodies review's recommendations, feedback from our engagement, and findings of our evaluations that have informed these proposals, is at Annex C. The matters to which we have had regard in developing our proposals are set out at Annex D.
28. The proposed assessments would be carried out under the OfS's statutory powers set out in the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA), Section 23 (Assessing the quality of, and the standards applied to, higher education) and Section 25 (Rating the quality of, and the standards applied to, higher education).

Consultation proposals

Summary of initial proposals

Section 1: Overall quality system

Proposal 1: A more integrated overall system

We propose to modify the overall quality system to ensure that it is integrated, drives improvement across the sector, and provides a clear view of the quality delivered by different providers.

Section 2: The future TEF

Proposal 2: Providers in scope

We propose to assess and rate all OfS-registered providers through the future TEF, on a cyclical basis, with rolling assessment cycles.

Proposal 3: Provision in scope

We propose to assess undergraduate provision in the first cycle of assessments and to extend the scope to include postgraduate taught provision in the second cycle.

Proposal 4: Assessment aspects and ratings

We propose to assess and rate providers for 'student experience' and 'student outcomes', and to generate 'overall' provider ratings based on these two aspect ratings.

Proposal 5: The student experience aspect

We propose to:

- align the scope and ratings criteria for the student experience aspect with the requirements of conditions B1, B2 and B4
- assess the student experience on the basis of provider submissions, an expanded set of NSS-based indicators, and additional evidence from students.

Proposal 6: A revised and integrated condition B3

We propose to revise and simplify our minimum requirements for student outcomes (condition B3), and integrate into the future TEF an assessment of whether a provider meets them.

Proposal 7: The student outcomes aspect

We propose to rate student outcomes based on benchmarked indicators of continuation, completion and an expanded set of post-study indicators, and taking contextual factors into account.

Proposal 8: Assessment and decision making

We propose:

- that TEF assessments would be conducted by an evolving pool of academic and student assessors, supported and advised by OfS staff
- to adopt a risk-based approach for the assessors to give further consideration, when outcomes would have a potentially negative impact on a provider.

Proposal 9: Varying the approach for providers with limited data

We propose to:

- use an alternative means of gathering students' views, where we do not have sufficient statistical confidence in the NSS-based indicators for a provider.
- not rate the student outcomes aspect, where we do not have sufficient statistical confidence in the student outcomes indicators for a provider.

Proposal 10: Student evidence and involvement

We propose to include direct student input in the assessment of the student experience aspect for all providers, and to expand the range of student assessors.

Proposal 11: Assessment cycle

We propose to assess each provider for the first time within three years, according to a set of priorities, and to link the timing of further assessments to the ratings awarded and our ongoing risk monitoring.

Section 3: A risk-based system of incentives and interventions

Proposal 12: Risk monitoring

We propose to introduce a risk monitoring tool that sets out the factors associated with increased risks to quality.

Proposal 13: Incentives and interventions

We propose to introduce a strengthened set of incentives and interventions that vary according to the level of quality and risk, to drive quality improvement across the sector.

Section 4: Published outputs of the overall system

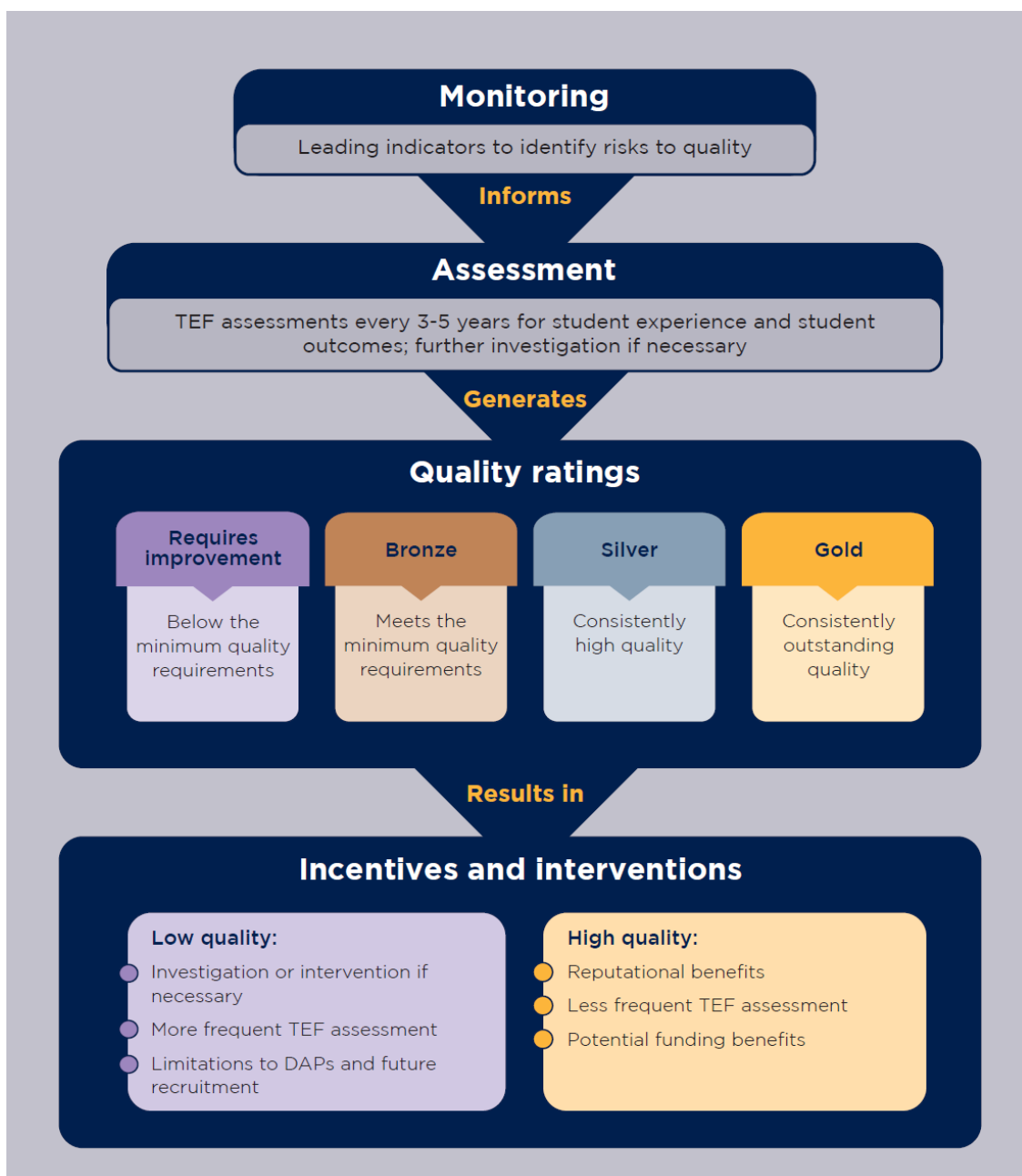
Proposal 14: Published outputs

We propose to continue publishing the outputs and outcomes of our quality assessments, aimed at providing clear information to students about the level of quality delivered by different providers, and incentivising and supporting providers' efforts to enhance quality.

Section 5: Implementation, ongoing development and evaluation

Proposal 15: Timeline

We propose to consult further during 2026-27 and carry out the first cohort of future TEF assessments in 2027-28.



Section 1: Overall quality system

Aims of the quality system

29. We want to be ambitious in securing positive higher education experiences for all students, and to use our regulation of quality to help drive improvement across the sector. Our aims for the quality assessment system are to:
- a. Ensure that students from all backgrounds benefit from high quality and continuously improving provision, through:
 - i. Supporting and encouraging providers to deliver the highest levels of quality for their students.
 - ii. Creating incentives and intervening to drive improvements where quality is not high enough.
 - b. Provide clear and useful information about the level of quality delivered by different providers to help inform student choice.
 - c. Provide assurance to government and the public about the delivery of high quality education.
30. Our current system broadly seeks to deliver these aims, and we do not propose to change the overall aims of our approach to quality regulation. Instead, we are proposing improvements to our approach to quality assessment and a set of strengthened incentives, with the intention of better achieving these overall aims.
31. Bringing together the issues highlighted by the public bodies review, what we have heard in discussions with stakeholders, and the findings of the early evaluations, we have identified the following main areas for improvement of the future quality approach:
- a. **Reach.** The current system focuses on undergraduate provision delivered by larger providers. We propose to extend the reach so that future quality assessments benefit students studying at all higher education providers, including proposals about how the system could work effectively for smaller providers. We also propose that over time the system should extend to benefit postgraduate as well as undergraduate students, and students studying on a modular basis.
 - b. **Impact.** The TEF has had a broadly but unevenly positive impact on participating providers, by increasing their attention on enhancement and excellence. Our proposals aim to have greater impact on the sector in a proportionate way, with a reduced burden for providers that deliver the highest quality. The proposals involve a streamlined approach to assessing student outcomes, and a strengthened set of incentives and interventions that vary according to different levels of quality and risk to students. The proposals also seek to strengthen input from students to focus improvement on what matters to students.
 - c. **Responsiveness.** Aspects of our current approach rely on data that involves time lags, and the current TEF system has fixed timeframes for carrying out assessments. Our

proposals aim to create a more dynamic and agile system that responds to emerging risks.

- d. **Integration.** Our current approach involves separate streams of assessment activity, with unclear connections between them. The proposals seek to create a more coherent and integrated system that reduces burden and is simpler to understand.

Proposal 1: A more integrated overall system

We propose to modify the overall quality system to ensure that it is integrated, drives improvement across the sector, and provides a clear view of the quality delivered by different providers.

- 32. Following the public bodies review, we discussed with sector and student groups how far we should integrate our quality assessment activities into a single system that would, through a single assessment process, provide a clear view of quality at each provider and drive improvement across the sector. This would have involved routinely assessing all providers to test fully whether they meet all the minimum quality requirements set out in the relevant ongoing B conditions of registration, as well as to rate the level of quality and drive improvement. Such an approach would be likely to involve visits to all providers, to assess whether they meet all the relevant B conditions of registration. Concerns were raised about the cost and scale of such an approach. We heard views that it would be more efficient and proportionate to continue with a risk-based approach to looking into concerns about compliance with the B conditions.
- 33. In light of this we propose a system that is largely integrated while remaining risk-based and proportionate, as follows:
 - a. We would continue to expect all providers to at least meet the requirements for quality set out in the ongoing B conditions of registration. We would clarify that the B conditions set out the minimum level of quality required of all providers.
 - b. We would incentivise all providers through a modified TEF to exceed the minimum level, and to strive for the highest levels of quality for their students.
 - c. The TEF assessments would remain desk-based, and would be carried out on a rolling cycle (with a cohort of providers assessed each year).
 - d. Through the TEF, providers would be assessed and rated for the student experience and student outcomes. Ratings would show whether or how far the provider exceeds the minimum requirements of the relevant B conditions.
 - e. We would simplify condition B3 and fully integrate an assessment of whether each provider delivers the minimum required student outcomes into its TEF assessments.
 - f. We would align the assessment of student experience in the TEF with our other quality requirements (conditions B1, B2 and the assessment element of B4). However, we would

not fully integrate the assessment of whether a provider complies with these conditions into the TEF, as this would probably require routine visits to all providers.

- g. Where we identify material concerns about the quality of the student experience (through risk monitoring or through TEF assessments), we would carry out targeted investigations, including visits to the provider. These would be prioritised based on risk.
 - h. We would improve and make more transparent the way we monitor risks to quality and our ability to respond rapidly to emerging risks in between cyclical TEF assessments.
34. The overall system would involve a strengthened set of incentives and interventions to drive improvement across the sector. These would vary according to the level of quality and risk to students, by:
- a. Rewarding providers that deliver the highest levels of quality and incentivising them to continue to do so.
 - b. Strongly incentivising improvement by providers that only deliver the minimum level of quality, including through increased scrutiny and further regulatory interventions.
 - c. Enabling us to intervene to ensure improvements are made by providers that do not deliver the minimum level of quality.
35. Alternatives we have considered for the future system are discussed in Annex E.

Quality and equality of opportunity

36. We propose the new system would be an integral part of our work to support equality of opportunity. The future TEF would hold providers to account for delivering equality of opportunity in relation to the experience and outcomes of their students. The TEF assessments and any quality compliance assessments would consider the experience and outcomes for all groups of students, and how well providers meet the needs of all their students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds.
37. As set out in Proposal 4, a provider would need to deliver consistently high or outstanding quality for all groups of students to achieve a Silver or Gold rating. Our proposals also involve assessing that each provider is delivering the minimum required student outcomes for all its student groups. These proposals would strongly incentivise providers to make improvements for any student groups with less good experiences or outcomes, including students from disadvantaged backgrounds.
38. Access and participation plans (APPs) would continue to support equality of opportunity. They would continue to apply to any provider registered with the OfS in the 'Approved (fee cap)' category. They focus on forward facing plans and (because of the link to the higher fee amount) on qualifying students on qualifying courses.
39. Because we are proposing the TEF would play a stronger role in assessing and driving improvement in the experiences and outcomes of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, there may be opportunities to refocus APPs on access in future, to reduce burden on providers. We invite views on opportunities to reduce duplication of effort between the future

TEF and APPs. Under Proposal 11, we also invite views on the sequencing of providers' TEF assessments and their submission of APPs.

European standards and guidelines

40. We have heard from some providers that it would be helpful for their international partnerships and recruitment for the future system to be recognised as adhering to European standards and guidelines for quality assurance. At this stage we consider that our proposed overall approach broadly includes all the elements required by these standards and guidelines. We will explore this further, including whether adherence would involve further adjustment to the system and what the additional costs to the sector could be. We would work towards applying to join the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education at the appropriate time.

Question 1a

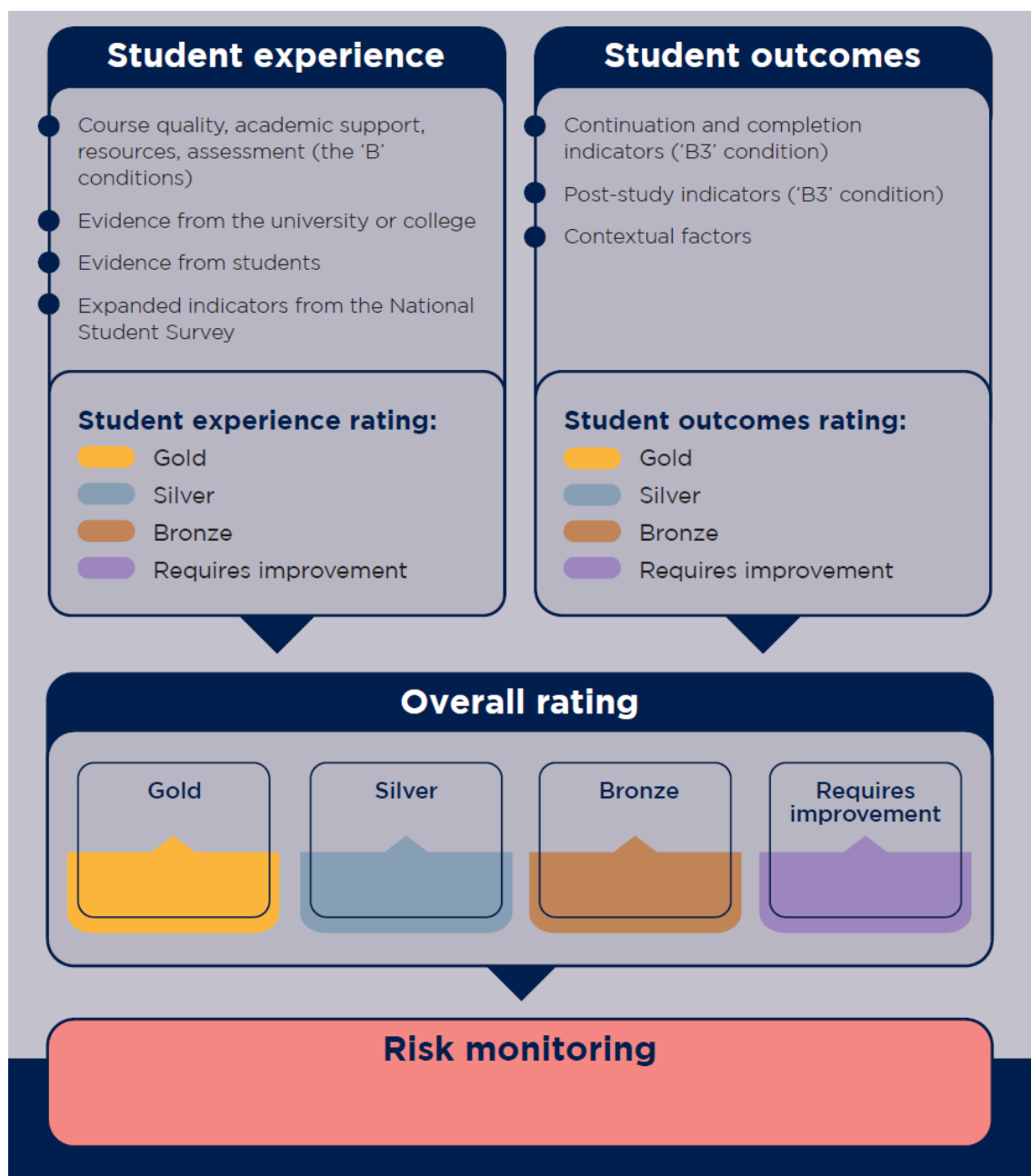
What are your views on the proposed approach to making the system more integrated?

Question 1b

Do you have views on opportunities to reduce duplication of effort between the future TEF and Access and Participation Plans?

Section 2: The future TEF

41. This section sets out our proposals to modify the Teaching Excellence Framework, which would be at the heart of the future integrated system that would apply to all providers. The current approach to the TEF, consulted on in 2022, was implemented for the first time in 2023. We are not proposing an entirely new approach, but rather to modify the TEF to build on what worked well and to create a more integrated overall system.
42. The TEF assessments would be desk-based, with decisions made by academic experts and student representatives, who would consider evidence from providers, direct input from students, and OfS-produced data indicators.
43. We propose a number of modifications to extend the reach and strengthen the impact of the TEF in driving improvement across the full range of providers, including the smallest. Our proposals include options for varying the approach for providers where the OfS data is limited.



Proposal 2: Providers in scope

We propose to assess and rate all OfS-registered providers through the future TEF, on a cyclical basis, with rolling assessment cycles.

44. In the previous TEF, it was optional for smaller providers (those that had fewer than 500 students and did not have data in at least two of the TEF indicators) to participate. We assessed 227 providers in the 2023 TEF, and a further 154 eligible providers opted not to take part.
45. We are now proposing over time to assess all registered providers, and we would revise condition B6 to reflect this requirement. All providers with undergraduate students would be included in the first cycle, and those with only taught postgraduate students would be included from the second cycle onwards. There are currently 431 providers on the OfS register, of which 392 had undergraduate students in the 2023-24 student data return and 13 had only postgraduate students.³
46. We propose this because we want students at all providers to benefit from high quality and improvement to their experience and outcomes. There was strong agreement in our engagement with sector and student groups with the principle that all providers should be subject to quality assessment. Additionally, should the proposal to integrate B3 assessments be implemented, it will allow us to review student outcomes at every provider on a regular basis in an efficient way, allowing us to identify and take action in more cases where student outcomes are not sufficiently positive.
47. One of the implications of extending the reach of the TEF to assess all providers, in combination with integrating an assessment of student outcomes against minimum thresholds, is that it would not be feasible to carry out all the assessments in one year. We propose to carry out future TEF assessments on a cyclical basis, with rolling assessment cycles, as discussed under Proposal 11: Assessment cycle, and we invite you to comment on the assessment cycle under that proposal.
48. If we apply the TEF to all registered providers, we would seek to design the assessment approach to recognise the diversity of the sector, and we acknowledge that a 'one size fits all' approach may not be appropriate. We would also seek to ensure the approach is proportionate, in relation to the scale of providers' activity and the risks to students of not receiving high quality provision. These considerations are reflected in our proposals to:
 - a. Simplify the range of information providers would submit to the TEF, with a stronger focus on the student experience, and more limited information in relation to student outcomes. (see Proposals 5 and 7).
 - b. Explore alternatives to a written student submission, such as commissioning focus groups, so that students at all providers can contribute their views (see Proposal 10: Student evidence and involvement).

³ The remaining providers did not return any undergraduate or postgraduate students in 2023-24.

- c. Vary the approach where providers do not have sufficient indicator data for the assessments. This is most likely to affect smaller or newer providers (see Proposal 9: Varying the approach for providers with limited data).
 - d. Vary the incentives, interventions and the frequency of assessment for providers depending on the level of quality and risk (See Proposal 13; Incentives and interventions).
 - e. Schedule most providers without a current TEF rating for their first assessment in the later years of the first cycle (as outlined in Proposal 11: Assessment cycle). This would allow more time for those unfamiliar with the TEF to prepare and could improve availability of data for some.
 - f. Recruit more academic and student assessors with experience and understanding of higher education at smaller, specialist and college-based providers (see Proposal 8: Assessment and decision making).
49. We are also interested in views on further actions we could take to ensure the future TEF operates proportionately and effectively for smaller providers and those that have not previously taken part. For example, these could include suggestions to provide more tailored support and guidance for different types of providers, or more detailed (optional) templates for preparing submissions.

Question 2a

What are your views on the proposal to assess all registered providers?

Question 2b

Do you have any suggestions on how we could help enable smaller providers, including those that haven't taken part in the TEF before, to participate effectively?

Proposal 3: Provision in scope

We propose to assess undergraduate provision in the first cycle of assessments and to extend the scope to include postgraduate taught provision in the second cycle.

Students in scope for the first cycle

- 50. We propose that the first cycle should focus on the quality of undergraduate provision, including the same levels of qualification covered in the 2023 TEF.
- 51. This would include all undergraduate courses that a provider has responsibility for. This includes courses taught by the provider and courses taught by other providers in England through partnership arrangements, whether through subcontractual arrangements (franchised provision) or through validation of qualifications.

52. As with the previous TEF, students taught through partnership arrangements would be considered in the assessments of both the lead provider and the teaching provider. This reflects the responsibilities of both providers for ensuring high quality and positive outcomes for these students. For student information purposes, we would present the ratings of the teaching provider and consider how best to link to information about the lead provider.
53. We propose to present data separately for the students taught by a provider, and students taught elsewhere through partnership arrangements, to make differences in quality transparent for these two groups (see Annex G for further details). We have considered proposing to rate a provider's taught provision and its partnership provision separately, but we do not consider that the benefits of doing so would outweigh the additional costs and complexity. Instead, our view is that it would be appropriate for material differences in quality between taught and partnership provision to have a limiting effect on a provider's ratings.
54. We are considering whether apprenticeship provision should be within the scope of the assessments. Including apprenticeships in the assessment of the student experience could constitute double regulation of this provision, given the responsibilities of Ofsted in this area. However, Ofsted does not make judgements about student outcomes or the quality of assessment practice and there may be an opportunity to reduce burden in relation to our role delivering external quality assurance of endpoint assessment. It may be appropriate for us to consider student outcomes and assessment for apprenticeship provision. We would welcome feedback on the extent to which apprenticeships should be included in the future TEF.

Extending the scope for future cycles

55. We would aim to extend the scope of future TEF assessments to include taught postgraduate (PGT) provision, to extend the incentives of the TEF to benefit these students. When extending the TEF to include PGT provision, we envisage that providers would be rated separately for their undergraduate and their PGT provision.
56. One of the reasons for not having included taught postgraduate provision in the TEF previously is the lack of sector-wide, comparable data for areas other than student outcomes. We recognise that this will continue to be a challenge in the short term, which is why we are proposing to focus on undergraduate provision in the first cycle. We would, during the first cycle, undertake work to develop a survey of taught postgraduate students. Further detail about this is available in Section 5.
57. The Department for Education has recently published plans for introducing modular provision eligible for funding under the Lifelong Learning Entitlement. The first cycle of TEF assessments would consider the quality of the courses within which funded modules sit. We need to develop additional measures that will allow us to assess the experience and outcomes of students undertaking modular provision specifically, and would aim to include these in the second cycle of TEF assessments.⁴
58. We have considered feedback received through our sector engagement about the complexity of extending assessments to transnational education and postgraduate research provision, as well as general comments about ensuring that what we propose to implement is deliverable.

⁴ This would cover students studying only modules, whether or not they are funded by the Lifelong Learning Entitlement.

Our conclusion is that we should not begin any implementation work to support assessment of these areas at this time, but instead ensure that we design the framework to be sufficiently flexible to allow us to incorporate them in subsequent future cycles, subject to further consultation.

59. The overall design we are proposing in this consultation would also allow us in future to extend the scope of our assessments: for example, to integrate a judgement about the effectiveness of a provider's governance arrangements. We would expect to consult further before extending the exercise in that way.

Question 3a

Do you have any comments on what provision should be in scope for the first cycle? You could include comments on areas such as:

- the inclusion of apprenticeships
- the proposal to look separately at partnership provision.

Question 3b

Do you have any comments on the proposed approach to expanding assessments to include taught postgraduate provision in future cycles?

Proposal 4: Assessment aspects and ratings

We propose to assess and rate providers for 'student experience' and 'student outcomes', and to generate 'overall' provider ratings based on these two aspect ratings.

Aspects of assessment

60. We propose the future TEF would continue to assess two broad 'aspects': the **student experience** and **student outcomes**. Each provider would be rated for the overall quality of the student experience across all of its undergraduate courses; and the overall student outcomes from all of its undergraduate courses. (From the second cycle, there would be separate ratings for the postgraduate student experience, and postgraduate student outcomes.)
61. In the previous TEF, we sought broad alignment between the TEF aspects and our B conditions. In future, we propose that the scope of the two aspects and the TEF rating categories would be more integrated and aligned with the requirements of the B conditions, so that our system provides a clear view of quality delivered by different providers.
62. In broad terms:
- a. **The student experience aspect** would consider the quality of course content and delivery, assessment, academic support, resources, and student engagement. These align with conditions B1, B2 and the 'effective assessment' element of condition B4.

- b. **The student outcomes aspect** would consider students' success in and beyond their studies, in terms of continuation and completion, and measures of further study and employment outcomes. This aligns with condition B3.

- 63. We also considered introducing an additional aspect to assess how effective a provider is at quality improvement. This would be based on a provider submission reflecting on areas for improvement, its approaches and the impact of its improvement activity. We considered this could help to increase the effect of the TEF in driving improvement. However, it would also increase the burden and complexity of the assessment, both for providers and TEF assessors and would not add a clear benefit in the clarity of information for students about the level of quality they can expect. Overall, we do not consider that the benefits would outweigh the additional burden and cost. Instead, we propose to increase the impact of the TEF by strengthening and varying the incentives and interventions as set out in Section 3. We consider this approach will more strongly incentivise improvement, and result in intervention where it would be of greatest benefit to students, while reducing burden on providers that are already delivering the highest levels of quality.
- 64. We also consider that retaining a focus on the student experience and student outcomes, in the way we propose, would create a cycle of continuous improvement over time. We consider that providers support their students to achieve positive outcomes by delivering a high quality student experience. We propose to assess the student experience based on recent activity (including the provider's efforts to improve the student experience), and to assess student outcomes based on measures that are more retrospective. Assessing both aspects in this way would mean a provider's recent actions to improve the student experience would be assessed in one cycle, and if successful should lead to improved outcomes that would be apparent in the next cycle.
- 65. Equality of opportunity would be embedded in the assessment of each aspect, by considering the extent to which the quality of the student experience and outcomes are consistent for all groups of students. Our initial proposals on the criteria for higher ratings build in the notion of consistency across student groups.
- 66. Our proposed approach to each of the aspects is set out in more detail under Proposals 5 and 7. In addition, under Proposal 9: Varying the approach for providers with limited data, we set out how we could vary the approach to assessing the student experience and student outcomes aspects if the OfS indicators for a provider are insufficient.

TEF ratings

- 67. We consider TEF ratings and their publication to be a helpful mechanism to incentivise providers to deliver the highest levels of quality for their students. The student experience and student outcomes aspects would continue to be rated individually, as in the previous TEF, and we also propose a simplified way to generate an overall rating for a provider based on the two aspect ratings.

68. We are not proposing to change the number of categories for the ratings nor their names. This is because previous research indicated that students found 'Gold', 'Silver', 'Bronze' and 'Requires improvement' to be clear.⁵
69. We propose to change the descriptions of the rating categories to align them with the requirements of the B conditions and to improve their clarity and the distinctions between the categories. Alongside this we would clarify that the requirements set out in the B conditions represent the minimum level of quality required, rather than representing high quality. In summary, we propose that:
- a. Gold ratings would represent the highest level of quality, signifying that quality is consistently outstanding for the provider's mix of students and courses.
 - b. Silver ratings would represent high quality that is consistently and materially above the minimum requirements for the provider's mix of students and courses.
 - c. Bronze ratings would align with meeting our minimum quality requirements, as expressed in the relevant B conditions of registration. This would be a change from the previous TEF, where Bronze was intended to represent quality above the minimum requirements.
 - d. Requires improvement ratings would signal there are concerns about meeting the minimum requirements and improvement is needed. This would be a change from the previous TEF, where this category signalled that improvement was required 'to be awarded a TEF rating'.
70. Where the Silver and Gold rating categories refer to consistency, we propose this would relate to both:
- consistency across the criteria for that aspect
 - consistency across the provider's mix of students and courses, and different areas of provision (such as full-time and part-time, and taught and partnership provision).
71. Under Proposals 5 (The student experience aspect) and 7 (The student outcomes aspect), we provide initial thoughts on the criteria for the TEF rating categories for each aspect, and about how consistency would be considered.

Overall ratings

72. We are considering the advantages and disadvantages of retaining an 'overall' provider rating, in addition to the aspect ratings. On balance we think it would be beneficial to generate an overall rating, but in a way that avoids additional workload for the TEF assessors. In the previous TEF the panel spent significant time and effort weighing up all the evidence and factors to decide an overall rating, whenever the aspect ratings were not the same as each other. If retaining an overall rating, we propose to do so in a way that avoids this additional work for assessors.

⁵ See YouthSight, '[Assessing student perceptions of proposed TEF naming and rating options](#)', a report to the OfS.

73. Our research with prospective students indicated that the overall ratings had some value as a 'confirmatory tool', largely after students had already made choices. It is unclear from the research so far whether publishing aspect ratings alone, without an overall rating, would be more or less useful to applicants. However, the research did find there is scope to improve the value of the information by ensuring that clear, succinct information, which is more specific about what can be expected, is presented alongside a provider's ratings.
74. In terms of the advantages of an overall rating, there are areas of our proposals where this would be helpful, for example to determine the frequency of assessment (Proposal 11) or what incentives or regulatory interventions would apply to a provider (Proposal 13). In addition, it would be helpful for overall ratings to link to fee levels as currently determined by the Department for Education (DfE).
75. We propose therefore to introduce a rule-based approach for determining an overall rating for each provider, which would not require additional work or judgement by TEF assessors. We consider the most appropriate and clearest 'rule' would be that a provider's overall rating would be the same as its lowest aspect rating. This aligns with our proposals that a Silver aspect rating would require consistently high quality, and a Gold aspect rating would require consistently outstanding quality. By extension, a Silver overall rating would signify consistently high quality across both aspects and a Gold overall rating would signify consistently outstanding quality across both aspects. Where one aspect is 'Requires improvement' this would be the appropriate overall rating because there would be material concerns about the provider delivering the minimum quality requirements.
76. We propose that the overall ratings would be published alongside the aspect ratings, with a clear explanation of their meaning.

Question 4a

What are your views on the proposal to assess and rate student experience and student outcomes?

Question 4b

Do you have any comments on our proposed approach to generating 'overall' provider ratings based on the two aspect ratings?

Proposal 5: The student experience aspect

We propose to:

- align the scope and ratings criteria for the student experience aspect with the requirements of conditions B1, B2 and B4
- assess the student experience on the basis of provider submissions, an expanded set of NSS-based indicators, and additional evidence from students.

77. We consider that the approach to assessing the student experience aspect in the previous TEF broadly worked well, and there is insufficient reason to make substantive changes to that approach.

Scope and criteria

78. The main change we propose is to align the scope and the ratings criteria of the student experience aspect with the requirements of the relevant B conditions (B1, B2 and the 'effective assessment' element of B4). This means, in broad terms, the student experience aspect would consider the quality of course content and delivery, assessment, academic support, resources, and student engagement.
79. As referred to under Proposal 4: Assessment aspects and ratings, we are proposing changes to the descriptions of the TEF rating categories, so that ratings would indicate clearly whether a provider meets or exceeds the minimum quality requirements. We would produce ratings criteria for the student experience aspect setting out:
- a. What would constitute consistently outstanding quality, required for a Gold rating.
 - b. What would constitute consistently high quality (materially above the minimum requirements) required for a Silver rating.
 - c. What would constitute quality that is in line with the minimum requirements, required for a Bronze rating. This would be set out in clear, succinct descriptions of what is required by the relevant B conditions.
 - d. The factors that might lead to a Requires improvement rating. These would be based on material concerns arising from the assessment, about a provider meeting the minimum requirements. Note that this rating would not in itself mean that a provider is in breach of the relevant quality conditions, because a more detailed assessment would probably be needed to establish this (see Section 3 for further discussion of how TEF ratings relate to decisions about breaches of conditions).
80. In Annex H we provide initial thoughts on how the criteria for Gold, Silver and Bronze ratings could be presented. We would refer providers and assessors to the relevant B conditions for more detailed descriptions and definitions of the minimum requirements.
81. We recognise that the requirements of condition B1 are set out at course level, and we are seeking to align the criteria for a provider-level TEF assessment with these. Our initial thoughts about the criteria in Annex H for 'course content and delivery' (at Bronze level in particular) are described at the course level. We would welcome views and suggestions about whether these criteria should be framed differently for a provider-level assessment, or about what evidence could demonstrate the requirements of condition B1 are met, at a provider level.
82. As indicated in Annex H, we propose that the criteria for Silver and Gold student experience ratings would include the consistency of the student experience. This would involve considering, across the range of criteria, whether the student experience is of high quality (for Silver) or outstanding (for Gold) across a provider's subjects, areas of provision and student groups, including students from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups. Where there is

inconsistency and the data indicates lower quality for some groups, subjects or areas of provision, the assessors would consider:

- information in the provider's submission about how it has been addressing those differences
- whether it would be appropriate for any lower quality areas to affect the overall rating for student experience, taking into account the full range of provision.

Evidence and assessment

83. As with the previous TEF, the assessment of the student experience aspect would be based on a combination of evidence submitted by a provider, input from its students, and benchmarked indicators drawn from the NSS.
84. The timeframe covered by the student experience aspect would also remain broadly the same as the previous TEF. We are considering options for whether this should be a standard four-year period, or the period since the last assessment (which could vary, as set out under Proposal 11).
85. We consider it important that the assessment of the student experience aspect should take into account students' own views of their experience, and it remains our view that the NSS is a valuable means of gathering these insights. However, as the NSS-based indicators are not direct measures of the quality of the student experience, they would continue to be only part of the evidence considered in the assessment of this aspect, and would need to be supplemented with other evidence from the provider and its students.
86. Alongside the five NSS-based indicators we used in the previous TEF, we propose the addition of one further indicator, based on the 'Learning opportunities' theme of the NSS.⁶ These questions ask about students' exploration of ideas and concepts in depth, whether their course introduced subjects and skills in a way that built on what they had already learned, and the balance between directed and independent study. We consider this theme has direct relevance to condition B1, which refers to the coherence of courses in respect of the breadth and depth of content and the key concepts and skills covered by the course, and to the balance of delivery methods and of directed and independent study.
87. In the previous TEF, students provided further direct input into the assessment of the student experience aspect through an optional student submission. We are considering ways to strengthen student input through a more focused student submission, and exploring other ways of obtaining student views where a student submission is impractical for the student body. We would intend to gather direct input from students at all providers. Alternatives to a student submission could include, for example, running focus groups with a provider's students. We discuss this further under Proposal 10: Student evidence and involvement.
88. The provider submission would contain evidence determined by the provider – as relevant to its context – that demonstrates how it meets the student experience ratings criteria. Similarly to the previous TEF, a provider would be guided to supply evidence that demonstrates the

⁶ The five NSS-based indicators used in the previous TEF related to the following themes: 'The teaching on my course', 'Assessment and feedback', 'Academic support', 'Learning resources' and 'Student voice'.

impact and effectiveness of its approaches to delivering a high quality or outstanding academic experience for its students. We would also continue to expect the evidence to cover all students and courses within the scope of the TEF assessment. This could mean the inclusion of evidence related broadly to all the provider's students and courses, as well as to more specific interventions or improvements for particular groups of its students or courses.

89. There would continue to be a page limit for provider submissions, to limit burden for providers and TEF assessors. Feedback from the previous TEF suggested the 25-page limit worked well. We would not expect to raise this limit, and we anticipate our proposal to streamline the assessment of student outcomes in future (see Proposal 7) could enable the page limit to be reduced.
90. In making a judgement on the student experience aspect, the TEF assessors would draw on their expertise to interpret and weigh up whether the evidence in the round suggests the provider is delivering the minimum level or higher levels of quality across its students and courses. Assessors would triangulate evidence from across the NSS, the provider and student submissions (or alternative student input). We would produce guidelines for assessors on how to place weight on the different sources of evidence and how to take account of the particular context of the provider and its students.
91. As in the previous TEF, the NSS-based indicators would be benchmarked to show how positive a provider's students are about aspects of their experience, compared with the views of similar students on similar courses across the sector. As with the previous TEF we expect that indicators that are materially above benchmark would (alongside other evidence in the submissions) suggest outstanding quality. Indicators that are broadly in line with benchmark would suggest high quality. While we do not set minimum thresholds for the NSS-based indicators as we do for student outcomes, we expect that indicators materially or consistently below the benchmark, with insufficient explanation by the provider and a lack of other evidence of how minimum requirements are being met, would suggest concerns about quality.
92. We recognise that for some providers the NSS indicators are unavailable, or there is insufficient statistical certainty to place weight on them in the assessment. We have therefore considered alternative ways of gathering student views to inform the assessment of the student experience aspect in these cases. This is discussed further under Proposal 9: Varying the approach for providers with limited data.

Question 5a

What are your views on the proposed scope of the student experience aspect, and how it aligns with the relevant B conditions of registration?

Question 5b

What are your views on our initial thoughts on the criteria for the student experience rating (at Annex H)? You could include comments on:

- whether the 'course content and delivery' criteria suggested in Annex H should be framed differently for a provider-level assessment

- whether there is clear enough differentiation between each level, and how this could be improved.

Question 5c

What are your views on the evidence that would inform judgements about this aspect? You could include comments on issues such as:

- what evidence could demonstrate the requirements of condition B1 are met at a provider level
- whether the submission page limit should be reduced
- the proposed inclusion of indicators based on the 'Learning opportunities' theme of the NSS.

Proposal 6: A revised and integrated condition B3

We propose to revise and simplify our minimum requirements for student outcomes (condition B3), and integrate into the future TEF an assessment of whether a provider meets them.

93. As indicated under Proposal 1: A more integrated overall system, we propose to simplify condition B3 and integrate an assessment of the minimum required student outcomes into future TEF assessments. This would produce a clear single view about the outcomes delivered by a provider. It would reduce duplication of effort both for providers and the OfS in monitoring separate data and carrying out separate assessments where there are concerns about meeting the minimum student outcome thresholds. It would also allow us to assess whether each registered provider is meeting minimum requirements for student outcomes on an ongoing basis. Our view is that this would help ensure, in an efficient way, that all providers are at least delivering the minimum level of positive outcomes for their students.
94. We are considering simplifying condition B3 and integrating an assessment against minimum student outcomes into the TEF, as follows:
 - a. We would revise condition B3 so that we continue to require providers to meet minimum thresholds for continuation and completion, but remove the requirement to meet minimum thresholds for progression. Our reasons for this are set out at paragraph 96. This would mean removing the progression indicator and its associated thresholds from the requirements of condition B3.
 - b. We would aim to integrate the B3 student outcomes indicators with the benchmarked TEF indicators. Alongside the benchmarked indicators we would clearly show any areas where a provider's continuation or completion rates are below the relevant minimum threshold. Within each mode and level of study that the thresholds are set at, this could

relate to particular subjects, areas of provision or student groups, including students from underrepresented or disadvantaged backgrounds.⁷

- c. In their TEF submissions, providers would be invited to provide relevant contextual information that might justify any continuation or completion rates below threshold, especially where these are also below the provider's benchmark.
- d. We propose to revise condition B3 so that only factors that explain historical performance would be considered as justifying below threshold outcomes (for the reasons set out at paragraphs 99 to 100). Improvement actions a provider has taken, or plans to take, but have not yet resulted in improved outcomes would no longer justify outcomes below the threshold. These actions would instead be considered separately by the OfS, when considering whether any intervention is needed to ensure improvement (as described at paragraphs 100 and 210).
- e. When assessing student outcomes in the TEF, we would initially identify any below-threshold indicators that are sufficiently material and are not explained by reference to benchmark performance, to warrant further consideration. We would then consider whether the relevant contextual information submitted by the provider justifies the below threshold performance.
- f. The provider would be awarded a rating of Requires improvement for student outcomes if there are continuation or completion indicators that are below minimum thresholds and are not justified, and these are considered to be material to the overall outcomes it delivers. These below-threshold outcomes may relate to particular subjects, student groups or areas of provision.
- g. The OfS would also make any decisions about a breach or increased risk of future breach of condition B3, and about any appropriate regulatory intervention. This would include consideration of actions the provider has taken, or plans to take, to improve student outcomes. These OfS decisions are discussed under Proposal 13.

95. The proposed amendments to condition B3 would also apply to our assessments of providers that apply to become registered with the OfS. In the second stage consultation we would consult on how the amended condition would apply as an initial condition of registration where the applying provider has student outcomes data, as well as an ongoing condition for registered providers.

Rationale for the revisions to condition B3

96. The proposal to remove the progression indicator from condition B3 follows from feedback we have received from the sector about technical limitations with this measure and the Graduate Outcomes survey data. For example, some courses are intended to lead to certain jobs that are not classified as professional or managerial, and there is limited information about graduates' 'interim' activities prior to the survey census date. We have reflected on the use of this measure for compliance as opposed to improvement purposes. Instead of regulating

⁷ We plan to publish an integrated version of the existing student outcomes and TEF data dashboards for comment early next year, independently of this proposed change and in response to feedback from dashboard users.

against a minimum numerical threshold for progression, we propose to use a broader set of benchmarked employment-related indicators to inform the TEF assessment (see Proposal 7), which between them would be intended to capture a wider set of positive post-study outcomes.

97. We have heard from students about the importance of their higher education improving their employment outcomes, so we are proposing improvements to the way this is considered in the TEF assessment (see Proposal 7) but without regulating employment outcomes against minimum thresholds. This approach also aligns with feedback that the continuation and completion measures are those most directly within the control of the provider; and with continuation being the least lagged indicator, suggesting that these are the most appropriate measures for which to set minimum thresholds that all providers are required to meet.
98. Current guidance for assessments of compliance with ongoing condition B3 sets out the contextual factors that could potentially justify outcomes that are below the relevant threshold.⁸ These factors fall into two broad groups:
- factors that may explain the reasons for a provider's historical performance.
 - actions a provider has taken, or will take, to improve its performance, and the extent to which these actions are credible.
99. We propose that in future, when considering whether below-threshold student outcomes are justified by context, we would consider only factors that may explain the reasons for a provider's historical performance. We propose in future to consider the following types of contextual justification:
- a. The provider's mix of students and courses. These are taken into account in the provider's benchmarks. If a provider is below the minimum threshold but meets its benchmark, this would normally be considered as sufficient justification.
 - b. Other historical factors that explain the indicators being below threshold, for example where there were historical inaccuracies in a provider's data, or specific reasons why the construction of the indicator did not provide an accurate measure of continuation or completion for that provider.
100. We propose to no longer consider actions taken or planned by a provider to improve student outcomes as a justification of why these outcomes were historically below the threshold. This is because any positive effect of the actions would in time become apparent in the data, and at that point would affect the assessment. Our proposed approach, which focuses on the measurable impact of any actions, is more robust and less burdensome than trying to evaluate the likely effect of actions on future outcomes. Instead, we propose to consider actions that have not yet affected the measured outcomes as relevant to our assessment of whether there is an increased risk of a future breach, and in understanding whether intervention is necessary to ensure the provider makes sufficient improvements. Our experience of B3 assessments to date is that planned actions would be more appropriate to consider in deciding whether intervention is needed, than in judging whether outcomes below the threshold were justified.

⁸ See Annex C of OfS, Regulatory advice 20: Regulating student outcomes.

The following is an illustrative example of the approach, if the proposed revisions to condition B3 are applied.

A provider's data shows outcomes below threshold (and below benchmark) in the years covered by the assessment. The provider has recently discontinued courses that had caused these outcomes to be below threshold. Under a revised condition B3, the fact that the provider recently closed these courses would not be considered as a justification for the outcomes being below threshold during the period under assessment, and the provider's student outcomes would be rated as 'Requires improvement' for that period. The OfS would be likely to find a historical breach of condition B3, and would then consider whether any intervention would be appropriate to ensure improvements are made. As part of this, the OfS would consider the provider's actions in closing the courses. If data analysis shows the effect of closing the courses would bring the outcomes above threshold, the OfS would be likely to decide there was not an increased risk of a future breach, and would not be likely to take any further action. The effect of the closed courses would feed through into the provider's outcomes data in future years, resulting in a more positive assessment in future TEF assessments.

101. We are proposing that the first cycle of TEF assessments would cover undergraduate provision, and therefore integrated assessments against the requirements of condition B3 would focus on undergraduate provision for the first cycle. A revised condition B3 would still apply to all levels of higher education, but we do not envisage carrying out routine assessments against condition B3 for postgraduate courses until the second cycle of TEF assessments. During the first cycle, we would take a risk-based approach to assessing postgraduate student outcomes. We may, if the data indicates significant concerns about outcomes for a provider's postgraduate students, select that provider for a targeted assessment as described in Section 3.
102. In 2022, when we set the minimum numerical thresholds for condition B3, we said we would normally review the thresholds every four years. We now propose to remove the thresholds for progression, and we expect to review the thresholds for continuation and completion during 2026. We expect this review to be light touch, rather than an in-depth review of each threshold. We would not expect to revise a threshold unless there has been a material change in sector-wide data since 2022. We would consult on proposals arising from the review, including any potential changes to thresholds, as part of the next consultation in 2026.
103. Subject to the outcomes of this consultation in this area, we will set out the detail of proposed changes to Condition B3 and Regulatory advice 20: Regulating student outcomes, in our consultation on detailed proposals for the future TEF.⁹

⁹ Available at OfS, [Regulatory advice 20: Regulating student outcomes](#).

Question 6

Do you have any comments on our proposed approach to revising condition B3 and integrating the assessment of minimum required student outcomes into the future TEF? You could include comments on areas such as:

- removing the progression indicator from condition B3
- how contextual factors would be considered at different stages in the process.

Proposal 7: The student outcomes aspect

We propose to rate student outcomes based on benchmarked indicators of continuation, completion and a broader set of post-study indicators, and taking contextual factors into account.

Scope and criteria

104. We think there are advantages to streamlining the assessment of student outcomes, to focus on a set of outcome measures based on available data. This would make the assessments more comparable and less burdensome and complex. We propose to use indicators for continuation and completion and a broader set of measures of post-study and employment outcomes. These would all be benchmarked to take into account the context of a provider's students, courses and other factors. Some additional context could also be taken into account through the provider submission. We propose to avoid the additional complexity and burden that would be involved if providers were invited to submit detailed information about their approaches to delivering positive outcomes and their own measures, including measures of educational gain (see paragraphs 121 to 128).
105. As explained under Proposal 4: Assessment aspects and ratings, we propose changes to the descriptions of the TEF rating categories so that ratings would show clearly whether and how far a provider exceeds the minimum requirements. Table 1 includes our initial thoughts on potential ratings criteria for the student outcomes aspect. These are based on two 'anchor points':
- a. **The minimum absolute thresholds for student outcomes.** Continuation or completion outcomes below the minimum thresholds required by a revised condition B3 would result in a Requires improvement rating (if not justified by context). Outcomes above these minimum thresholds would be needed for a rating of Bronze or above.
 - b. **A provider's benchmarks for the student outcome measures.** These are sector averages, adjusted for the provider's types of courses, student characteristics and other factors. We consider that the sector as a whole delivers positive outcomes that are materially above the minimum thresholds, so if a provider performs in line with its benchmarks this would signify high quality (as long as these outcomes are also above the minimum thresholds). Performance materially above benchmarks would signify outstanding outcomes. Performance below benchmarks (but meeting the thresholds)

would signify sufficient outcomes. When interpreting performance against benchmarks, context would be taken into account (so, for example, an indicator below benchmark could be considered high quality if justified by context).

Table 1: Student outcomes ratings criteria

Rating	Description and criteria
Gold	<p>Student outcomes are consistently of outstanding quality</p> <p>Outcomes are consistently outstanding and materially exceed what would be expected for the provider's mix of students and courses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> indicators are consistently materially above benchmark (or meet very high absolute thresholds) there are no substantial groups of students or areas of provision with outcomes below this level (without adequate justification).
Silver	<p>Student outcomes are consistently of high quality</p> <p>Outcomes materially exceed minimum requirements and are what would be expected for the provider's mix of students and courses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> indicators are at least broadly in line with benchmarks (and above the minimum thresholds) there are no substantial groups of students, subjects or areas of provision with outcomes materially below benchmark (without adequate justification).
Bronze	<p>Student outcomes are of sufficient quality</p> <p>Outcomes meet minimum requirements, but are below what would be expected for the provider's mix of students and courses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the provider meets thresholds for continuation and completion indicators (or justifies being below threshold) there are substantial groups of students, subjects or areas of provision with outcomes materially below benchmark (without adequate justification).
Requires improvement	<p>Student outcomes require improvement</p> <p>Outcomes are below minimum requirements:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> continuation or completion rates are below the minimum thresholds and are not justified, for any substantial areas of provision, subjects or student groups.

106. In suggesting these criteria, we are interested in how we can embed consideration of equality of opportunity. In common with the student experience aspect, we are proposing that a provider must demonstrate that it is delivering consistently high quality (on benchmark) outcomes for a Silver rating, and consistently outstanding (above benchmark) outcomes for a Gold rating, for students from all backgrounds.

107. Assessors would consider consistency across subjects, different areas of provision (for example, full-time and part-time courses, and taught and partnership provision) and student

groups, including students from underrepresented and disadvantaged groups. Where there is inconsistency and the data indicates lower outcomes for some subjects, areas or student groups, the assessors would consider:

- information in the provider submission to explain those outcomes (as per paragraph 110)
- whether it would be appropriate for any areas with lower outcomes to affect the overall rating for student outcomes, taking into account the full range of provision.

Assessment and evidence

108. Unless we have already concluded that student outcomes require improvement following an assessment of whether minimum thresholds had been met, the assessors would assess student outcomes by considering benchmarked indicators for continuation and completion, along with a set of benchmarked post-study or employment indicators. The assessors would also take account of relevant contextual factors submitted by the provider.
109. The assessors would consider in the round whether the range of student outcome measures indicate whether student outcomes are below, in line with, or above what would be expected for the provider's mix of students and courses. As part of this they would consider consistency across student groups, subjects and areas of provision.
110. The provider would have the option to submit relevant contextual information about factors other than those already accounted for by benchmarking that should be considered. This could, for example, include:
- a. Information about the jobs that certain courses are intended to lead to, that are not classified by the Office for National Statistics as professional or managerial (and therefore would not count positively in the progression measure). To limit the burden on providers we could include information in our guidance about specific occupations where we know this occurs, or specific qualifications (such as certain higher technical qualifications) that are intended to lead to such occupations.
 - b. Information about flexible study pathways that may result in some students progressing through their studies in ways that do not count positively in the continuation or completion measures.
111. We propose to avoid inviting providers to submit other types of evidence in relation to student outcomes, such as details of their approach to delivery, their own alternative measures of student outcomes, or their own definitions and measures of educational gains. We would set out in guidance the type of contextual information that is likely to be given weight by the assessors.

Benchmarked student outcome indicators

112. We propose that continuation and completion would be measured and benchmarked in the same way as in the 2023 TEF, and would continue to be aggregated over the four most recent years. These indicators would be used to understand how far the provider's students had succeeded in their studies, taking into account their different characteristics and the nature and level of their courses of study. We expect the collection of in-year student data in future would enable us to generate and publish more timely indicators for continuation and

completion. Other than bringing forward their publication, we do not expect in-year data collection would result in material changes to these measures.

113. We would continue to present ‘splits’ in the data for different student and course characteristics. We would look to make improvements to the way that partnership provision is presented, to make clearer any differences in outcomes through different partnership arrangements. We would consider how to simplify or reduce the range of splits in the data, for assessment purposes.
114. We propose to develop a more rounded set of post-study or employment measures that would be used to assess how far a provider’s students go on to succeed after their studies. These would also be benchmarked to take account of students’ characteristics, the subject and level of study, and regional differences that affect employment outcomes. We acknowledge that the current progression indicator does not capture all positive post-study outcomes, and we therefore propose to use several indicators, which, taken together, would provide a more rounded picture. Our initial views are that the following indicators could be generated from existing data without creating additional burden on providers, can be benchmarked, and would together provide a rounded perspective:
- a. The existing indicator of progression to professional or managerial employment or further study, using data from the Graduate Outcomes survey.
 - b. A measure of graduates’ reflections on how far they are using what they learned in higher education in their post-study activity. This would also use responses to the Graduate Outcomes survey.
 - c. A benchmarked salary measure derived from the Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) dataset. We propose to consider salaries three years after graduation.¹⁰
115. Our initial view is that a measure of how far graduates are utilising what they learned in their studies would complement the other proposed measures, by providing a view of how far their time in higher education had helped prepare graduates for their future, regardless of their type of job or salary.
116. A benchmarked salary measure based on LEO data could usefully supplement the other two measures by providing a longer-term measure of student outcomes, responding to feedback that 15 months can be too soon to get a clear indication of post-study outcomes. Our initial view is that looking at salaries three years after graduation would be appropriate. A measure after, say, five years would involve an unnecessarily long time lag. Using the LEO dataset would also complement the other measures, because it covers a larger population beyond those who respond to the Graduate Outcomes survey. We propose to benchmark the data to take account of students’ backgrounds, subject of study and geography, applying the same benchmarking methodology we have established for the other indicators. In doing so we will also consider the analysis and issues raised in the report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies on ‘Using graduate earnings data in the regulation of higher education providers’.¹¹

¹⁰ The LEO dataset joins education records to tax and benefits data. This shows whether graduates are employed and how much they are paid.

¹¹ See Gov.UK, [Using graduate earnings data in regulation of higher education providers](#).

117. We have considered whether there might also be benefit in developing indicators based on other responses to the Graduate Outcomes survey, for example:
- questions in the 'Reflection on activity to date' section about graduates' perspectives on the extent to which their current activity fits with their future plans, or they consider it to be meaningful
 - questions in the subjective wellbeing section.¹²
118. Our view is that there are too many additional factors beyond a provider's control that could impact answers to these questions, so it would not be appropriate to use such measures in ratings judgements.
119. We also considered the appropriateness of a number of other potential measures, for example based on student loan repayment levels or numbers of graduates receiving benefits, but consider that these are likely to be undesirable for a variety of reasons. In some cases, they would duplicate or overlap with what we view as potentially better measures, and in others they would focus on negative student outcomes. As our regulatory approach is based on the extent to which students achieve positive outcomes, we do not consider it appropriate for measures to focus on negative outcomes.
120. Subject to the outcomes of this consultation, we would include detailed proposals for the additional post-study measures, in the second consultation and any proposed changes to the definitions of existing measures. We would potentially share indicators based on proposed specifications with individual providers at that point, to inform their responses.

Provider submissions and contextual information

121. We think there are advantages to streamlining the approach and basing the student outcomes assessment on comparable, benchmarked measures drawn from existing national data sources. These would show measurable outcomes achieved over the period since the last assessment. We propose that additional contextual factors (that aren't already accounted for by benchmarking) should also be taken into account, where they relate directly to those measures.
122. We think this approach would provide an efficient means of rating student outcomes based on comparable, factual information about the extent to which students had succeeded in and beyond their studies. It avoids the significant additional burden and complexity of inviting detailed evidence from each provider to supplement the indicators. The approach that we propose to take where sufficient indicator data is unavailable for a provider is set out under Proposal 9: Varying the approach for providers with limited data.
123. We acknowledge that the set of proposed outcome measures does not necessarily provide a full view of the outcomes achieved by students. However, we consider that it does provide important measures that matter to students, and that taken together these are sufficient to judge how far a provider has delivered positive outcomes for its students.

¹² These questions explore concepts such as the extent to which graduates are satisfied with their lives and feel that what they are doing is worthwhile, and the extent to which they feel happy or anxious.

124. We considered whether to continue with the approach to educational gains set out in the TEF 2023 guidance, which would involve providers submitting evidence about their own definitions and measures of outcomes and educational gains. While we have heard positive feedback from some providers about assessing educational gains in the TEF, our view is that pursuing this approach for all providers in the future TEF would be overly burdensome. It would also provide less robust and comparable evidence in the assessment, if each provider defines its own measures.
125. Instead, we propose to base the assessment on existing data, including a more rounded set of post-study indicators. All the student outcome indicators would be benchmarked to take account of student characteristics (including entry qualifications and socioeconomic backgrounds) and other factors. This approach would make comparable data available to both the TEF assessors and providers that takes account of each provider's context, without creating burden.
126. In making this proposal we recognise that some providers have invested effort in developing their own measures of educational gain. Our view is that a provider would have scope to set out how it develops its educational provision in ways that support the wider educational gains it intends for its students, as part of the student experience aspect. To avoid creating unnecessary burden, we do not propose this would be compulsory as part of the student experience evidence.
127. These proposals respond to feedback received from providers and students as part of our evaluation of TEF 2023 and our review of panel statements to understand where additional evidence supplied by providers had been given weight by the panel. Our view is that assessing the student outcomes aspect based on comparable data will reduce the burden involved in producing submissions for providers and students, and reduce complexity for the TEF assessors. It will make it easier for users of the ratings, such as prospective students, to interpret them by improving comparability and increasing clarity about what the aspect covers.
128. We are not proposing to seek evidence directly from students to inform the assessment of this aspect. Our reasons for this are twofold: as well as supporting the broader approach of the student outcomes aspect being based on comparable data, our survey of student representatives who had prepared student submissions for TEF 2023 showed that many found it difficult to comment on the features covered by the student outcomes aspect. This was because their student representation activity tended not to focus as much on student outcomes as the areas covered by the student experience aspect. We therefore consider that seeking feedback and evidence from students to inform the assessment of the student experience aspect, but not the student outcomes aspect, would be appropriate.

Question 7a

What are your views on the proposed approach and initial ratings criteria for the student outcomes aspect?

Question 7b

Do you have any comments on the proposed set of employment and further study indicators, and are there other measures that we should consider using?

Question 7c

What are your views on the proposal to consider a limited set of contextual factors when reaching judgements about this aspect?

Proposal 8: Assessment and decision making

We propose:

- that TEF assessments would be conducted by an evolving pool of academic and student assessors, supported and advised by OfS staff.
- to adopt a risk-based approach for the assessors to give further consideration, when outcomes would have a potentially negative impact on a provider.

Expert review

129. The TEF assessments would continue to be carried out by assessors with expertise in the development and delivery of higher education in diverse provider contexts, and experience of being and representing students. The assessors would be appointed to make ratings decisions on behalf of the OfS. We are also considering whether OfS staff should be appointed as assessors and take part in making rating decisions.
130. We consider the use of expert review a strength of the TEF that helps ensure the assessments are robust and credible. This is integral to the TEF achieving its policy intention, because providers are more likely to respect and act on the outcomes and recommendations of their assessment if they have confidence in the process.
131. As discussed further under Proposal 11: Assessment cycle, we are proposing that in future the assessments would be carried out on a rolling cycle, with a cohort of up to 150 providers assessed each year. With the move to rolling cyclical assessments and the large number of providers to be assessed over an extended period, we would need to appoint an evolving pool of TEF assessors, rather than a single 'TEF panel'. We expect we would seek to appoint assessors for a period of at least two to three years, which would both ensure overlap and consistency from one cohort of assessments to the next, and frequently bring in new assessors with expertise relevant to upcoming cohorts. As with the previous TEF, assessors would be appointed through an open recruitment process.
132. We would select an appropriate group of assessors from the pool for each cohort, seeking to ensure that across the group there is an appropriate mix of skills, and that the group contains members from diverse backgrounds and with experience relevant to the types of providers being assessed in the cohort.
133. We recognise there are challenges associated with recruiting a sufficient number of academic and student assessors with experience of smaller, specialist and college-based providers, and we are considering what more we could do to increase their numbers in future. We could, for example:

- offer assessors from these providers a reduced overall workload to enable their participation
- consider how to recruit assessors from these providers who have recently retired or are stepping back from full-time work
- potentially involve these assessors in advising or training other assessors.

134. We propose OfS staff would manage the assessment process, and support and advise the TEF assessors. Their role would be designed to reduce burden on academic and student assessors by carrying out activities that do not rely on expertise in the delivery or student experience of higher education. Their role could include recording the assessment outcomes and drafting the assessment reports.

135. We are also considering whether OfS staff should contribute to making decisions about ratings, as assessors. We envisage OfS staff would (whether as assessors or not), assess whether providers meet the minimum student outcomes requirements. This would help align decisions about the student outcomes ratings with the OfS's decisions about breaches of condition B3.

Decision making

136. The TEF assessors (who might include OfS staff) would be responsible for determining the provider's TEF ratings. We propose a risk-based approach for the assessors to consider representations from providers, before finalising the ratings.

137. We propose that all providers would be able to make representations about the factual accuracy of their assessment report prior to publication. To limit burden and costs (to both providers and the OfS), we propose that a provider would be able to make representations about the ratings only if these are provisionally Bronze or Requires improvement. This is because these ratings would have the most significant impact on providers. Silver ratings would be considered a positive outcome, and we consider the costs would outweigh the benefits of considering representations for these ratings.

138. Only OfS staff would be responsible for any decisions relating to breaches of conditions and any regulatory interventions. Depending on the ratings, OfS staff would consider:

- potential further engagement or investigation, if the student experience has been rated Requires improvement
- whether there has been a breach of condition B3, if student outcomes have been rated as Requires improvement
- whether there is an increased risk of a future breach of a condition (this could relate to a provider rated as Bronze or Requires improvement)
- whether a regulatory intervention would be appropriate to ensure improvements are made.

139. If the provider has been rated as Requires improvement, we would also consider what an appropriate timeframe would be before it should be reassessed. We are considering whether

there should be an option for a provider rated Requires improvement to have a targeted reassessment in some circumstances, rather than a full reassessment, focusing on the specific issues of concern and whether they have been adequately addressed (in which case a rating of Bronze could be awarded).

140. Decisions by OfS staff relating to breaches and interventions would be made in accordance with the OfS scheme of delegation. The range of options that we are likely to consider is discussed under Proposal 13: Incentives and interventions.

Question 8a

What are your views on who should carry out the assessments? You could include suggestions for how we can enable more assessors (both academic and student) from small, specialist or college-based providers to take part.

Question 8b

What are your views on only permitting representations on provisional rating decisions of Bronze or Requires improvement?

Proposal 9: Varying the approach for providers with limited data

We propose to:

- use an alternative means of gathering students' views, where we do not have sufficient statistical confidence in the NSS-based indicators for a provider.
- not rate the student outcomes aspect where we do not have sufficient statistical confidence in the student outcomes indicators for a provider.

141. Our proposals include the use of NSS indicators to inform the assessment of student experience, and that we will base the assessment of student outcomes primarily on a set of student outcome indicators. We are aware that for some providers the indicators are unavailable, or there is insufficient statistical certainty to use them in this way. There can be gaps due to suppression because of low numbers, limitations in survey coverage or low survey response rates, and the data that is available may have very wide confidence intervals.
142. We are therefore considering, and would welcome feedback on, what approach should be taken in these cases to help ensure the future TEF works effectively across the diversity of provider types and sizes. We discuss each of the two aspects in more detail below, but in summary we propose to vary the approach as follows:
- a. **For the student experience aspect:** Where we do not have sufficient statistical confidence in the student experience indicators for a provider, we propose to gather students' views through alternative means. This might involve online meetings or commissioned focus groups with students. We would use the evidence we gather to supplement available indicator data, or in place of indicator data where there is none.

- b. **For the student outcomes aspect:** Where we do not have sufficient statistical confidence in the student outcomes data for a provider, we propose that we would not rate the student outcomes aspect. This would not impact on the proposed overall rating, and it would be presented neutrally.

143. The effect of these proposals would be that:

- a. All providers would receive a rating for student experience. For the large majority, this would be based on the provider submission, the NSS indicators, and other direct input from students. For a minority of providers, the insufficient NSS indicators would be supplemented with an alternative approach to gathering student views.
- b. A large majority of providers would be rated for student outcomes. A minority would not be so rated. Based on initial assumptions and analysis, we estimate this to be between 10 and 15 per cent of providers (see Annex G for details). We consider this approach to be appropriate for the reasons set out at paragraph 150. Under Proposal 4, we propose an overall rating based on the lowest aspect rating. Where a provider is not rated for student outcomes, its overall rating would be the same as its student experience rating.

144. In the previous TEF, if a provider's indicators were uncertain or unavailable, the onus was on the provider to supply alternative evidence of its own. Feedback from the TEF 2023 evaluation and recent engagement about the development of the integrated system suggested that providers in this position (often smaller providers) found it challenging to devote sufficient resource to producing detailed submissions and presenting alternative forms of evidence. There was additional complexity for the TEF panel in weighing up these alternative forms of evidence. We consider therefore that varying the approach in the specific circumstances described above would reduce burden both for providers with uncertain or unavailable data, and for the TEF assessors.

Student experience

145. Our proposal to vary the approach for the student experience aspect is aimed at obtaining alternative or supplementary student views, in cases where we do not have sufficient NSS indicator data. In these cases, the provider would still supply evidence in a written submission which addresses assessment criteria for the aspect. We are considering what kinds of alternative mechanism would be most useful, for example online meetings or commissioned focus groups with students.

146. For the student input to be broadly comparable with insights from the NSS, we propose that the range of topics covered should be similar to the themes covered by the NSS, and that views should be gathered largely from final year undergraduates. This could include students on courses that are too short to be included in the NSS. We would need to consider how to gain broadly representative input, although the need for alternative student input typically arises in smaller providers. One approach could be to have online meetings or focus groups with a mixture of final year course representatives and other final year students selected randomly from across different courses.

147. To determine which providers would need alternative student input, we would produce a clear definition of what we would consider to be sufficient NSS data to inform the assessment, based on the data available for each provider. We propose to take this approach, rather than

setting a standard student number or NSS response threshold, so that we can maximise use of the available NSS data. Our initial view is that a definition could be based on the majority of the overall NSS indicators for a provider covering a significant proportion of the provider's students, and having at least strong statistical evidence about the provider's performance against its benchmarks. Further details of this are set out at Annex G. If a provider's NSS data is unavailable or does not meet this definition, we would gather student views through an alternative means.

148. We propose that, once the definition is established, it should be applied consistently to all providers rather than taking into account each individual provider's preferences. This means there would not be scope for other providers with sufficient NSS indicators to request the alternative or supplementary student input. (Note that the alternative to a written student submission would still be available to all providers, as set out under Proposal 10: Student evidence and involvement).
149. We are considering what actions we could take to improve levels of statistical confidence and coverage of NSS data indicators, for more providers. We do not expect that lowering the response rate publication threshold would have a great impact, but we intend to look at the potential effect of this, as well as considering ways of increasing response rates in particular contexts, with the aim of improving confidence in the data. We would also explore extending the coverage of the survey in future, especially once in-year data becomes available and could enable the inclusion of students on shorter courses. We are also considering whether there are ways of making use of the NSS qualitative comments to inform the assessments.

Student outcomes

150. As explained under Proposal 7: The student outcomes aspect, we propose that the student outcomes aspect in future would be assessed based only on OfS data and relevant contextual information. We propose that, where OfS data is statistically uncertain or unavailable, the provider would not be assessed and rated for student outcomes. This is because we consider that trying to assess student outcomes based on the provider's own alternative evidence would create a substantial additional burden for providers and for assessors, and it would not enable the assessors to make judgements about student outcomes on a comparable basis for these providers. Under Proposal 7, we set out in more detail our reasons for not basing the student outcomes rating on alternative evidence from the provider.
151. We would produce a clear definition of what we would consider to be sufficient data to be assessed and rated for student outcomes, based on the data available for each provider. We propose to take this approach, rather than setting a standard student number threshold, so that we can maximise use of the available data. Our initial view is that a definition could be based on having at least strong statistical confidence (90 per cent or greater) in a provider's performance against its benchmarks for the overall continuation indicator, plus at least one of the other student outcomes indicators (completion, progression or one of the other proposed post-study indicators). We propose this approach because we consider continuation to be an especially important indicator of whether students are succeeding. Students continuing their courses of study is a prerequisite for other outcomes later on in the student lifecycle, and this measure involves a shorter time lag than other outcome indicators. We propose there should be at least one other indicator with strong statistical confidence, so that the rating would not

be based on a single measure of performance. Further details of this proposal are set out at Annex G.

152. If a provider has not been rated for the student outcomes aspect, we would seek to present this neutrally in the publication of outcomes, as discussed further in Section 4: Published outputs of the overall system.

Worked examples of Proposal 9

Provider A does not have sufficient NSS indicator data. It does have sufficient student outcomes data. We would deploy the alternative means of gathering student views to supplement any available NSS data. The provider would be assessed and rated for both the student experience and student outcomes. Its overall rating would be the lower of the two.

Provider B has sufficient NSS indicator data. It does not have sufficient student outcomes data. The provider would be assessed and rated for the student experience. It would not be assessed or rated for student outcomes. Its overall rating would be the same as its student experience rating.

Question 9a

What are your views on our proposal for an alternative means of gathering students' views to inform the student experience aspect where we do not have sufficient NSS-based indicators? You could include comments on:

- the proposed approach to determining whether the NSS data is sufficient (this is expanded on in Annex G)
- the actions we are considering to improve the availability of NSS data for more providers
- how student views could be gathered through an alternative means.

Question 9b

What are your views on our proposal not to rate the student outcomes aspect where we do not have sufficient indicator data? You could include comments on the proposed approach to determining whether the data is sufficient (this is expanded on in Annex G).

Proposal 10: Student evidence and involvement

We propose to include direct student input in the assessment of the student experience aspect for all providers, and to expand the range of student assessors.

153. In the most recent TEF, the opportunity for student involvement was greater than before, in particular through the introduction of the independent student submission. This gave students

a valuable opportunity to have their voices heard, and they fed back to us that being involved had helped them influence positive changes at their providers, and strengthened their voices in discussions about teaching and learning.

154. Students also took part in the most recent TEF as full and equal members of the TEF panel, bringing direct experience of being and of representing students to bear in the judgements.

155. For the future TEF, we propose to build on and strengthen student involvement further, and we set out below some options for how we might achieve this.

Student evidence

156. Students' perspectives would be central to the evidence used to inform judgements. Evidence would be gathered directly from a provider's students through:

- a. Students' responses to the NSS. This would be a key part of the evidence that informs the assessment of the student experience aspect; and where this data is not sufficient we propose alternative means of gathering students' views on similar themes.
- b. Graduates' responses to the Graduate Outcomes survey, reflecting on how far they are utilising the skills they learned in higher education (see Proposal 7). This would be one of the measures informing the assessment of student outcomes.
- c. Independent student submissions made on behalf of a provider's student body or, where this is impractical, an alternative option discussed below.

157. In the previous TEF, the student submission was optional and provided evidence related to both the student experience and outcomes aspects. For the future TEF, we propose that:

- we would seek direct and independent student input for all providers, whether through a student submission or alternative option (such as a commissioned focus group)
- the focus would be on the student experience, and would not cover the student outcomes aspect.

158. It remains our view that there is value in the student experience aspect being informed by an independent student submission (or alternative student input) in addition to the NSS indicators. For example, this could:

- a. Supplement the themes covered by the NSS indicators, by highlighting or emphasising specific issues that are important to the provider's students.
- b. Supplement the quantitative NSS indicators with additional explanation or context, from the student perspective. (For example, in setting out how students are involved and engaged by the provider in the development of provision, and how students perceive the provider has responded.)
- c. Include views from students not reflected in the NSS indicators (which covers final year students on courses over a year in length). This could include views from students in earlier years of study, those on shorter courses, and those still studying at the provider.

159. We are proposing that the student submission would no longer cover student outcomes, in part because of our proposal that the student outcomes aspect in future would be based on a set of benchmarked indicators and revised contextual information (see Proposal 7: The student outcomes aspect). We also consider that revising the scope of the student submission in this way could have the benefits of reducing the burden of evidence collection on students, and ensuring the student evidence relates to those areas of the assessment where it might have the most impact. We learned from our evaluation of the previous TEF that student representatives had found it more challenging to provide evidence related to the outcomes of previous students no longer studying at the provider. By focusing on the student experience, we would still invite students' views on how well they consider providers are developing their skills and preparing them for their futures.
160. We would aim to gather independent student input for all providers. While it would remain optional for a provider's students to make a student submission, we would encourage them to do so. We know from operating the previous TEF that in some cases it could be challenging or impractical for a provider's students to produce a submission, particularly where student representation structures are less formal or less well developed. So we propose there should be some alternative means of gathering students' views where this is the case.
161. One option could be for the OfS to commission focus groups with the provider's students. We would welcome views on this or other possible options. We also welcome views on whether there are benefits to retaining the option students had in the previous TEF of producing submissions in a non-written format.
162. As discussed under Proposal 9: Varying the approach for providers with limited data, we are proposing that if the NSS indicators for a provider are insufficient, the OfS would gather students' views through online meetings or commissioning focus groups with students. We have suggested under that proposal to focus on gathering views on areas covered by the relevant NSS themes, from final year students. Where the NSS data is insufficient and students do not make an independent submission, we could broaden the scope of this to cover other areas that students may wish to comment on and include students from other years of study.

Student assessors

163. The views of students are also embedded in the TEF through their role as student assessors (see Proposal 8: Assessment and decision making). As part of the TEF assessment teams, students (those with recent experience of being and representing students) would jointly assess and decide the ratings for providers alongside academic assessors. As with academic assessors, we would anticipate appointing student assessors for two to three years.
164. In previous TEF exercises we recruited fewer student assessors from small, specialist and college-based providers. We would welcome views about how we can increase their numbers in future, including, for example by offering student assessors from these providers a reduced overall workload to enable their participation.

Involvement in other OfS quality assessments

165. As well as informing the TEF assessments, student views form an important part of other OfS quality assessments. For example, quality assessments for providers applying to register with the OfS, or applying for degree awarding powers (DAPs), or where we investigate concerns

about compliance with the B conditions, will normally include a visit to the provider where the views of students are sought through meetings with the assessment team.

166. In addition, students currently serve as members of the OfS's Quality Assessment Committee, which plays a key role in advising the OfS on quality assessment matters, including advice on DAPs assessments.¹³

Question 10a

What are your views on our proposed approach to including direct student input in the assessment of the student experience aspect for all providers? You could include comments on alternative ways of gathering student input where student submissions are impractical.

Question 10b

How could we help enable more student assessors from small, specialist and college-based providers to take part?

Proposal 11: Assessment cycle

We propose to:

- assess each provider for the first time within three years, according to a set of priorities
- link the timing of further assessments to the ratings awarded and our ongoing risk monitoring.

167. The TEF has previously been a periodic exercise, with a single assessment point for all participating providers. It would be impractical to operate this way in future if we extend assessments to all providers and integrate B3 assessments. A single periodic exercise would also limit our ability to respond rapidly to emerging risks, or vary the frequency of assessments according to risk. We propose instead to carry out assessments on a cyclical basis, assessing a cohort of providers each year. This would enable the system to be more dynamic and risk-based, and more practical to deliver.

168. This section proposes how we would schedule providers for their first assessment, and how the cyclical process could operate after that.

169. We acknowledge there would be some challenges in moving away from a single periodic exercise to a rolling cyclical approach, including:

- a. How to ensure reasonable consistency in judgements across cohorts of providers assessed in different years. We intend to address this through maintaining continuity in

¹³ For more information on the Quality Assessment Committee, see OfS, [Who we are: Quality Assessment Committee](#).

TEF assessors across years of the cycle (see Proposal 8: Assessment and decision making) and deploying mechanisms for calibration of judgements.

- b. How to communicate outcomes during a transitional period, in which some providers would hold an award from the previous scheme while others have ratings from the new scheme. This is discussed in Section 5.

170. This section sets out our proposals that all providers taking part in the first cycle would be assessed within three years (from 2027-28 to 2029-30), and the frequency of their assessments after that would vary according to their rating and ongoing risk monitoring.

First assessments

171. We have considered the impact of other proposed changes, such as the integration of B3 assessments and additional evidence-gathering for providers with limited NSS data, on the time and resource needed for assessments under the new scheme. We currently estimate that we could assess all providers for the first time over a cycle of three years. This would depend on the final assessment method and on recruiting a sufficient range of assessors.

172. Rather than setting out a schedule for every provider's assessment across the full three-year cycle in advance, we propose to each year to select a cohort of providers to be assessed in that year. Each year we would inform the selected providers approximately six months before their submission deadline. This is longer than the time providers had to prepare their submission for the 2023 TEF. We are proposing this approach because it will allow us to prioritise providers for assessment on an annual basis, in response to changes in indicators or identification of emerging risks. It will also allow us to take account of significant events that the provider may not have been aware of at the beginning of the three-year cycle.

173. We propose to prioritise when to schedule providers for their first assessment in a way that avoids existing TEF ratings being in place for an extended period. In particular, because we are proposing that a Bronze rating in future would have a different meaning from the previous TEF, we would prioritise assessing all providers with a 2023 TEF Bronze rating in the first year of the new scheme. We propose to also take account of other factors including:

- increased risks to quality (as set out in the quality monitoring tool described in Proposal 12, or material changes in a provider's TEF indicators)
- allowing providers to access the benefits of holding a TEF rating (for providers that do not currently have TEF ratings, or that have Requires improvement outcomes)
- the benefits of assessing a diverse mix of providers each year (in terms of indicator performance and other provider characteristics)
- whether any significant events would suggest we should not select a provider for assessment in a given year, for example a structural change or merger.

174. In practice, we could take account of these issues by scheduling the assessments broadly as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Schedule

Year	Providers to be assessed
Year 1 (2027-28)	<p>All providers with an existing Requires improvement or Bronze TEF rating.</p> <p>Some providers with an existing Silver or Gold TEF rating (prioritising those with a Bronze aspect rating, with concerns raised in a previous assessment of compliance with our B conditions, or with increased risk indicators or declining TEF indicators).</p> <p>Some providers without an existing TEF rating (prioritising those that want to take part in year 1, and those with increased risk indicators).</p>
Years 2 and 3 (2028-29 and 2029-30)	<p>All remaining providers with an existing Silver or Gold TEF rating.</p> <p>All remaining providers without an existing TEF rating.</p>

175. We will need to consider how to balance the range of factors we consider. We are interested in views on whether there are additional factors we should consider, and what circumstances might represent a significant event meaning that we should avoid scheduling a provider for assessment in a given year.

176. We will also explore the sequencing of TEF assessments and APP approvals, and consider how the sequencing enables providers to access any higher fee limit associated with TEF ratings in a timely way. We acknowledge there could be some overlap in the information a provider would include in its APP and its TEF submission. We are interested in views about how to reduce this overlap, as well as the sequencing of TEF assessments and APPs: for example, whether there are potential benefits or efficiencies for providers in carrying out both in the same year, whether this should be avoided, and whether there are advantages to sequencing them in any particular order.

177. We are aware that many providers are due to make submissions to the Research Excellence Framework in autumn 2028. Providers are also subject to other assessments, for example by Ofsted. We consider that a number of our proposals are intended to minimise the burden of preparing TEF submissions, and we consider it reasonable that providers could be expected to meet multiple demands from regulatory and funding bodies in a given year. We do not therefore propose to avoid scheduling a provider's TEF assessment in the same year as another type of assessment by another body.

Frequency of further assessments

178. Following its first assessment, we propose to base the frequency at which a provider is assessed on its rating. We propose to reassess providers with Gold ratings after five years; those with Silver ratings after four years; and those with Bronze ratings after three years. If a provider has been rated as Requires improvement, we would consider what an appropriate timeframe would be before the provider should be reassessed.

179. This approach would reduce burden for those delivering the highest levels of quality, and would allow more regular scrutiny of those with lower ratings. It would also mean that providers with lower ratings would have a scheduled opportunity to increase their ratings, and to derive the associated benefits, sooner than if we assessed all providers equally often.

180. This approach would also give providers predictability about the timing of their next assessment, although we would retain the ability to assess a provider sooner if our ongoing monitoring identified increased risks to quality. There may also be other circumstances in which it would be appropriate to change the timing of a provider's next assessment, for example if sufficient indicator data becomes available to rate student outcomes, or in the case of significant events such as a merger or structural change. We would also consider whether there might be circumstances in which we might consider extending a provider's award for longer than initially granted.
181. We would take a case-by-case approach to scheduling subsequent assessments for a provider rated as Requires improvement. This would allow us to balance adopting an appropriate level of scrutiny with ensuring that there was a realistic possibility of the provider having made improvements, while not unnecessarily delaying the provider an opportunity to gain a rating.

Question 11a

What are your views on our proposed approach to scheduling providers for their first assessments? You could include comments on:

- the factors we should consider in scheduling assessments
- any types of significant events that should lead us not to schedule an assessment in that year
- the sequencing of TEF assessments and APP approvals.

Question 11b

What are your views on our proposed approach to scheduling providers for subsequent assessments?

Section 3: A risk-based system of incentives and interventions

Proposal 12: Risk monitoring

We propose to introduce a risk monitoring tool that sets out the factors associated with increased risks to quality.

182. In between cyclical assessments through the TEF, we would continue our risk-based approach to monitoring, as set out in the Regulatory Framework and Regulatory Advice 15: Monitoring and Intervention.¹⁴ This section sets out how we will use that approach to identify emerging risks to quality in between TEF assessments in a dynamic and timely way. It also sets out how we will make the approach more transparent by publishing a quality risk monitoring tool, and invites views on some of the content of the monitoring tool.
183. Annex I sets out an initial draft of the quality risk monitoring tool. So far, we have identified factors that we consider to be associated with increased risks to quality through the findings of our quality assessment work conducted to date, and analysis of available data. We invite views and evidence about the factors associated with risks to quality that might be included in the tool. Through this call for views, we aim to build a shared understanding with the sector of the main factors associated with risks to quality.
184. Following responses to the consultation we would revise and publish the monitoring tool. We anticipate keeping it updated as the context of the sector and our understanding of risk factors evolves, for example through the completion of each TEF cycle.
185. We would make use of the factors and indicators set out in the monitoring tool to identify and consider increasing risks to quality at providers, as follows:
- a. Monitoring risks in between TEF assessments. Where we identify increasing risks across a range of indicators, we would consider this (alongside the published TEF indicators) to determine whether a provider's next TEF assessment should be brought forward, or whether further engagement, information gathering, or investigation might be appropriate for a provider.
 - b. Considering risks alongside a provider's TEF ratings. If a provider receives a Requires improvement or Bronze rating, we would consider the risk information alongside the TEF ratings to inform decisions relating to breaches, interventions or further investigation, as set out under Proposal 13.
186. This approach would provide more transparency to providers about the factors that might lead us to consider a provider to be at increased risk or to increase scrutiny of a provider, and would support providers to consider where to focus their improvement activities.

¹⁴ See OfS, [Regulatory framework for higher education in England](#) and [Regulatory advice 15: Monitoring and intervention](#).

Question 12

Do you have any comments or evidence about the factors associated with risks to quality that might be included in the draft risk monitoring tool at Annex I?

Proposal 13: Incentives and interventions

We propose to introduce a strengthened set of incentives and interventions that vary according to the level of quality and risk, to drive quality improvement across the sector.

187. We propose a strengthened set of incentives and interventions that varies the incentives, the level of scrutiny and regulatory interventions according to different levels of quality and risk to students. Our aim in doing so would be to drive improvement across the sector in a way that is appropriate to different levels of quality offered by providers, and supports our aim for all students to receive a high quality education.
188. At the heart of the system we would assess all providers on a cyclical basis through the modified TEF, with an associated set of incentives and interventions intended to:
- reward providers that deliver the highest levels of quality and incentivise them to continue to do so
 - strongly incentivise improvement by providers that only deliver the minimum level of quality (rated Bronze), including through increased scrutiny and further regulatory interventions
 - enable us to intervene to ensure improvements are made by providers that do not deliver the minimum level of quality (rated Requires improvement).
189. Under the previous TEF, the only incentive to improve above the level of Bronze, and the only reward for providers with the highest ratings, was the reputational effect of the rating. We want the future system to be more ambitious in driving improvements and securing high quality for all students. We therefore propose additional rewards for providers with the highest ratings, and stronger mechanisms to drive improvement where quality is not rated high.
190. The range of incentives we are considering is outlined in Table 3.

Table 3: Potential incentives and interventions

TEF rating	Incentives and interventions
Gold	Reputational benefit of the highest possible rating. Potential eligibility for some kinds of funding in future. Reduced scrutiny through a longer TEF award.
Silver	Reputational benefit of a high quality rating. Potential eligibility for some kinds of funding in future.

Bronze	<p>Reputational disbenefit of a low rating.</p> <p>Limiting growth in student numbers.</p> <p>Potential ineligibility to apply for or extend Degree Award Powers (depending on whether an increased risk of a future breach of an ongoing condition of registration is identified, and a specific condition applied).</p> <p>Potential ineligibility for some kinds of funding in future.</p> <p>Increased scrutiny through a shorter TEF award.</p> <p>We might also consider the provider to be at increased risk of a future breach of a quality condition, based on the TEF findings and the risk factors set out in the monitoring tool. If so we would consider further scrutiny or intervention to mitigate the risks. This is described in more detail in paragraphs 209 to 210.</p>
Requires improvement	<p>Reputational disbenefit of the lowest rating.</p> <p>Limiting growth in student numbers.</p> <p>Likely ineligibility to apply for or extend Degree Award Powers, potential retest of ability to meet DAPs criteria for existing DAPs award holders.</p> <p>Potential ineligibility for some kinds of funding in future.</p> <p>Increased scrutiny through a reassessment at the appropriate time.</p> <p>We would be likely to consider: potential further scrutiny; whether there has been a breach or an increased risk of a future breach of a quality condition; and if so what regulatory intervention would be appropriate to ensure improvements are made. This is described in more detail in paragraphs 207 to 211.</p>

Limiting growth in student numbers

191. Under the previous system, providers rated Bronze had little incentive to improve and could continue to be rated Bronze in successive assessments without being materially affected. We think in future an incentive should apply to all providers rated Bronze that is stronger than the published ratings alone, to be more effective in driving them to deliver consistently high quality.
192. We propose to limit future growth in student numbers at providers rated Bronze as well as Requires improvement. This would not be a reduction in numbers, but a limit on the provider increasing its student numbers, until it demonstrates high quality. Although a Bronze rating would mean a provider meets the minimum quality requirements, our aim is that more students should experience the high quality of education they expect. This proposal would provide a strong incentive for all providers to deliver consistently high quality. It would also reward those already delivering high quality through concentrating growth in those providers. Our view is that the overall effect of this proposal would be to enable more students in future to experience high quality education, through a combination of driving up quality to this level, and making more places available at providers that consistently offer high quality.
193. We propose to revise condition B6 to require all registered providers with students in scope of the TEF to participate, and to include the ability for the OfS to issue directions to providers rated as Requires improvement or Bronze. The directions would limit growth in future recruitment, until such time as the provider reaches the level of high quality. We envisage there would be a small tolerance for increased numbers (for example 5 per cent, which is the

tolerance applied under the previous system of number controls). We envisage that the OfS would have discretion to increase this tolerance in some cases, for example where a provider is rated Bronze overall but one of the aspects has a higher rating.

194. As part of the stage two consultation we would consult on the details of the proposed revisions to condition B6.

Eligibility and assessment for DAPs

195. We consider that linking eligibility for new awards of DAPs or extensions to existing DAPs to specific TEF ratings is appropriate, because the DAPs criteria that providers are assessed against represent requirements for quality and standards above the minimum levels set out in the B conditions of registration. If a provider receives a Requires improvement rating, it is not delivering the minimum level we expect to comply with these conditions, and therefore we consider it would not be able to deliver the high level of quality we would expect for a provider to be able to demonstrate it meets the DAPs criteria.

196. If a provider receives a Bronze rating it may be eligible for DAPs, but we would consider carefully whether any increased risk of a future breach of an ongoing condition of registration, or any linked specific conditions that may be applied, may affect its eligibility. This is in line with the approach set out in the regulatory framework.

197. We acknowledge that this approach could not be easily applied to new applicants to DAPs that may apply alongside registration applications, or before they have received a TEF rating. We also need to consider the implications for current DAPs award holders that may receive Requires improvement or Bronze ratings through future TEF assessment. If a provider with DAPs receives a Requires improvement rating it is likely we would subsequently want to retest its ability to meet the DAPs criteria, either through a targeted DAPs assessment or as part of any resulting compliance assessment. If a provider with DAPs receives a Bronze rating, any further action may depend on whether any increased risk of a future breach of an ongoing condition is identified, or a specific condition applied. Depending on the findings of the TEF assessment, while we may not seek to remove a provider's DAPs, we may want to consider restricting powers in some way, for example restricting powers to validate and subcontract other providers' provision.

198. We plan to consult on our approach to DAPs in the future, and as part of that we would be likely to propose greater alignment between the TEF and providers' assessments for DAPs, with clearer links between TEF ratings and eligibility to apply for and hold DAPs. We envisage that we would also streamline the DAPs assessment by relying on elements of the TEF assessment wherever possible, for example on quality of the student experience. Our proposals to link eligibility for DAPs to TEF ratings aim to reduce the burden on providers of going through a DAPs assessment it is likely they would be ill-equipped for and unlikely to be successful in, and would also ensure more efficient use of OfS resources. But it is likely we could go further in this alignment to reduce burden across the sector, which we will consider in any future DAPs reform.

Potential eligibility for funding

199. In terms of the potential to link TEF ratings to eligibility for some kinds of OfS funding in future, we are carrying out a review and reform of strategic priorities grant funding. As part of this review we will consider and consult as appropriate on options for linking higher TEF ratings

with eligibility for certain funding streams, for example world-leading specialist provider funding. Any proposals to this effect would also consider the implementation implications of our proposal to complete the first cycle of future TEF assessments over three years from 2027-28 to 2029-30. We expect to consult on reform to strategic priorities grant in winter 2025.

Other benefits linked to TEF ratings

200. In addition to the incentives and interventions we are considering, the DfE determines how TEF ratings may be used to determine a provider's maximum fee limit. Through Schedule 2 of the HERA, the Secretary of State can determine what a high level quality rating is, for a provider to be eligible for the higher fee limit.
201. The DfE also determines eligibility for access to student loans. It has, for example, set out that TEF ratings of Silver or Gold will allow providers to go through a simpler and quicker approval process to access modular funding under the Lifelong Learning Entitlement from January 2027.
202. The government will soon publish its plan for higher education reform as part of the forthcoming post-16 skills White Paper.

Risk-based investigations

203. As set out under Proposal 12 we would routinely monitor providers against a set of quality risk factors and indicators. Where significant concerns arise, we may investigate them outside a TEF assessment. We would also consider whether an investigation should be carried out following a TEF assessment where concerns are raised about the quality of the student experience.
204. We expect each year to carry out a number of such investigations, prioritised on the basis of risk. These would be targeted to investigate specific concerns in relation to conditions B1, B2, B4 and B5. These investigations would include visits to gain detailed evidence of what students are experiencing in the real world.
205. Where an investigation results in a finding of a breach of a B condition, we would have the full range of enforcement powers available to protect students' interests and ensure improvements are made. Our view is that in such cases we would also be likely to amend a higher TEF rating for student experience to Requires improvement, and we would consider what an appropriate timeframe would be for a TEF reassessment.
206. Where an investigation results in a finding of an increased risk of a future breach of a B condition, we would consider what intervention might be appropriate to mitigate that risk. We would also consider whether a higher TEF rating for student experience should be amended (for example, to Bronze), and what would be an appropriate timing for the next TEF assessment, to mitigate risks to students.

Regulatory interventions following on from TEF assessments

207. Where the TEF assessors rate an aspect as Requires improvement we would consider this, alongside the risk factors and indicators in the risk monitoring tool, to determine:
- a. If the student experience is rated Requires improvement, whether to carry out a further targeted investigation to determine whether there has been a breach of conditions B1, B2

or B4. We consider that such an investigation is likely to be necessary to establish whether there has been a breach of these conditions.

- b. If student outcomes are rated Requires improvement, whether there has been a breach of condition B3. Once we apply the proposed revisions to condition B3, we would be likely to determine that the provider had breached condition B3 during the period covered by the assessment.
- c. For either aspect, whether there is an increased risk of a future breach of a B condition. We consider that the TEF assessment findings, alongside consideration of the risk factors and indicators, may provide sufficient evidence of this without necessarily requiring further investigation.

208. We recognise that there would be a transition period after the proposed revisions to condition B3 come into effect, during which we would not apply the narrower set of contextual factors. This means that for a transitional period we would continue to consider actions taken or planned by the provider as a potential justification for outcomes being below threshold, when considering whether there has been a breach or an increased risk of a future breach of the condition.

209. Where either aspect has been rated as Bronze, it is possible that we might consider a provider to be at increased risk of a future breach of a quality condition. We would consider the TEF assessment findings, alongside the risk factors and indicators, to determine this. Although a Bronze rating indicates quality was in line with the minimum requirements during the period under assessment, there may nevertheless be concerns raised by the TEF assessment, or other factors or information suggesting there are increased risks to the provider continuing to meet the minimum requirements.

210. Where we determine that a provider has breached or is at increased risk of a future breach of a B condition, we would consider whether intervention is needed to protect students' interests and ensure improvements are made. Where we consider intervention is necessary we would consider the intervention factors,¹⁵ and what intervention would be appropriate to protect students' interests and ensure the relevant improvements are made. In doing so we would consider what actions a provider has already taken or plans to take to make improvements.

211. Under Proposal 11, we propose to vary the length of a TEF award depending on whether the overall rating is Bronze, Silver or Gold. We do not propose a standard length for a provider with a Requires improvement rating, as we would want to consider this alongside determining any breaches and interventions, and what length of time would be appropriate to expect the provider to have made sufficient improvements before being reassessed. We would also consider a targeted reassessment focusing on the specific areas of concern, rather than a full reassessment, where it would be reasonable to expect a provider to make rapid improvements in specific areas.

¹⁵ See Annex A of OfS, Regulatory advice 15: Monitoring and intervention.

Question 13

Do you have any comments about the proposed set of incentives and interventions associated with TEF ratings? You could include comments on:

- the principle that growth in student recruitment should take place at high quality providers
- the potential to link eligibility for new DAPs awards, or extensions to existing DAPs, to higher TEF ratings
- the approach to determining a breach or increased risk of breach, following TEF rating decisions
- whether there are any other incentives and interventions we should consider.

Section 4: Published outputs of the overall system

Proposal 14: Published outputs

We propose to continue publishing the outputs and outcomes of our quality assessments, aimed at providing clear information to students about the level of quality delivered by different providers, and incentivising and supporting providers' efforts to enhance quality.

212. We would continue to publish the outputs and outcomes of our quality assessments, to provide clear information to students about what quality they can expect at different providers, and to incentivise and support providers in their efforts to enhance quality. The intended effect of publishing TEF ratings is to create a reputational incentive for providers to deliver the highest quality experience and outcomes they can for their students.
213. The OfS's general policy on the publication of information about individual providers is set out in Regulatory advice 21.¹⁶ The proposals in this consultation would require some amendments to the regulatory advice, for example to reflect the integration of B3 and TEF assessments, and to remove references to TEF participation being voluntary for some providers.
214. As we explain in Regulatory advice 21, our general view is that it is appropriate for us to publish information about our regulatory activities, including information relating to investigations into a provider's potential non-compliance with a condition of registration, and information relating to a provider's participation in the TEF. We consider it to be strongly in the interests of the public, current and potential students, and providers, for the OfS's approach to regulating quality to be transparent, with the outcomes of assessments – and the reasons for those outcomes – published in an accessible and timely way.

TEF outcomes

215. A provider's TEF assessment outcome would comprise the following elements, all of which would be published:

- a rating for each aspect and the overall rating
- a report setting out the TEF assessors' findings and reasoning for their decisions, along with highlighted areas of good practice and areas for further improvement.

An illustrative example of a provider's ratings is set out below.

Student experience	Student outcomes	Overall rating
Silver	Gold	Silver

216. Alongside a provider's TEF outcome we would normally expect to publish the provider and student evidence, along with a link to the particular year of OfS indicators that informed the

¹⁶ See OfS, '[Regulatory advice 21: Publication of information](#)'.

assessment., along with a link to the particular year of OfS indicators that informed the assessment.

217. As well as TEF outcomes being made publicly available by the OfS, we would expect each provider to display its own outcome, for example on the home and course pages of its website. We would expect the provider to display its overall rating as well as its aspect ratings. This is for transparency and to ensure that the assessment outcomes are visible to students.

Investigation reports

218. Published reports from detailed compliance investigations would explain the assessment findings in detail, highlighting issues that other providers could learn from. We would also publish the risk monitoring tool to highlight areas for providers to pay attention to and make our approach to selecting providers for compliance assessments more transparent.
219. Our proposed approach to the monitoring tool and compliance assessments can be found in Section 3.

Annual indicators

220. We would continue to publish updated quality indicators for all providers annually, based on the NSS and student outcomes data. We intend that the indicators would be useful to providers to benchmark their performance and inform their own ongoing improvement activity, and they would be used as evidence in the OfS's quality assessments.
221. We propose some improvements to the published indicators including consolidating the TEF and student outcomes indicators (see Proposal 6), and broadening the range of post-study or employment indicators (see Proposal 7).

Improving the usefulness of published information for providers and students

222. In the 2023 TEF we provided a detailed assessment report to each provider, and published a summary version aimed at a more general audience. We received positive feedback from providers about the usefulness of the detailed reports and we would intend to continue to provide useful feedback to each provider on its TEF assessment. However, to reduce burden on assessors and OfS staff, and to improve transparency, we envisage the reports in future would be more succinct and would normally be published in full. Publication in full would also align more closely with European standards and guidelines.
223. As well as publishing information about individual provider assessments, we are considering whether it would be appropriate and useful for the OfS to work to identify broader themes, insights and areas of good practice from across a range of assessments, and to share these with the sector. We would welcome views on whether the sector would welcome the OfS taking on more of a role in sharing good practice, and how useful this would be alongside the work of other agencies and resources that already exist.
224. We would consider how best to present the TEF ratings and the student experience and outcomes indicators to student audiences. We would take into account the research we have already conducted with applicants on their use of TEF information, and develop our approach as part of our review of student information that is currently underway.

225. We consider that the data dashboards we would produce for providers and TEF assessors are unlikely to be presented in the most useful way for students, and we are therefore likely to develop simplified presentations of the data for this audience.
226. We consider our proposed changes to the descriptions of the TEF rating categories set out under Proposal 4 would serve to more clearly communicate the level of quality delivered by different providers. We would also consider whether any further detail should be published alongside the TEF ratings, to both strengthen the incentives for providers and provide more useful information to students. For example, the published outcome could draw out some of the key areas of good practice or areas for improvement identified by the TEF assessors, or could detail the specific elements of the student experience and outcomes covered by the ratings.
227. Where a provider does not have a student outcomes rating, we will consider how to present this neutrally. We expect to commission research with prospective students to inform how we would do this. We would consider the findings of the research alongside any views received through this consultation, before developing a preferred approach to be set out in our planned second stage consultation (see 'Next steps').

Question 14a

What are your views on the range of quality assessment outputs and outcomes we propose to publish?

Question 14b

Do you have any comments on how we could improve the usefulness of published information for providers and students? You could include comments on areas such as:

- whether the OfS should have a role in sharing good practice, and how we should do so
- the presentation of TEF outcomes for providers that are not rated for student outcomes.

Section 5: Implementation, ongoing development and evaluation

Proposal 15: Implementation timeline

We propose to consult further during 2026-27 and carry out the first cohort of future TEF assessments in 2027-28.

Timeline

228. Table 4 sets out an indicative timeline for carrying out further consultation and implementing the future system. We will be working to deliver the new system as quickly as possible, as we are conscious that current TEF awards were originally planned to be updated in 2027. Additionally in our sector engagement we have heard there is appetite for a cyclical and rolling system of quality assessment. The timeline below is therefore subject to change; we will seek to deliver to a quicker timeline where possible. We will publish more information on timelines in the next stage of consultation.

Table 4: Indicative timeline

When	Activity
December 2025	First stage consultation closes.
Early 2026 to summer 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis and consideration of first stage consultation responses. • Development of additional employment indicators and consolidated TEF and B3 data dashboards. • Development of detailed proposals for the TEF assessment methodology and draft guidance. • Development of detailed changes to conditions B3 and B6, and associated guidance. • Revisions to and publication of the quality monitoring tool. • Development of a PGT student survey questionnaire.
Autumn 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Second stage consultation on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – details of the data indicators to be used in the TEF and B3 assessments – the TEF assessment methodology and draft guidance – changes to conditions B3 and B6, and associated guidance – proposals for a PGT student survey.
Early 2027 to summer 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Analysis and consideration of second stage consultation responses. • Production of final: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – TEF guidance for providers, students and assessors – data indicators to be used in TEF and B3 assessments – changes to conditions B3 and B6, and associated guidance.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot of a PGT student survey.
Spring 2027	Recruitment of TEF assessors begins.
Summer 2027	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Publish TEF guidance for providers, students and assessors. • Publish data dashboards. • Selection of first cohort of providers for assessment.
Autumn 2027	Appointment and induction of TEF assessors.
Early spring 2028	Submission deadline for first cohort of providers.
Spring to autumn 2028	First cohort of providers assessed.
Autumn 2028	First outcomes under new scheme.
By autumn 2030	First assessment of all providers completed.

229. We envisage that an annual cycle of selecting providers for assessment, submissions and assessments would take place on the same timeline as that set out for the first year (academic year 2027-28). While we would expect to have a single submission deadline in each year, we anticipate that outcomes would be published in batches rather than all at the same time, as some assessments are likely to take longer than others to complete.

Question 15

Do you have any comments on the proposed implementation timeline?

Transition to the new scheme

230. We anticipate assessing the first cohort of providers under the modified TEF in academic year 2027-28, and we expect to be able to assess up to 150 providers in any single year, given the proposed changes in the assessment approach. There are currently 227 providers with 2023 TEF ratings, which they would retain until they are assessed under the new scheme.¹⁷ Table 2 sets out a proposed timeline for assessing providers for the first time under the new scheme. This would result in some providers with existing TEF ratings retaining them during a transitional period, while other providers have ratings under the new scheme.

231. We acknowledge that the ratings from the 2023 TEF and the future TEF scheme would be based on different criteria, and that existing 2023 TEF ratings will become increasingly out of date. In particular, the meaning of a Bronze rating would be different in the future approach. Our proposed timeline for assessing providers for the first time includes assessing all providers with a TEF 2023 Bronze rating in the first year of the cycle, and completing the first cycle as rapidly as would be practicable.

232. We are considering how best to communicate outcomes from both schemes during this transitional period and welcome views on two possible options, as well as suggestions of others:

¹⁷ We state in paragraph 17 of the TEF 2023 guidance that ratings will last for four years, or until the subsequent exercise concludes, whichever is later.

- a. We could 'archive' the published TEF 2023 outcomes from autumn 2028 (once we publish the first set of outcomes under the new scheme) and require providers to stop publicising any TEF 2023 ratings. With this option, a provider's TEF 2023 rating would remain valid until replaced by a new rating and would provide access to the fee uplift, but could be communicated as historical in terms of student information.
- b. We could publish TEF 2023 ratings that remain valid alongside ratings from the new scheme, with clear labelling and explanation of what the ratings mean from each scheme. Providers would be able to publicise TEF 2023 ratings if still valid.

Question 16

Do you have any comments on the two options we have set out for how we could approach publication of TEF ratings during the transitional period, or suggestions of other approaches we could take?

Assessment costs

233. The costs to the OfS of delivering the TEF (including fees for panel members) were previously met directly by the DfE. We do not expect this to continue, so we would in future need to recover our costs from providers. We envisage that this would be through charging an assessment fee rather than an increase to OfS annual registration fees. We have been mindful of this in developing our proposals and therefore have sought to streamline our approach where possible, to limit the costs. We welcome further suggestions to streamline the approach.
234. If the TEF was developed and implemented along the lines proposed in this document, we initially estimate that the average cost of a provider's assessment would be in the region of £25,000. This includes costs related to OfS staff time and external assessors. However, this estimate is based on a number of assumptions and could vary depending on the final shape and details of the scheme. We expect to provide a revised estimate when we consult further on the detailed methods and guidance.
235. Respondents to this consultation should bear in mind that suggestions that add complexity to the process or involve increasing the workload of OfS staff or TEF assessors would, if taken up, result in higher fees for providers. There could also be additional costs, and therefore higher fees for providers, involved in adhering with European standards and guidelines.

Ongoing development

236. As in the past, we will reflect on an ongoing basis on how well the quality system is working, both operationally and in terms of achieving its aims, and make improvements where we identify these and when we consider them to be deliverable.
237. There is scope for us to make operational changes between TEF assessment years without compromising the comparability of ratings. After the first year of operation we are likely to review and refine the operational procedures, but we would avoid making more fundamental changes, such as changes to scope or assessment criteria, at that point.

238. To test the robustness of the assessment outcomes and inform ongoing development of the approach, we also think it would be beneficial to carry out a small number of sample-based visits to providers. These visits would test how well the outcomes of the desk-based TEF assessments reflect students' experiences on the ground.

Development for future cycles

239. As set out under Proposal 3: Provision in scope, we are proposing to expand the TEF to include taught postgraduate students from the second assessment cycle onwards. Our intention would then be to rate taught postgraduate provision separately to undergraduate provision. Expanding to include PGT provision from the second cycle gives us sufficient time to collect PGT student feedback data and develop the benchmarked data indicators that we will need to inform the assessments.

240. We plan to develop a national survey for PGT students as follows:

- a. During 2026 we would develop a questionnaire and carry out cognitive testing, drawing on previous pilot work, the current NSS questionnaire and the Postgraduate Taught Experience Survey.
- b. We would pilot the survey in 2027.
- c. It could be implemented in full from 2028. This would enable data to be gathered in advance of the second cycle of assessments.

241. Proposal 3 also sets out our intention to undertake preparatory work to allow us to include indicators relating to modular provision, from the second assessment cycle. As a minimum, we anticipate this will include developing a module completion measure, which we anticipate being available to use for regulatory purposes from 2030-31, and considering how transfers to and from modular study should be treated in existing measures. We anticipate we will also consider:

- whether it would be appropriate to develop additional measures specifically for modular study
- how to benchmark any measures related to modular provision
- how we might best understand and assess the experience of students undertaking modular study
- whether the assessment criteria should be adapted to accommodate modular provision.

242. In future cycles, it could be possible to extend assessments to consider additional areas of provision such as transnational education, or additional assessment themes, for example relating to wider student support and student wellbeing. We could also consider further integration of access and participation into the assessments. When considering extending assessments to other areas we would undertake scoping work to understand how they could be incorporated, their relative priority, and the extent of the development work needed to provide the TEF assessors with a sound evidential basis for their judgements before consulting with the sector on proposed additions.

Question 17

Do you have any comments on our approach to ongoing development, or our plans to prepare for the future inclusion of taught postgraduate provision?

Evaluation

243. We have carried out evaluations exploring different component parts of our current quality system, including the TEF and B3 assessments, and we are due to publish a further evaluation of our quality investigations in October.¹⁸ We recognise that looking at these components in isolation has the potential to miss how they work together to help us achieve our regulatory objectives. We are currently beginning a wider programme of evaluation, which will explore the extent to which our overall approach to regulating quality achieves its intended impacts. This programme will also look at how the impact changes as we revise our assessment approach and is expected to last from 2025 until as late as 2035. The two key questions for the evaluation are:

- a. Does the OfS's overall approach to regulating quality result in improvements for students?
- b. How could the quality system be improved to have greater impact on:
 - i. Providers at risk of being not compliant with the OfS's minimum requirements?
 - ii. Continuous improvement for high quality providers?

244. The detailed evaluation questions that sit below these will be answered through a combination of methods, including quantitative and qualitative data collection from providers and students, analysis of existing secondary data such as NSS and student outcomes data, and repetition of methods to look at changes over time. We are in the process of contracting with independent evaluators, through an open procurement process, to collect and analyse data from providers and students.

¹⁸ Available at OfS, [Evaluating the TEF](#) and [Evaluating our approach](#).

Next steps

245. Following the close of this consultation and consideration of responses, we will decide how to take forward the proposals.
246. We will then conduct a second stage consultation – expected in autumn 2026 – on more detailed methods, guidance and associated technical details (for example, relating to the data). As part of that consultation, we will also set out proposed revisions to conditions B3 and B6, and Regulatory advice 20.

Question 18

Are there aspects of the proposals you found unclear? If so, please specify which, and tell us why.

Question 19

In your view, are there ways in which the objectives of this consultation could be delivered more efficiently or effectively than proposed here?

Annex A: Abbreviations

APP	Access and participation plan
DAPs	Degree awarding powers
DfE	Department for Education
HERA	Higher Education and Research Act 2017
LEO	Longitudinal Education Outcomes
NSS	National Student Survey
OfS	Office for Students
PGT	Postgraduate taught provision
TEF	Teaching Excellence Framework

Annex B: List of consultation questions

Question 1a

What are your views on the proposed approach to making the system more integrated?

Question 1b

Do you have views on opportunities to reduce duplication of effort between the future TEF and Access and Participation Plans?

Question 2a

What are your views on the proposal to assess all registered providers?

Question 2b

Do you have any suggestions on how we could help enable smaller providers, including those that haven't taken part in the TEF before, to participate effectively?

Question 3a

Do you have any comments on what provision should be in scope for the first cycle? You could include comments on areas such as:

- the inclusion of apprenticeships
- the proposal to look separately at partnership provision.

Question 3b

Do you have any comments on the proposed approach to expanding assessments to include taught postgraduate provision in future cycles?

Question 4a

What are your views on the proposal to assess and rate student experience and student outcomes?

Question 4b

Do you have any comments on our proposed approach to generating 'overall' provider ratings based on the two aspect ratings?

Question 5a

What are your views on the proposed scope of the student experience aspect, and how it aligns with the relevant B conditions of registration?

Question 5b

What are your views on our initial thoughts on the criteria for the student experience rating (at Annex H)? You could include comments on:

- whether the 'course content and delivery' criteria suggested in Annex H should be framed differently for a provider-level assessment
- whether there is clear enough differentiation between each level, and how this could be improved.

Question 5c

What are your views on the evidence that would inform judgements about this aspect? You could include comments on issues such as:

- what evidence could demonstrate the requirements of condition B1 are met at a provider level
- whether the submission page limit should be reduced
- the proposed inclusion of indicators based on the 'Learning opportunities' theme of the NSS.

Question 6

Do you have any comments on our proposed approach to revising condition B3 and integrating the assessment of minimum required student outcomes into the future TEF? You could include comments on areas such as:

- removing the progression indicator from condition B3
- how contextual factors would be considered at different stages in the process.

Question 7a

What are your views on the proposed approach and initial ratings criteria for the student outcomes aspect?

Question 7b

Do you have any comments on the proposed set of employment and further study indicators, and are there other measures that we should consider using?

Question 7c

What are your views on the proposal to consider a limited set of contextual factors when reaching judgements about this aspect?

Question 8a

What are your views on who should carry out the assessments? You could include suggestions for how we can enable more assessors (both academic and student) from small, specialist or college-based providers to take part.

Question 8b

What are your views on only permitting representations on provisional rating decisions of Bronze or Requires improvement?

Question 9a

What are your views on our proposal for an alternative means of gathering students' views to inform the student experience aspect where we do not have sufficient NSS-based indicators? You could include comments on:

- the proposed approach to determining whether the NSS data is sufficient (this is expanded on in Annex G)
- the actions we are considering to improve the availability of NSS data for more providers
- how student views could be gathered through an alternative means.

Question 9b

What are your views on our proposal not to rate the student outcomes aspect where we do not have sufficient indicator data? You could include comments on the proposed approach to determining whether the data is sufficient (this is expanded on in Annex G).

Question 10a

What are your views on our proposed approach to including direct student input in the assessment of the student experience aspect for all providers? You could include comments on alternative ways of gathering student input where student submissions are impractical.

Question 10b

How could we help enable more student assessors from small, specialist and college-based providers to take part?

Question 11a

What are your views on our proposed approach to scheduling providers for their first assessments? You could include comments on:

- the factors we should consider in scheduling assessments
- any types of significant events that should lead us not to schedule an assessment in that year
- the sequencing of TEF assessments and APP approvals.

Question 11b

What are your views on our proposed approach to scheduling providers for subsequent assessments?

Question 12

Do you have any comments or evidence about the factors associated with risks to quality that might be included in the draft risk monitoring tool at Annex I?

Question 13

Do you have any comments about the proposed set of incentives and interventions associated with TEF ratings? You could include comments on:

- the principle that growth in student recruitment should take place at high quality providers
- the potential to link eligibility for new DAPs awards, or extensions to existing DAPs, to higher TEF ratings
- the approach to determining a breach or increased risk of breach, following TEF rating decisions
- whether there are any other incentives and interventions we should consider.

Question 14a

What are your views on the range of quality assessment outputs and outcomes we propose to publish?

Question 14b

Do you have any comments on how we could improve the usefulness of published information for providers and students? You could include comments on areas such as:

- whether the OfS should have a role in sharing good practice, and how we should do so
- the presentation of TEF outcomes for providers that are not rated for student outcomes.

Question 15

Do you have any comments on the proposed implementation timeline?

Question 16

Do you have any comments on the two options we have set out for how we could approach publication of TEF ratings during the transitional period, or suggestions of other approaches we could take?

Question 17

Do you have any comments on our approach to ongoing development, or our plans to prepare for the future inclusion of taught postgraduate provision?

Question 18

Are there aspects of the proposals you found unclear? If so, please specify which, and tell us why.

Question 19

In your view, are there ways in which the objectives of this consultation could be delivered more efficiently or effectively than proposed here?

Annex C: Additional background to our proposals

1. This annex sets out background to our proposals, and includes summaries of:

- the relevant conclusions of the public bodies review of the OfS
- feedback that we received through our pre-consultation engagement
- the findings of the TEF and B3 evaluations.

The public bodies review of the OfS

2. The public bodies review of the OfS recommended that we bring quality assessment methodologies and activities together into an integrated system that drives improvement across the full range of providers.¹⁹

3. In Section 5 on quality regulation, the review report describes the current system, sets out what the review heard, and sets out its conclusions, including that:

- a. The quality of higher education is and must remain a key priority for the OfS.
- b. Interactions between the two strands of quality activity (assessment of compliance with the B conditions and the TEF) are unclear and seemingly minimal.
- c. As the primary tool for incentivising improvement, the TEF is broadly welcomed by the sector. However, it is not mandatory for small providers and quality activity should be applicable to all providers.
- d. Baseline regulation can play more of a role in improvement.
- e. The OfS should bring together qualitative and quantitative intelligence to form a view of what quality above minimum standards looks like, and disseminate best practice and drive quality across the sector for all providers and students.
- f. By developing an integrated methodology of assessing quality, the OfS should work with the sector to embed a culture of continuous improvement that encourages excellence and innovation beyond the minimum standards. This approach can act as a critical feedback loop that reinforces the OfS's role in enabling providers to undertake effective quality improvement.
- g. The OfS should develop an effective basket of qualitative predictive and lead indicators, that allow it to regulate quality boldly and confidently, anticipating, identifying, and then responding rapidly to address emerging risk.
- h. The OfS should be clearer with the sector and better articulate the risk factors that could lead to providers being selected for further regulatory intervention, including assessment visits and investigations.

¹⁹ See Gov.UK, [Fit for the future: Independent review of the Office for Students](#).

- i. The OfS should reflect on how its standards and processes can demonstrate equivalence with European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education requirements to enable English higher education providers to align to international standards. This should be done through constructive dialogue with the sector and government.

Pre-consultation engagement feedback

4. Our current proposals have been shaped by engagement with sector and student groups since the beginning of the year. Our thinking has evolved in response to the feedback we have received as we have tested various ideas for what the future quality system could look like.
5. Following the public bodies review, we initially presented ideas for a fully integrated model, which would involve carrying out assessments of all providers on a cyclical basis both to test whether they meet our minimum quality requirements and to drive improvement beyond these requirements. While there was broad support for the aims of the integrated system, many of those we spoke to raised concerns about the scale, cost and deliverability of a fully integrated approach. Instead, there was support for continuing with targeted risk-based assessments where we have concerns about a provider meeting our quality requirements and, alongside this, building on the TEF to carry out improvement-focused assessments of all providers to drive improvement across the sector.
6. Some of the key areas on which we have received feedback are:
 - integration
 - simplification and provider burden
 - continuous improvement
 - inclusion of all providers
 - scope of assessments
 - ratings and outcomes
 - student input
 - assessment cycle and transition
 - alignment with the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

Integration

7. While there were concerns about a fully integrated system, the suggestion of integrating B3 assessments into future TEF assessments was generally welcomed and considered to make our assessment approach more straightforward for providers to engage with.

Simplification and provider burden

8. Many of those we spoke to encouraged us to consider how we could simplify our approach and reduce burden for providers, particularly in the current financial context, and to ensure that we were taking an appropriately risk-based approach.

Continuous improvement

9. There was strong support for a system that focuses on supporting and driving enhancement or continuous improvement. There were mixed views about whether this should be done by introducing an additional aspect to assess how well the provider improves, or whether this should be built into the system in other ways.

Inclusion of all providers

10. There was agreement with the principle that all providers should be subject to regular quality assessment. Small and specialist providers highlighted the need for the assessments to work effectively for them, and to take account of the diversity of provision across the sector. Some also highlighted the limitations of our data indicators in terms of coverage of their students or applicability to their students' intended outcomes. Providers' suggestions in this area included more fully taking account of their context, varying our assessment approach for small providers and ensuring that there was good representation from all types of providers among the assessors. Some providers supported the inclusion of visits in assessments as they thought it would help assessors better understand their context, or potentially reduce the burden of preparing submissions.

Scope of assessments

11. There was support for the extension of TEF assessments to taught postgraduate students, but providers queried the current lack of comparable data for these students and questioned how we would assess the student experience consistently before this was available. Many raised concerns about attempting to assess transnational provision at this time, also arising from the limitations of available data.

Ratings and outcomes

12. We heard mixed views about retaining comparative ratings in our early discussions. Some of those we talked to suggested a kitemark-type approach, but others considered the lack of differentiation that would result in unhelpful and supported retaining ratings.
13. In general, there was a preference for ratings to be at a level comparable with the 'aspects' in the last TEF exercise, rather than at a more granular level, for example at the level of each assessment criterion. We heard mixed views about whether there should be an overall rating.
14. In response to the suggestion that we might not rate providers where we have insufficient data, those likely to be affected emphasised the need for us to present this in a way that avoided it being interpreted negatively.
15. There were questions (including from students) about the value of provider-level outcomes to inform student choice.

16. There was support for publishing assessment reports that highlight good practice and make recommendations for improvement and the provision of detailed, meaningful feedback that providers could act upon was viewed as important.

Student input

17. We heard strong support for continuing with direct student input into assessments in the form of an independent student submission but, again, we were asked to consider how we could make this less burdensome for students. Small providers in particular encouraged us to think about alternatives to the student submission for those that do not have established student representation structures and where it would be difficult for individual students to put together a submission.

Assessment cycle and transition

18. Those we spoke to accepted that we would need to move to a rolling approach to assessments if we were to assess all providers, but raised a number of potential challenges associated with this that would need to be addressed. These included:

- the differing priorities between providers that we would need to account for in our scheduling approach
- potential clashes in activity for providers, such as assessments clashing with APP submissions and the Research Excellence Framework
- the complexities of the period where some providers would have ratings from the old scheme and others would have new ratings.

19. We were encouraged to complete the first cycle of assessments as quickly as possible to mitigate some of the potential risks during the transitional approach.

20. We also heard that moving to a rolling approach would make it more challenging to achieve consistency in outcomes than had been the case with a single-point exercise, and that we would need to ensure we had strong mechanisms in place for this.

Alignment with the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area

21. There were mixed views on whether the new system should aim to be compliant with European standards and guidelines, with some strongly favouring this and some saying it was not a priority for them.

Evaluation findings

Evaluation of our revised approach to student outcomes

22. The main findings of our early evaluation of the impact of our revised approach to regulating student outcomes (through setting minimum numerical thresholds and carrying out assessments of compliance with condition B3) were that:

- a. Providers were already monitoring and seeking to improve student outcomes before we introduced the revised condition.

- b. The revised condition and data helped to strengthen their approaches, for example through incorporating the thresholds into their course level monitoring, helping them to identify and address potentially weaker areas of performance.
- c. Providers found our documentation complex, and some found it cumbersome to develop their knowledge of our methodology and analyse the data.²⁰

Evaluation of the TEF

23. We carried out a combination of commissioned and OfS-led work to evaluate TEF 2023.²¹ This included commissioning IFF Research to evaluate the early impact of the 2023 TEF exercise on providers. The key findings from their work include:

- a. Views on the TEF among providers are largely positive, with most viewing the framework as fit for purpose.
- b. The potential reputational impacts of participating in and gaining a good TEF rating are important to providers, and this is therefore incentivising delivery of excellent student experience and outcomes (along with a range of other factors).
- c. Participation in the TEF 2023 exercise has enabled many providers to identify areas of strength and weakness in their performance and has led to some making decisions in a more evidence-led way. The TEF panel statements were welcomed and found helpful in this regard.
- d. The impact it has had varies across providers, with a more noticeable impact in providers with less well established, evidence-based quality systems.
- e. The change interventions introduced as a result of the TEF 2023 exercise are still somewhat limited, but that is not unexpected given the timing of the evaluation.
- f. The key challenges for providers were the resource involved in participating and the timescales.

24. Shortly after the submission deadline, we carried out a survey of student representatives who had been involved in producing student submissions to understand their experiences. We found that:

- a. The vast majority of respondents agreed that their overall experience of TEF involvement was positive and had helped them influence positive changes in learning and teaching at their provider.
- b. Respondents mostly described a very positive experience being supported by and working with their provider.
- c. Nearly all respondents felt their involvement had strengthened the student voice in discussions with providers about learning and teaching.

²⁰ See OfS, [Evaluating our approach](#).

²¹ See OfS, [Evaluating the TEF](#).

- d. Most respondents found the timeframes to produce the submission very challenging, and many felt there wasn't enough time to do the submission alongside their workloads.
 - e. Aside from managing timing and resources, the most common areas of challenge were in handling existing data and insights, and working with the student outcomes area.
25. We also commissioned Savanta Research to gain an understanding of how applicants are using TEF information to inform their decisions. Based on six focus groups with prospective students, they found that:
- a. Both student outcomes and teaching quality are seen as important factors by students when making choices. However, there is limited evidence that TEF ratings currently feature prominently in these decisions.
 - b. Where TEF ratings are used, they generally serve as a confirmatory tool rather than being a decisive factor, with Gold and Silver TEF ratings providing a sense of reassurance about the chosen institutions.
 - c. There is scope to increase the use and value of TEF information, including through:
 - i. General raising of awareness and understanding of the TEF. When learning more in the focus groups, applicants were positive about several elements of the TEF, including the focus on student experience and outcomes, the use of multiple sources of evidence, and the involvement of students.
 - ii. The inclusion of more detail beyond the ratings – presented as concisely and directly as possible – to help applicants understand what TEF ratings represent.

Annex D: Matters to which we have had regard in developing our proposals

The OfS's general duties

1. In formulating these initial proposals, the OfS has had regard to its general duties as set out in Section 2 of HERA. These are:
 - a. The need to protect the institutional autonomy of English higher education providers.
 - b. The need to promote quality, and greater choice and opportunities for students, in the provision of higher education by English higher education providers.
 - c. The need to promote competition between English higher education providers in connection with the provision of higher education where that competition is in the interests of students and employers, while also having regard to the benefits for students and employers resulting from collaboration between such providers.
 - d. The need to promote value for money in the provision of higher education by English higher education providers.
 - e. The need to promote equality of opportunity in connection with access to and participation in higher education provided by English higher education providers.
 - f. The need to use the OfS's resources in an efficient, effective and economic way.
 - g. So far as relevant, the principles of best regulatory practice, including the principles that regulatory activities should be:
 - i. Transparent, accountable, proportionate and consistent.
 - ii. Targeted only at cases in which action is needed.
 - aa. The need to promote the importance of freedom of speech within the law in the provision of higher education by English higher education providers.
 - ab. The need to protect the academic freedom of academic staff at English higher education providers.
2. We consider that the proposals we set out are relevant to all our general duties to varying degrees, but we have given the most weight to b, and particular weight to e, f and g in developing them.
3. Our general duty to promote quality, and greater choice and opportunities for students, underpins the changes that we are proposing to make. These changes are intended to enable us to better achieve our aims for the quality assessment system to:
 - a. Ensure that students benefit from high quality and continuously improving provision.

- b. Provide clear information about the level of quality delivered by different providers to help inform student choice.
 - c. Support and incentivise providers to deliver the highest levels of quality for their students, and ensure improvements are made where quality falls short.
4. Our proposals to extend assessments to all registered providers and, in time, to other areas of provision, would increase the reach of our activity to promote quality so that more students benefit from high quality provision. We also propose strengthened incentives and interventions with the aim of pushing all providers to deliver high quality materially above our minimum requirements, and for growth in student recruitment to take place at high quality providers. Additionally, the way in which we propose to deliver assessments seeks to protect students from poor or rapidly declining quality through regular assessment of all providers alongside active monitoring of risk indicators, which would allow us to prioritise providers for assessment where we have concerns about emergent risks to quality.
 5. We have taken account of the duty to support greater choice in terms of a diverse range of providers, courses and means of delivery through proposing an assessment approach that recognises the diversity of provision in the sector and the need for incentives to apply across all of this. Our proposed assessment approach seeks not only to avoid disincentivising delivery of some types of provision or courses, but to achieve improvements in quality across all types of provision thereby improving the range of high quality choices that are available to students.
 6. We have carefully considered our general duty in relation to equality of opportunity and consider our proposals to support this through:
 - a. Explicit consideration of the experience and outcomes of different groups of students, through the continued consideration of 'split' indicators for groupings such as disability and combined measures of disadvantage.
 - b. Ratings criteria, which require that consistent levels of quality are delivered for all student groups and that the provider effectively tailors its academic support to its particular mix of students.

Providers would need to demonstrate that they are delivering among the best experience and outcomes in the sector for all their students to gain the highest rating, and this would therefore incentivise providers to improve the experience and outcomes of all student groups.

7. We have sought to develop proposals for our future assessment approach which balance consideration of our duty to use the OfS's resources in an efficient, effective and economic way with:
 - a. Our duty to promote quality, which is supported by the extension of assessments to all registered providers.
 - b. Recognition of the diversity of the sector and institutional autonomy, and the need to vary our assessment approach if we are to effectively assess all providers.

8. We have attempted to identify an efficient way to assess all providers effectively and have moved away from an initial idea of all assessments involving visits to all providers, while retaining scope for targeted action where we identify concerns and collection of alternative evidence in specific circumstances.
9. In developing our proposals for the future system, we have considered the principles of best regulatory practice, including the principles that regulatory activities should be:
 - transparent, accountable, proportionate and consistent
 - targeted only at cases in which action is needed.
10. This has been particularly relevant when considering the extent to which we should propose to integrate our assessment activities. Our proposals set out what we consider to be an appropriately risk-based and proportionate approach, which combines desk-based assessments of all providers with the possibility of further engagement, investigation or intervention where concerns or increased risks to quality are identified. We are also proposing to make more transparent the way we monitor risks to quality through the creation of a risk monitoring tool.
11. Throughout our proposals for integrating our assessment activities and the future TEF assessments we have considered where it may be possible to streamline the assessment approach, primarily to reduce burden for providers. For example, we expect that our proposals to simplify and integrate the assessment of the minimum required student outcomes, and rely more on available data to assess student outcomes will reduce the effort needed to monitor student outcomes and produce provider and student submissions.
12. Our consideration of the need to protect institutional autonomy is reflected in our proposals for a flexible approach to assessing student experience, which takes account of provider context, and the focus on positive outcomes without any prescriptiveness about how the provider achieves these.
13. We have also considered the need to encourage competition between providers where this is in the interests of students. This is reflected in the proposal to retain differentiated ratings, which not only help to make clear to prospective students the level of quality offered by each provider but, through their publication, also incentivise providers to make quality improvements because of the reputational and competitive advantage a high TEF rating is seen to bring.
14. We have also had regard to our general duty relating to value for money and consider that improvements in the quality of the student experience and outcomes across the higher education sector will result in better value for money for students and taxpayers. We also propose that a more rounded set of employment and further study measures should be used in the assessment. This would enable a wider set of benefits that student gain from their education to be recognised and rewarded.
15. We have also had regard to our general duties to promote freedom of speech and secure academic freedom, but consider these to be less pertinent to our proposals.

The Public Sector Equality Duty

16. We have had regard to Schedule 1, paragraph 21 of HERA, which extends the Equality Act 2010, and therefore the Public Sector Equality Duty, to the OfS. This requires the OfS to have due regard to eliminating unlawful discrimination, foster good relations between different groups and take steps to advance equality of opportunity.
17. Our proposals aim to ensure that all students, whatever their background and characteristics, receive a high quality student experience and achieve positive outcomes. By designing the ratings criteria in a way that requires providers to demonstrate consistently high levels of quality for all student groups to gain the highest ratings, we hope to incentivise improvements for groups that typically experience less good experience and outcomes. Expanding the coverage of the TEF in terms of providers and levels of study means that the incentives it creates could result in benefits for a wider range of students, including those from underrepresented groups or those with less good experience and outcomes.
18. Through this consultation we are seeking views on any unintended consequences of our proposals, for example on particular types of provider or student groups. We are also seeking views about the potential impact of our proposals on individuals on the basis of their protected characteristics. Responses to this consultation will inform our assessment of the impact of our proposals on different groups.

Guidance issued by the Secretary of State

19. We have had regard to guidance issued to the OfS by the Secretary of State under Section 2(3) of HERA.
20. We will have regard to any further guidance from the Secretary of State once issued.

The Regulators' Code

21. We have had regard to the Regulators' Code and consider Section 1 and Section 3 to be particularly relevant to our proposals:
 - a. Section 1 says that regulators should carry out their activities in a way that supports those they regulate to comply and grow, including using proportionate approaches and avoiding unnecessary burdens.
 - b. Section 3 which discusses the need to base regulatory activities on risk.
22. Our proposals for the future system represent a risk-based approach, with regulatory activity increased where risk is greatest, and we have sought to design future TEF assessments in a way that streamlines what is required of providers while maintaining the TEF as an effective mechanism to ensure and improve quality across the sector.

Annex E: Consideration of alternative proposals

1. In developing these proposals for the principles, scope and structure of the system we have considered and discussed a range of options with sector and student groups. The options we have considered include:
 - a. Retaining the existing system with minimal changes. This might involve rerunning the TEF in its current form and conducting compliance assessments where we have concerns about quality. The compliance assessments could integrate an assessment against condition B3 with other B conditions, including through visits to the providers. We have not proposed this approach, as we consider there are benefits to aligning the scope and TEF rating categories to the requirements of the B conditions, integrating the assessment of B3 within the TEF, and making some revisions to extend the TEF to all providers.
 - b. A fully integrated model. This would involve routinely assessing all providers to fully test whether they meet all the minimum quality requirements set out in the relevant ongoing B conditions of registration, as well as to rate the level of quality and drive improvement. Such an approach would probably involve visits to all providers to assess whether they meet the 'qualitative' B conditions of registration. Concerns were raised about the cost and scale of such an approach. We heard views that it would be more efficient and proportionate to continue with a risk-based approach to looking into concerns about compliance with the qualitative B conditions. We have not proposed this approach because of the substantial increase in cost and burden that would be involved.
 - c. Adding an additional aspect to the TEF to assess how effective a provider is at continuous improvement (discussed under Proposal 4). This would involve each provider submitting information about its areas for improvement, its approaches and the impact of its improvement activity. While this could help to increase the effect of the TEF in driving improvement, it would also increase the burden and complexity of the assessment, both for providers and TEF assessors. We have not proposed this because overall, we do not consider that the benefits would outweigh the additional burden and complexity. Instead, we propose to increase the impact of the TEF by strengthening and varying the incentives and interventions, as set out in Section 3.
 - d. Changing the TEF by using data (as far as it is available) to generate a granular dashboard of ratings for each provider. In this approach, some context would need to be taken into account, but to create an efficient process this would be limited to the minimum necessary. We have not proposed this approach because beyond student outcomes, we do not consider the data would support meaningful ratings without further evidence, and the granular dashboard of ratings could be complex for students and others to understand. Sector groups also queried what incentives this approach would create and whether it would in practice minimise burden.
2. We have also considered not making the revisions to condition B3 set out under Proposal 6. If we did not make these revisions but still sought to integrate B3 assessments into the future TEF, this would involve providers in their TEF submissions setting out the actions they have taken and future plans to improve any outcomes below the thresholds for continuation, completion or progression. The TEF assessors would then need to assess the credibility of

those plans in improving the relevant outcomes. Our experience of B3 assessments to date is that this would involve considerable effort and complexity for assessors, often requiring further information or analysis. As we expect providers to be assessed through the TEF on a cyclical basis, we consider a more robust and efficient approach would be to take account of actual improvements delivered, once they are reflected in the outcome measures. We have also reflected on the use of the progression measure for regulation against a minimum threshold, as explained at paragraph 96. For these reasons we have proposed to simplify condition B3 as set out in Proposal 6.

3. We are open to considering alternative ideas put forward by respondents to this consultation.

Annex F: Comparison of the previous TEF and proposed future TEF

1. Table F1 sets out how we propose the future TEF would differ from the previous TEF exercise (known as TEF 2023).

Table F1: Comparison of the previous and future TEF

	Previous TEF	Future TEF
Providers in scope	<p>Mandatory for providers with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • at least 500 undergraduate students • at least two TEF indicators based on a denominator of at least 500 students. <p>Voluntary for other providers.</p>	All registered providers.
Provision in scope	<p>Undergraduate only (Levels 4 and 5, first degree, undergraduate with postgraduate components).</p> <p>Optional: transnational education courses, validated-only provision, modular provision, apprenticeships at undergraduate level.</p>	<p>Undergraduate only for the first cycle – no change to levels of qualification. Validated-only provision would be in scope.</p> <p>Inclusion of apprenticeships remains under consideration.</p> <p>Postgraduate taught provision and measures for modular provision would be added from the second cycle.</p> <p>Transnational education courses would not be included, but we would design the scheme so that there is scope to include this in later assessment cycles.</p>
Aspects of assessment	<p>Two aspects: Student experience and student outcomes.</p> <p>Each aspect was assessed through a combination of indicators, provider and (optional) student submissions.</p>	<p>Two aspects: Student experience and student outcomes.</p> <p>Student experience to be assessed through a combination of NSS indicators, provider and student submissions (or alternative student input where needed).</p> <p>Assessment criteria to be closely aligned with conditions B1, B2 and B4.</p> <p>Assessment of student outcomes to be based on a broader set of benchmarked indicators and relevant contextual information.</p>

	Previous TEF	Future TEF
		Consideration of whether each provider meets the minimum required student outcomes to be integrated into the TEF assessments.
Ratings	<p>A rating for each aspect, and an overall provider rating.</p> <p>Bronze ratings signified some excellence above the minimum quality requirements. Requires improvement outcomes may, but need not, have indicated concerns about meeting them.</p> <p>Overall ratings based on a 'best fit' judgement weighing up all of the evidence.</p>	<p>A rating for each aspect, and an overall provider rating.</p> <p>Requires improvement and Bronze ratings to align with not meeting or meeting the minimum quality requirements.</p> <p>Silver and Gold ratings to require more consistency across student groups, subjects and areas of provision.</p> <p>Overall rating to be based on the lower of the two aspect ratings.</p>
Incentives for providers	<p>Reputational effect of the rating.</p> <p>Fee uplift for providers with Gold, Silver or Bronze ratings (determined by DfE).</p>	<p>A strengthened set of incentives and interventions that varies by rating:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • additional rewards and less frequent assessments for Gold and Silver rated providers • stronger incentives to push Bronze rated providers to improve, and limits to their growth or eligibility for DAPs • regulatory interventions to ensure improvements by those with a rating of Requires improvement.
OfS indicators	<p>Student experience aspect (based on NSS data):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching on my course • Assessment and feedback • Academic support • Learning resources • Student voice. <p>Student outcomes aspect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuation • Completion 	<p>Student experience aspect (based on NSS data):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching on my course • Assessment and feedback • Academic support • Learning resources • Student voice • plus Learning opportunities <p>Student outcomes aspect:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuation

	Previous TEF	Future TEF
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Progression. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Completion Rounded set of post-study or employment measures, based on progression, use of skills, and earnings.
Provider submissions	<p>Provider-determined evidence covering both aspects.</p> <p>Under both aspects, the provider's own alternative evidence to cover gaps in the indicators.</p> <p>Under student outcomes, each provider included the 'educational gains' it identified for its students.</p>	<p>Provider-determined evidence covering the student experience aspect.</p> <p>Under student outcomes, only contextual information relating directly to the indicators, not alternative evidence of positive outcomes to supplement the indicators.</p>
Student evidence	Optional student submissions covering both aspects.	Optional student submission to focus on student experience aspect. Alternative ways of capturing student input where submissions are impractical.
Expert review and decision making	<p>Expert review by the TEF panel, consisting of academics and student representatives with expertise of learning and teaching.</p> <p>All providers could make representations about their ratings, before they were finalised.</p>	<p>Expert review as before, although to accommodate the rolling cycle of assessment the OfS would probably appoint an evolving pool of TEF assessors.</p> <p>OfS staff involved, to assess minimum student outcomes.</p> <p>Only providers with provisional Requires improvement or Bronze ratings able to make representations about their ratings.</p>
Assessment cycle	Four years, with all participating providers assessed in the same year.	Rolling cycle with up to 150 assessments conducted each year. First cycle (assessing all providers) over three years. Timing of subsequent assessments dependent on rating – five years for providers rated Gold, four years for providers rated Silver, three years for providers rated Bronze.

Annex G: Data annex

Introduction

1. This annex provides further detail about the proposed indicators and how they might be presented. It also sets out initial proposals for the tests we could use to determine whether a provider has sufficient indicators for use in TEF assessments (expanding on Proposal 9).

Presentation of indicators

2. The data measures that we are currently considering using as evidence for assessing each aspect in the first cycle of future TEF assessments are set out in Table G1.
3. We expect to consult on measures for taught postgraduate and modular provision before using them in the second cycle of assessments. That would include any related changes to the presentation of the indicators.

Table G1: Proposed measures by aspect of assessment

Student experience	Student outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teaching on my course• Learning opportunities (new)• Assessment and feedback• Academic support• Learning resources• Student voice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Continuation• Completion• Post-study measures (not used in assessment against minimum requirements):<ul style="list-style-type: none">– Progression– Measure of extent to which graduates are using what they learned (new)– Salary measure (new).

4. We intend to retain the current approach to benchmarking the TEF indicators. Benchmarking takes account of the characteristics of a provider’s students and courses. It enables the assessment to consider the quality of the student experience and outcomes for a provider’s particular mix of students and courses. We envisage applying the existing methodology to the additional post-study measures we are proposing. As part of the second stage consultation in 2026, we intend to consult on the details of these new measures, including how they would be benchmarked, and on any adjustments to benchmarking for any other indicators.
5. We intend to retain the current approach of presenting ‘overall’ TEF indicators that group all undergraduate levels of study together, and aggregate the data over a four year period. These overall indicators would be presented separately for each mode of study (full-time, part-time, and apprenticeships if applicable).
6. The overall indicators would also be ‘split’ to show different levels of study, subjects, student characteristics, years and other groupings. We intend to review existing split indicators to identify which are most relevant and whether there might be scope to remove any to reduce

complexity in the dataset. We would consult on any proposed changes to split indicators as part of the second stage consultation in 2026.

7. We are also proposing the data dashboards would present the indicators for two views of each provider's student population:
 - taught only (students that the provider teaches)
 - subcontracted out and validated only (students taught by others through partnership arrangements).
8. As described under Proposal 3: Provision in scope, we consider that presenting indicators separately for taught and partnership provision would increase the visibility of any differences in quality between these two groups. We are also considering introducing additional splits for provision delivered through partnerships, which would break down the data by each named partnership.
9. For student outcomes, our intention is to explore how we can integrate or simplify the data dashboards to support an integrated assessment of B3 as part of the assessment of student outcomes in the TEF. Within the approach described above we aim to develop a means of identifying for users where student outcomes do not meet the minimum numerical thresholds, which are set for each level of study.²²

Sufficiency of indicator data for use in TEF assessments

10. Proposal 9 sets out how, where there is insufficient data, we might vary our approach to assessing student experience, or not rate student outcomes. We propose that we should develop rules or tests, to be applied consistently across all providers, to determine whether the data is sufficient for use in the assessment of each aspect.
11. We are proposing to develop sufficiency tests based on:
 - a. **Coverage** – whether an indicator covers a substantial percentage of the provider's students.
 - b. **Statistical confidence** – whether there is sufficient statistical confidence in an individual indicator.

We would then test, for the aspect as a whole, whether there are enough indicators that meet both the coverage and statistical confidence tests to inform an assessment of that aspect.

12. We have carried out analysis to identify the potential effect of our proposals to vary the assessment approach, where there is insufficient data. For this analysis we have applied initial assumptions about what might be appropriate thresholds for each of these tests, as set out below. We invite comments on how we should define whether the data is sufficient, and the tests we are proposing to carry out under Proposal 9.

²² The numerical thresholds that currently apply are available at OfS, [Setting numerical thresholds for condition B3](#).

13. In our analysis, we have so far only considered indicators for the 'Taught only' view, which includes all students taught by the provider. We could consider in future also including students for which the provider has responsibility under partnership arrangements.
14. In the analysis we considered the indicators in whichever modes of study the provider has a substantial proportion of its students. Rather than just looking at indicators in the 'majority mode' for a provider, we looked at indicators in any modes that represented at least 35 per cent of the provider's students.²³

This means, for example:

- If 70 per cent of a provider's undergraduate students were full-time, 20 per cent part-time and 10 per cent on apprenticeships, we looked at the full-time indicators for this provider.
- If 45 per cent of a provider's undergraduate students were full-time, 40 per cent part-time and 15 per cent on apprenticeships, we looked at both the full-time and part-time indicators for this provider.

15. We took this approach rather than looking at the 'majority mode' because not all providers have a single 'majority' mode, or the balance between two modes can be almost even, and this could result in a near majority of students being excluded from consideration. We consider it more useful to test all indicators that represent a substantial proportion of students.

Sufficient coverage

16. The indicators we propose to use in the TEF do not cover all undergraduate students, and the coverage can vary for different providers. When considering whether the data is sufficient to inform an assessment, we need to consider how to account for circumstances where the coverage of a provider's indicator is limited. For example, the NSS does not include students on courses that are one year or less in length, so NSS indicators will be less representative of the student population at providers that offer large numbers of these courses.
17. In our analysis, we considered an NSS indicator to have sufficient coverage if at least half of the provider's students in the relevant mode are on courses more than one year in length. We considered this to be the simplest test to give us a likely indication of whether the majority of the students in that mode are likely to be invited to complete the NSS.
18. We did not apply coverage tests to the student outcomes indicators. The way in which the continuation and completion measures are defined means that we could be confident they represent the majority of the provider's students. However, we would envisage applying a coverage test to the progression measure and any additional post-study measures we develop where this would be appropriate. We would consult on this as part of our detailed proposals prior to implementation.

²³ Based on the most recent 'Size and shape of provision' data, available at OfS, [Size and shape of provision data dashboard](#).

Sufficient statistical confidence

19. We currently use four indicative categories to describe the strength of statistical evidence we use in judgements about student outcomes and in TEF assessments:
- Around **99 per cent** statistical confidence would provide **compelling** statistical evidence on which to make regulatory judgements.
 - Around **95 per cent** or higher statistical confidence would provide **very strong** statistical evidence on which to make regulatory judgements.
 - Around **90 per cent** or higher statistical confidence would provide **strong** statistical evidence on which to make regulatory judgements.
 - Around **80 per cent** or higher statistical confidence would provide **probable** statistical evidence on which to make regulatory judgements.²⁴
20. Our view is that, because the TEF assessments consider multiple indicators to inform judgements rather than relying on a single indicator, we should regard all indicators that provide strong, very strong or compelling statistical evidence as materially contributing to the assessment. (This is consistent with our current approach to B3 assessments, where we would begin to consider whether a provider is failing to meet minimum requirements when we have around 90 per cent or higher statistical confidence that an indicator falls below the relevant numerical threshold.)
21. When interpreting the level of quality suggested by an indicator, the TEF assessors would consider whether an indicator is: materially below benchmark; broadly in line with benchmark; or materially above benchmark (in one of three 'zones of performance'). We consider that an indicator can meaningfully contribute to the assessment if it spans two zones of performance, with at least strong statistical confidence.
22. For example, if the 'Proportion of statistical uncertainty distribution' for an indicator is 70 per cent broadly in line with benchmark and 30 per cent materially above benchmark, there is compelling statistical evidence indicating at least high quality. This would be considered alongside contextual information or evidence in the submissions that might confirm an assessment of high quality, or might shift the judgement to outstanding quality. This would then be considered alongside a range of other indicators and evidence, to inform a broad overall judgement of the aspect as a whole.
23. In our analysis, we therefore consider an indicator to provide sufficient statistical confidence to contribute to an assessment if we have around 90 per cent or higher statistical confidence that it is either within one zone of performance, or spans no more than two zones of performance.

Sufficient number of measures

24. As shown in Table G1, we are proposing to use multiple indicators when assessing each aspect. We have initially considered how many measures with sufficient coverage and sufficient statistical confidence would be needed, as a minimum, for an assessment of student

²⁴ More information about what creates statistical uncertainty in the data indicators and our view of this can be found in [Description and definition of student outcome and experience measures - Office for Students](#).

outcomes or to contribute to the assessment of student experience (without needing the alternative means of gathering student views). Our initial view, which we used for the purpose of our analysis, is:

- a. We would have sufficient data to rate the student outcomes aspect for a provider if we have indicators with sufficient coverage and statistical confidence for the continuation measure and at least one other measure. In practice, there are unlikely to be many cases where we have sufficient confidence in another measure and not in the continuation measure.
- b. We would have sufficient NSS indicators to inform the assessment of student experience (without the alternative means of gathering student views) if we have at least three NSS-based indicators with sufficient coverage and statistical confidence.

Likely effect of these proposals

25. We set out the likely effect of our proposals, based on the tests that we applied in our analysis, below. Adjusting the thresholds for the tests or the indicators apply would impact on these estimates.

Student outcomes

26. Based on initial assumptions and analysis, there are currently:

- 349 providers with sufficient data for student outcomes to be assessed
- 27 providers without sufficient outcomes data to be assessed.

27. In addition to this, there are currently 23 relatively new or recently registered providers with undergraduate students that do not yet have any student outcomes data. While these providers will have accumulated outcomes data by the time we carry out the first cycle of assessments under the new scheme, it is not possible to know now how many of them would have sufficient data by 2027-28 to 2029-30. We also expect new providers to continue to register in the intervening period, and on an ongoing basis, so at any point we can anticipate there being some providers without student outcomes data.

28. Our current estimate, based on the sufficiency criteria we have used, is that we could expect between 10 and 15 per cent of registered providers not to have sufficient data for a student outcomes assessment. It is worth noting that our current analysis is based on the continuation measure plus either or both of completion and progression. Once data indicators are available for the proposed additional measures, this could increase the number of providers where data meets the criteria for a student outcomes assessment.

Student experience

29. Based on initial assumptions and analysis, there are currently:

- 260 providers with sufficient NSS indicator data
- 102 providers without sufficient NSS indicator data.

30. In addition to this, there are currently 46 providers with undergraduate provision without NSS data. These include newer providers that don't yet have students who have finished their courses, those with very small cohorts where data has been suppressed and those where response rate publication thresholds haven't been met, as well as any providers where none of their higher education courses fall within scope of the NSS. As with student outcomes, it is possible that the number of providers without data will fluctuate in future.
31. Based on the current numbers, we would need to use the alternative means of gathering student views to inform assessment of the student experience for around a third of providers. However, this initial analysis used the three years of available response data for the current NSS questionnaire. By the time we carry out assessments under the new scheme, we will have four years of data, and we expect confidence in the overall indicators to increase as a result. Our initial modelling suggests this would increase the number of providers with sufficient NSS indicator data to 315, meaning that we would need to use the alternative means of gathering student views to inform assessment of the student experience for around a quarter of providers.

Examples of applying proposed tests for data sufficiency

32. From the next page we set out some examples of how the proposed sufficiency rules would apply for a number of illustrative scenarios. These use the same thresholds that we used in our analysis and are intended to support understanding of our proposals.

Student experience

Provider A

Coverage

78 per cent of Provider A's undergraduate provision is full-time, so we would look at the coverage of its full-time NSS indicators. It has 5,000 full-time students.

80 per cent of Provider A's full-time undergraduate students are on courses within scope of the NSS, so the NSS-based indicators would have **sufficient coverage** to inform an assessment and we would move on to apply the rules for statistical confidence.

Statistical confidence

Table G2 shows the proportion of the statistical uncertainty distribution that falls within each zone of performance for each full-time NSS indicator for Provider A.

Table G2: Statistical uncertainty distribution for Provider A's NSS indicators

	Proportion of statistical uncertainty distribution			Sufficient statistical confidence to contribute to an assessment?
	Materially below benchmark (%)	Broadly in line with benchmark (%)	Materially above benchmark (%)	
Teaching on my course	0	5	95	Yes (around 90% or higher statistical confidence in one zone of performance)
Learning opportunities	0	35	65	Yes (around 90% or higher statistical confidence spanning two zones of performance)
Assessment and feedback	20	50	30	No (we do not have 90% or higher statistical confidence spanning two zones of performance)
Academic support	0	40	60	Yes (around 90% or higher statistical confidence spanning two zones of performance)
Learning resources	0	35	65	Yes (around 90% or higher statistical confidence spanning two zones of performance)
Student voice	17	37	46	No (we do not have 90% or higher statistical confidence spanning two zones of performance)

Provider A has **four** NSS indicators with sufficient statistical confidence to contribute to an assessment and two NSS indicators where we do not have this level of confidence.

Conclusion

The tests would mean that Provider A has **sufficient NSS indicators with sufficient coverage and statistical confidence** to inform the assessment of student experience (without the alternative means of gathering student views).

Provider B

Coverage

85 per cent of Provider B's undergraduate provision is part-time, so we would look at the coverage of its part-time NSS indicators. It has 250 part-time students.

35 per cent of Provider B's part-time undergraduate students are on courses within scope of the NSS, so the rules would mean that the NSS-based indicators have **insufficient coverage** to inform an assessment (without alternative student views).

Statistical confidence

Because Provider B's indicators have insufficient coverage to inform an assessment, we would not consider statistical confidence.

Conclusion

The tests would mean that Provider B has **insufficient NSS indicators with sufficient coverage and statistical confidence** to inform the assessment of student experience on their own. We would therefore gather student views through alternative means.

Student outcomes

Provider A

Coverage

78 per cent of Provider A's undergraduate provision is full-time, so we would look at the coverage of its full-time student outcomes indicators. It has 5,000 full-time students.

Over 90 per cent of the provider's full-time undergraduate students are within the population used for the Continuation and Completion indicators.

75 per cent are within the target population for the Graduate Outcomes survey, used for the progression indicator, and the new 'Use of skills' indicator.

80 per cent are within the sample for the new salary indicator.

All of these indicators have **sufficient coverage** to inform an assessment and we would move on to consider statistical confidence for each of them.

Statistical confidence

Table G3 shows the proportion of the statistical uncertainty distribution that falls within each zone of performance for each full-time student outcomes indicator for Provider A.

Table G3: Statistical uncertainty distribution for Provider A's student outcomes indicators

	Proportion of statistical uncertainty distribution:			Sufficient statistical confidence to contribute to an assessment?
	Materially below benchmark (%)	Broadly in line with benchmark (%)	Materially above benchmark (%)	
Continuation	0	3	97	Yes (around 90% or higher statistical confidence in one zone of performance)
Completion	2	6	92	Yes (around 90% or higher statistical confidence in one zone of performance)
Progression	20	25	55	No (we do not have 90% or higher statistical confidence spanning two zones of performance)
Use of skills	5	55	40	Yes (around 90% or higher statistical confidence spanning two zones of performance)
Salary	10	45	45	Yes (around 90% or higher statistical confidence spanning two zones of performance)

Provider A has four student outcomes indicators with sufficient statistical confidence to contribute to an assessment, one of which is for the continuation measure.

Conclusion

The rules would mean that we have **sufficient data** to assess and rate the student outcomes aspect for Provider A as we have indicators with sufficient coverage and statistical confidence for the continuation measure and at least one other measure.

Provider B

Coverage

85 per cent of Provider B's undergraduate provision is part-time, so we would look at the coverage of its part-time student outcomes indicators. It has 250 part-time students.

Over 90 per cent of Provider B's part-time undergraduate students are within the population used for the Continuation and Completion indicators.

65 per cent are within the sample for the Graduate Outcomes survey, used for the Progression indicator and the new Use of skills indicator

70 per cent are within the sample for the new salary indicator

All of these indicators have **sufficient coverage** to inform an assessment and we would move on to consider statistical confidence for each of them.

Statistical confidence

Table G4 shows the proportion of the statistical uncertainty distribution that falls within each zone of performance for each part-time student outcomes indicator for Provider B.

Table G4: Statistical uncertainty distribution for Provider B's student outcomes indicators

	Proportion of statistical uncertainty distribution:			Sufficient statistical confidence to contribute to an assessment?
	Materially below benchmark (%)	Broadly in line with benchmark (%)	Materially above benchmark (%)	
Continuation	8	55	37	Yes (around 90% or higher statistical confidence spanning two zones of performance)
Completion	45	35	20	No (we do not have 90% or higher statistical confidence spanning two zones of performance)
Progression	30	45	20	No (we do not have 90% or higher statistical confidence spanning two zones of performance)
Use of skills	35	40	25	No (we do not have 90% or higher statistical confidence spanning two zones of performance)
Salary	50	30	20	No (we do not have 90% or higher statistical confidence spanning two zones of performance)

Provider B has one student outcomes indicator with sufficient statistical confidence to contribute to an assessment, for the continuation measure.

Conclusion

The rules would mean we have **insufficient data** to assess or rate the student outcomes aspect for Provider B. While all indicators have sufficient coverage, because of the small size of the student population we only have sufficient statistical confidence in the indicator for one measure.

Annex H: Draft student experience ratings criteria

1. This annex provides initial thoughts on how the criteria for Gold, Silver and Bronze student experience aspect ratings could be presented.

	Bronze: The student experience is of sufficient quality	Silver: The student experience is consistently of high quality	Gold: The student experience is consistently of outstanding quality
	The student experience typically meets the following:	The student experience meets the following consistently across the provider's mix of students and courses:	The student experience meets the following consistently across the provider's mix of students and courses:
Course content and delivery	<p>1. Courses are coherent and up-to-date, with content appropriately informed by recent subject, research, industry or professional developments.</p> <p>2. Courses provide sufficient educational challenge and require students to develop relevant knowledge and skills.</p> <p>3. Courses are delivered effectively.</p>	<p>1. Courses are coherent, regularly updated and attuned to learners' needs. They are enhanced by recent subject, research, industry or professional developments.</p> <p>2. Courses are effective in stretching and supporting students to develop knowledge and skills that are relevant to their personal goals and future ambitions.</p> <p>3. Courses are delivered effectively, with high quality teaching practices that encourage students to engage in their learning.</p>	<p>1. Courses are coherent, carefully attuned to learners' needs, and are innovative or cutting edge. They are enriched by the latest subject, research, industry or professional developments and innovations.</p> <p>2. Courses are highly effective in stretching and supporting students to develop knowledge and skills that reflect their full potential and their personal goals and future ambitions.</p> <p>3. Courses are delivered highly effectively, with outstanding quality teaching practices that inspire students to actively engage in and commit to their learning.</p>
Resources, support and student engagement	<p>4. Academic support is sufficient and appropriate for the provider's students.</p> <p>5. Physical and digital learning resources are adequate and used effectively to meet the needs of the provider's students.</p>	<p>4. Academic support that is responsive to the provider's students is readily available, and is of high quality.</p> <p>5. Physical and digital learning resources are of high quality and are used effectively to enhance the teaching and learning experience and meet the needs of the provider's students.</p>	<p>4. Academic support that is tailored, proactive and highly responsive to the provider's students is readily available and is of outstanding quality.</p> <p>5. Physical and digital learning resources are of outstanding quality, used highly effectively to enrich the teaching and learning experience, and are tailored and responsive to the needs of the provider's students.</p>

	Bronze: The student experience is of sufficient quality	Silver: The student experience is consistently of high quality	Gold: The student experience is consistently of outstanding quality
	<p>6. Staff teams are sufficient in number and appropriately qualified.</p> <p>7. Engagement with students is sufficient and effective, with routine opportunities for students to contribute to the development of the academic experience.</p>	<p>6. Staff team sizes are good and staff are well qualified. There is high quality support for staff professional development, and excellent academic practice is promoted.</p> <p>7. Engagement with students is widespread and highly effective in leading to improvements to students' experiences and outcomes.</p>	<p>6. Staff team sizes are optimal and staff are well qualified. There is outstanding support for staff professional development and excellent academic practice is embedded across the provider.</p> <p>7. The provider works in partnership with its students and has embedded an outstanding level of engagement that is highly effective in ensuring continuous improvements to students' experiences and outcomes.</p>
Assessment	8. The provider's assessment practices ensure students are assessed effectively.	8. The provider has embedded high quality assessment practices that are effective in testing and supporting students' learning, development and attainment.	8. The provider has embedded outstanding quality assessment practices that are highly effective in testing and supporting students' learning, development and attainment.

Annex I: Draft quality risk monitoring tool

1. This annex provides an initial draft quality risk monitoring tool, outlining:
 - a. Our initial view of the factors that are associated with increased risks to quality, and why.
 - b. What data and information we could use to monitor these risk factors. For this purpose we would aim to use up-to-date or current data as far as possible, rather than lagged indicators, so that we can anticipate emerging risks to quality.
2. We invite views and evidence about the factors associated with risks to quality. Through this call for views we aim to build a shared understanding with the sector about the main factors associated with risks to quality.
3. The intended purpose of the quality monitoring tool is different from that of the equality of opportunity risk register. The latter is intended to be used by providers to inform their work to improve equality of opportunity, and should be considered by providers when writing their access and participation plans. The main purpose of the proposed quality monitoring tool is that it would be used by the OfS for ongoing monitoring of quality, to understand where there are risks to quality. We would use it to:
 - identify whether we should engage with or gather further information from a provider
 - prioritise or select a provider for further investigation
 - assess, alongside a provider's TEF outcome (of Requires improvement or Bronze), whether there is an increased risk to quality
 - consider whether to bring forward a provider's next TEF assessment.
4. We would use the tool and consider risks by looking at the range of factors and data we hold about a provider, rather than relying on a single indicator to form a view of risk.
5. The tool would also be intended to provide transparency about the factors that might lead to increased scrutiny of a provider, so providers could also use the tool to identify and mitigate areas of potential risk.

Risk factor	Rationale	Evidence we would use
Very high or increasing student:staff ratios	<p>We consider that student:staff ratios that are materially increasing or are outliers at the high end present a risk to quality.</p> <p>The financial viability and sustainability enquiry project found that financial pressures are leading some providers to reduce staffing, or rely increasingly on temporary staff or non-academic staff to deliver programmes. It also indicated potential negative impacts of this on quality.</p>	<p>Data derived from student and staff returns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Student:staff ratios that are significantly higher than the sector norm• Material increases in student:staff ratios over time.

Risk factor	Rationale	Evidence we would use
Rapid or significant growth in student numbers	<p>Evidence from B3 and other quality investigations that providers do not always successfully manage rapid increases in student numbers, for example by not ensuring equivalent increases in academic staffing, student support, library facilities etc.</p> <p>This risk is likely to be more significant when combined with other risk factors such as growing partnership provision or recruiting more students onto foundation years or with low entry qualifications, as these students are more likely to have additional support needs.</p>	Increases of student numbers based on Student Loans Company data, and forecast growth in annual financial returns.
Recruitment of students with very low or no entry qualifications	<p>Student outcomes data shows that across the sector continuation rates for full-time first degree students with certain types of entry qualifications have fallen below the minimum threshold.</p> <p>Evidence from B3 and quality investigations that providers recruiting students with low entry qualifications do not always successfully provide for the additional or differing support needs that arise.</p>	OfS size and shape data UCAS data (noting that some students with no or low entry qualifications may be recruited outside of UCAS)
Large or growing volume of foundation year provision	<p>Student outcomes data shows that across the sector as a whole continuation rates for full-time first degree students studying with a foundation year have fallen below the minimum threshold.</p> <p>Evidence from B3 investigations that some providers have sought to increase student numbers by substantially increasing the number of students it recruits via foundation years, and that providers have not always managed the different needs of growing numbers of foundation year students.</p>	OfS size and shape data Student outcomes data
Large or growing portfolio of delivery through domestic partnerships	Student outcomes data shows that across the sector continuation rates for full-time first degree students delivered via a subcontractual partner have fallen below the minimum threshold.	<p>OfS size and shape data</p> <p>Student outcomes data</p> <p>Reportable events indicating new partnerships or termination of partnerships</p>

Risk factor	Rationale	Evidence we would use
Low continuation rates	<p>Evidence from quality investigations that below threshold continuation rates can indicate issues with the quality of the student academic experience.</p> <p>Continuation is more timely than other outcome measures.</p>	<p>Student outcomes data</p> <p>Student Loans Company term 1 data</p>
Notifications and other regulatory intelligence indicating material concerns	<p>Where they appear to be credible, notifications can indicate significant concerns about quality.</p> <p>Information from other regulators or agencies can relate to concerns about the quality of a provider's higher education courses.</p>	<p>Notifications sent to OfS indicating quality issues</p> <p>Relevant regulatory intelligence shared by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies, other regulators, the Student Loans Company or other agencies</p>



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