

Response ID ANON-TWMW-TN5N-M

Submitted to Independent Review of TEF: Call for views.

Submitted on 2019-03-01 17:54:18

Who are you?

1 What is your name?

Name:

Farooq Dean

2 What is your role/position (if relevant)?

What is your role/position (if relevant)? :

Education Officer

3 What is your email address?

Email:

simon.to@ucl.ac.uk

4 In what capacity are you responding to this consultation?

Body representing students in higher education

If other, please specify below:

5 Are you responding on behalf of an organisation (eg. higher education provider, student union or representative group)?

Yes

a. If yes, what is the name of your organisation?:

Students' Union UCL

Not Answered

6 Have you been involved preparing for or writing a TEF or subject TEF submission?

Yes

7 Have you been involved as a TEF assessor or panel member (for provider TEF or in the subject pilots)?

No

8 Would you like us to keep your responses confidential?

No

If yes, what is the reason for confidentiality?:

9 Please indicate which UK country/other country you are responding from.

Please indicate which UK country/other country you are responding for. :

England

If you are responding from a country outside of the UK, please write this in below.:

Why have TEF?

10 Do you support the aim of assessing the quality of teaching excellence and student outcomes across providers of higher education?

Yes

Please explain why:

Why have TEF?

11 These purposes fall into two main areas: providing information, and enhancing the provision of higher education.

Enhancing provision

b. Please outline below the reasons for your answers :

We as a student representative body believe that students are best placed to assess whether their university is providing high-quality teaching and an exceptional student experience. We believe that the purpose of such a framework should focus on all aspects relating to teaching quality and the student experience, rather than the narrow definition of student outcomes. Students have a key part to play in the future of our university and should be considered partners in any assessment of teaching quality and the student experience.

We believe that enhancing provision of higher education is the most important part, as the institutional and subject level exercises have acted as a focal point for greater accountability of the commitment to educational enhancement at institutional and subject level. However, we share our institution's concerns about whether this could be maintained over time, whether the narratives will be sufficiently different from each other (across the sector) or sufficiently different between iterations (within a provider) to make it a meaningful exercise over the long-term.

The framework should be reimagined to address the potential gamification of the exercise, where universities focus solely on the metrics which lead to a more desirable TEF outcome rather than working in partnership with their student body on addressing the most challenging aspects of the student experience. We would be happy to see TEF metrics change every few iterations, in order to set universities new challenges and promote continuous improvement. We are committed to developing a strong and pervasive culture of student engagement and leadership with our institution, which cements our way of working as true partners in the future of our university.

We feel that there is limited benefit in TEF acting as a source of information for prospective students as it is too complex to offer meaningful information. TEF assesses a very wide range of student outcomes and it is not meaningful or useful to flatten these down to a 'Gold/Silver/Bronze' medal.

12 Should there be any other purposes for TEF?

Should there be any other purposes for TEF? :

We are strongly opposed to linking TEF to any fluctuations in tuition fees, we believe that this would be a damaging step towards a further marketised and fragmented higher education sector. Original proposals to use increased fee-caps as an incentive for excellent teaching would load students up with further debt, act as an increased disincentive for the poorest students, and financially penalise those universities most in need of investment.

We believe that a poor TEF outcome should lead to greater accountability of senior staff in universities in terms of their responsibility for management of enhancing teaching quality and the student experience.

What is TEF?

How does TEF work?

13 Are the criteria used in TEF (see Figure 1 for a list of the criteria) appropriate?

No

If not, what criteria would be more appropriate? :

We do not believe the criteria currently used in TEF would support the framework we have outlined which should focus principally on teaching quality and the student experience rather than the narrow definition of student outcomes through graduate salaries as provided by the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) data.

14 There is no direct measurement of teaching quality currently available. As a result, the TEF uses existing data as indirect measures of teaching quality. These measures are known as "proxies".

No

b. If you answered no, what metrics would be more suitable proxies? :

We believe that students are best placed to assess teaching quality and the student experience, any such framework would require student voice mechanisms at its core. We believe the NSS metrics provide a starting point for such an assessment, but these quantitative metrics require contextualising by students in order to provide a meaningful assessment. We further believe that there are limitations to a framework which relies solely on proxies and would recommend an in-person visit by the assessment panel to the institution. This would add value to the framework and ensure greater engagement with students and staff, resulting in assessments which are better informed and meaningful.

We share the concerns that our institution have outlined in terms of the LEO data and support their assertion that LEO be removed from the dataset.

15 The TEF metrics are benchmarked to account for factors such as the subject of study, prior attainment, ethnicity and educational disadvantage of the provider's student intake (see that 'What is TEF?' section for detail).

Yes

b. Does TEF benchmark for the right factors?:

Yes, however we would suggest the removal of LEO data in the metrics. We strongly support the current approach to benchmarking, as it ensures that universities with the most talented intakes are measured on the value they add to students' lives, not who they are able to attract.

16 The TEF process uses both quantitative evidence (for example, the core metrics) and qualitative evidence (for example, the written submission).

a. What are your views about the balance of quantitative and qualitative evidence considered in arriving at ratings?:

As we have outlined above, we believe that the TEF should be an assessment of teaching quality and the student experience, any such assessment should be largely qualitative. We believe that an accurate assessment would require a visit by an assessment panel. An assessment mostly defined by a series of quantitative metrics will not measure teaching quality and the student experience, and will be open to perverse incentives that will reduce the societal benefit of universities.

We believe that the quantitative metrics usefully inform lines of enquiry, and any future assessment of teaching quality and the student experience should have the student voice at the core of the process.

We believe that students' unions as the student representative body should provide a direct, independent and evidenced student submission which carries equal weighting as the institution's submission. We are grateful for our strong relationship with our institution and the support and resourcing that they provide to enable us to engage fully with external quality review processes. We believe that all universities should ensure that their students' union is supported and resourced to produce their submission and engage in the framework fully.

b. Are there any other aspects of the process that you wish to comment on?:

As outlined earlier, we are strongly opposed to any link to tuition fees as an outcome of engaging with TEF, we believe this to be a damaging step towards a marketised and fragmented higher education sector.

Are the ratings right?

17 Are the purpose(s) of TEF met by:

No

Please explain your answer:

We believe that the current single rating and levels of differentiation conflict with the assertion that all UK provision meets a high quality standard, and therefore does not provide useful information for prospective students. The response to this question is closely dependent on one's views of what the purposes of TEF should be. As expressed previously, we believe TEF should prioritise its effectiveness as an enhancement tool for universities. In addition to this, it should provide accountability for universities to the Office for Students, students, and the public.

No

Please explain your answer :

No

Please explain your answer :

18 If you answered no, what alternatives you would suggest.

a. For provider-level TEF?:

We believe the outcomes of TEF cannot be effectively summarised in a way which will be useful to prospective students – the purpose of the Gold, Silver, Bronze system – as so, this system should be abandoned to provide more differentiated information which will of greater use for enhancement and accountability.

We believe that a 1-100 scale might be a preferable alternative to the Gold, Silver, Bronze system, and will be familiar to students and staff. This will provide information which is more intuitively meaningful, and enables better benchmarking of relative performance between different universities and subject areas.

b. For subject-level TEF?:

c. If your previous response(s) reflected on the impact of the TEF on the international reputation of institutions and/or the UK as a whole, we would welcome any evidence or information you can provide that might support your view or help inform the independent review.:

Has TEF changed anything?

19 Has the introduction of TEF positively changed the educational experience of students (e.g. teaching and learning)?

Don't know

If yes, how?:

We believe that the introduction of TEF has focused the attention of universities on reviewing its education provision, and reinforced existing quality assurance and enhancement activities. However, it is too soon to assess whether this has had a significant impact on the educational experience of students.

20 Has the introduction of TEF negatively changed the educational experience of students (e.g. teaching and learning)?

Don't know

If yes, how?:

We share our institution's view that there is a risk that improvement and enhancement work may be solely focussed on those areas which are prescribed in the TEF metrics, rather than working with students on addressing the most challenging aspects of the student experience.

21 Has the introduction of TEF impacted positively on research and/or knowledge transfer?

No

If yes, how?:

Not that we are aware.

22 Has the introduction of TEF impacted negatively on research and/or knowledge transfer?

No

If yes, how? :

Not that we are aware.

Is TEF worth it?

23 Does TEF help you as a student/provider/employer?

No

Please explain the reasons for your answer.:

No not in its current form.

24 Explaining your reasoning, what are the most significant costs of:

a. Provider-level TEF?:

We believe that in a partnership, the institution should ensure that the students' union is supported and resourced to produce their submission and engage in the framework fully.

b. Subject-level TEF?:

25 Explaining your reasoning, what are the most significant benefits of:

a. Provider-level TEF?:

As we have outlined above, it is too early to assess any benefit to the educational experience of our members. We would like TEF to move away from a narrow definition of student outcomes and consider all aspects which affect teaching quality and the student experience.

b. Subject-level TEF?:

Is TEF fair?

26 Are there particular types of students, provision or providers that are disadvantaged by the current design of TEF, in a disproportionate way?

Yes

If so, what changes could be made to address this?:

We agree with our institution that TEF does not serve interdisciplinary provision well and would welcome the retroactive reclassification of highly interdisciplinary programmes into one or more discrete categories.

We also share our institution's concerns around LEO data, as it is misleading information about graduates who enter professions or employment areas which are not as well paid and could lead to perverse incentives that reduce the societal benefit of universities.

27 Are there particular types of students, provision or providers that are advantaged by the current design of TEF, in a disproportionate way?

No

If so, what changes could be made to address this?:

We are not aware of any particular disproportionate advantages.