

Emergency Motions Received

uea(su) response to TEF independent review consultation

Proposer: Jenna Chapman (Undergraduate Education Officer)

Secunder:

Union Notes

1) There is a consultation open regarding TEF for anyone to respond to, with further background information for each question found here:

https://consult.education.gov.uk/higher-education-reform/independent-review-of-tef-call-for-views/supporting_documents/TEF_review_Call_for_views.pdf

2) We have current policy against TEF (1951 Market Reforms in Higher Education)

Union Believes

1) This is an opportunity for us as an SU to respond to the consultation with our concerns and experiences of TEF

Union Resolves

1) To submit the following answers in response to the consultation:

Questions 1-9 includes background information about ueasu

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

We support the aim of assessing the quality of teaching to ensure students receive the best education and Universities are encouraged to focus on and improve this. If research is measured through the REF, a similar focus should also be placed on teaching.

We do not however believe student outcomes should be measured, especially in relation to teaching quality. Student outcomes are affected by more than the quality of teaching and the benefits of education at university go beyond the type of job and salary at the end.

The Government has stated that the purpose of the TEF is to:

- ***better inform students' choices about what and where to study;***
- ***raise esteem for teaching;***
- ***recognise and reward excellent teaching; and***
- ***better meet the needs of employers, business, industry and the professions.***

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

a. Which of these is the most important (select one option only)?

- **Providing information**
- **Enhancing provision**
- **Both are equally important**
- **Neither are important**

Both are equally important

b. Please outline below the reasons for your answers

By providing information, it gives more focus for academics to improve, including research based academics who are often less motivated to improve teaching.

Providing information is important for prospective students, but the information should be useful and accurate so they're able to make the best decision. We do not believe students see it as useful at the moment and when they do, do not fully understand what it means on its own.

12. Should there be any other purposes for TEF?

No, we believe the TEF in its current form already measures and aims to do too much to achieve its current purposes.

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

Teaching quality and learning environment criteria do, however the student outcomes doesn't and shouldn't be a measure of teaching excellence.

If not, what criteria would be more appropriate?

Just teaching quality and learning environment.

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".

a. Are the metrics used in TEF the best proxies for measuring the TEF criteria (see Figure 1 for a list of the criteria and metrics)?

Whilst the NSS doesn't measure teaching excellence, it is the best proxy for measuring the TEF criteria as it comes from students and their feedback. LEO data is too distant for it to be a meaningful to the university and to be useful for students. It is also not an effective way to measure teaching quality as employment is influenced by more than the quality of teaching which is not taken into account and you can't benchmark for these. Employment also shouldn't be seen as the sole purpose of University and so shouldn't be measured in this way.

The TEF does allow and support institutions to explore the narratives around the metrics which may not happen otherwise so using this criteria is good in this respect.

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

I'm unaware of other metrics available, but there should be a statement from the Student Union included and the weight should be placed on the institutions written submission.

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).

a. Should the metrics be benchmarked to allow for difference in a provider's student population?

Yes, the metrics should be benchmarked as there are many differences between the institutions, however how and who institutions are benchmarked by should be more transparent.

b. Does TEF benchmark for the right factors?

Yes, the LEO data should also be benchmarked by location.

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?

The balance is good as the metrics do not provide an accurate picture of the institution on their own. However the Student Union should also be able to make a submission as the current sign off process for the written submission is unclear. The provider submission could also not be an accurate reflection of the University, and so an independent way for the SU to contribute and comment on the submission is incredibly important.

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

The inclusion of differential attainment and split metrics is incredibly important for institutions to focus on and so this should definitely be included in the process.

Are the ratings right?

Terms of Reference 3: The names of the ratings under the scheme and whether those names are appropriate

There are currently three ratings – Gold, Silver and Bronze – plus an additional Provisional award, given to participating providers that meet national quality requirements, but do not yet have sufficient data to be fully assessed. These are shown below.

We will be separately investigating the needs of applicants and employers as well as the international impact of the scheme and the ratings, but we would also like your views on the following questions.

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

a. awarding a single rating?

No, it measures too many indirect variables for the final rating to be valuable and an accurate reflection. Even with benchmarking, institutions are incredibly different and all of the proposed aims of TEF cannot be summarised in a single rating. It is not a meaningful way of measuring teaching quality.

b. with three levels of differentiation, plus a fourth rating for those unable to be assessed?

No, it's not clear why they may not be assessed and may be perceived as them failing which will make it more difficult for them to improve.

c. ratings named Gold, Silver, Bronze and Provisional?

No, by using these ratings it suggests some providers are failing rather than doing well. Some students may also not see themselves belonging at a Gold institution so may be put off when they're capable.

Please explain your answers.

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

a. For provider-level TEF?

N/A

b. For subject-level TEF?

N/A

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.

N/A

Has TEF changed anything?

Terms of Reference 4: The impact of the scheme on the ability of higher education providers to which the scheme applies to carry out their functions (including in particular their functions relating to teaching and research)

The review will consider the recently published Evaluation of Provider-level TEF 2016-17 (Year 2) as well as other available evidence, but we are also interested in your thoughts.

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

So far, it has meant academics have a greater focus on teaching quality, especially research based academics and the split metrics has raised awareness of the attainment gaps. UEA has introduced an Academic Director for Widening Participation as well as other roles within faculty to address these in the past couple of years which TEF has

influenced the creation of. All schools have also been tasked to make a teaching excellence plan for the year ahead, to improve the areas in the TEF. On a subject level, these have led to improvements in the student experience.

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

Academics have been unhappy with the extra workload required of them which may have impacted on their quality of teaching as they had to spend extra time on the TEF submission rather than improvements.

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

Unknown

If yes, how?

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

Unknown

If yes, how?

Is TEF worth it?

Terms of Reference 5: An assessment of whether the scheme is in the public interest

We are interested to assess whether the scheme provides outputs that are in the public interest and arrives at these outputs in a cost effective way that meets public interest principles. The review intends to consider research about the costs and benefits of provider and subject level TEF, but we are also interested in your views of the range of benefits, and costs, of the scheme to individuals, institutions and society.

23. Does TEF help you as a student/student union/provider/employer/other? Please explain the reasons for your answer.

It has provided some opportunities to suggest improvements to the university, however not many, and these conversations may have happened using the NSS data on its own instead.

It has also been difficult to engage students as they do not see the value in simply justifying previous metrics and would instead like to see improvements instead.

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

a. Provider-level TEF?

Staff time, our Business intelligence unit has spent most of the year working on the TEF.

b. Subject-level TEF?

Academic time, leading to staff dissatisfaction with the process.

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

a. Provider-level TEF?

Increased focus on attainment gaps and improving teaching

b. Subject-level TEF?

Increased focus on improving teaching

Is TEF fair?

Terms of Reference 6: Any other matters that the appointed person considers relevant

The review will also consider whether the overall TEF process delivers effectively for all across a diverse sector.

In the following question, we are particularly interested in views about:

• providers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; • harder to reach applicant/student groups; • part-time students and part time provision; • small providers; • specialist providers and specialist provision; • private providers; • further education colleges providing higher education.

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

Smaller institutions or colleges where there isn't the time and resource to complete TEF are disadvantaged.

Courses where there are less than 30 students will always come out with a Silver initial hypothesis and so disadvantages smaller courses.

It would make it more difficult for new providers or subjects to recruit students.

There has been evidence to suggest that students from a WP background are less likely to choose a gold standard institution as they feel they would not belong.

Providers may be less inclined to increase the number of WP students due to gaps in employment and earnings for WP students.

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

Remove the gold, silver, bronze rating. Do not include LEO or employment data.

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

Larger universities with resource to create strong submissions.

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

On the money (an amendment to the bye laws)

Proposer Oli Gray, Chair of Finance (Activities & Opportunities Officer)

Seconded Jenna Chapman, Deputy Chair of Finance (Undergraduate Education Officer)

Summary

Bye Law 10 is all about the Budget, but not all of it matches up to what actually happens. Union Council approves the Budget once a year by voting on the 'Estimates' (a proposal of how much we think we'll earn and spend in each area in the upcoming year), but this is typically met with low engagement, probably because it's pretty confusing. This motion makes the bye law more realistic to what actually happens, and ensures the estimates are presented to Union Council in a way that's easy for everyone to understand.

Council Notes

1. **10.2** (Estimates) are not presented with the year-on-year context needed for councillors to see changes in expenditure and income over time.
2. Elements of Bye Law 10 contradict with actual methods used to report finances to Union Council, specifically:

10.4: *"A report on expenditure & income against the estimates will be presented to union council at least twice per term on a cycle approved at the first Union Council of the year"*

10.5: *"At the beginning of each academic year, the Student Officer Committee will approve a timetable for budgetary involvement from the Union Council and students that includes:*

- a. *Input from user groups in the commercial areas*
 - b. *Formative discussion at union council that allows councillors to ask questions and suggest ideas*
 - c. *A summative 'Estimates' proposal that council will formally vote on as a policy."*
3. There have been no challenges from Union Council to the budget and estimates in the last 4 years, under current reporting processes.
 4. Finance Committee is a subcommittee of the trustee board and is responsible for reviewing the financial performance of the Union in terms of the Budget and the Annual Accounts.

Council Believes

1. Members of Union Council have a right to challenge the annual Estimates (**10.2**). However, the lack of context presented with Estimates in recent years (particularly how these change over time) has made it difficult for councillors to understand and engage with the budgeting process.
2. Reporting expenditure and income twice on a termly basis as outlined in **10.4** would be restricted to term time due to Union Council dates, whereas income and

expenditure are reviewed quarterly in line with the financial year by Finance Committee. This has not been fulfilled, likely due to the mismatch in dates of financial reporting.

3. Development and Oversight Boards (DOBs) allow elected council members and user groups to review the Union's commercial areas (**10.5a**)

Council Resolves

1. Add "compared to previous years" to the end of **10.2**.
2. Remove **10.4** and renumber accordingly.
3. Amend **10.5** to:

"Union Councillors are involved in the budget setting process through:

- a. Six elected members of Union Council to Development & Oversight Boards
- b. Two elected members of Union Council to Finance Committee.
- c. A finance themed open discussion at the final Union Council meeting of the academic year.
- d. A formal vote on the annual Estimates proposal presented at the final Union Council meeting of the academic year."

and renumber accordingly.

4. Remove "that" at the start of **10.7** and recapitalise accordingly.
5. Amend **10.8** to:

"There will be no change in funding allocated to each area of the Union if the Estimates are approved (until a new set of Estimates are approved) except if there is a significant decline in income."

6. Amend **10.9** to

"Management Committee will be required to report to the next Council in the event that it becomes aware of *significant* deviations from the Estimates arising from performance of different areas of the Union."