

# QAA Viewpoint

## TEF Year 2 and the Technical Consultation: what's next? July 2016

### Background

Having been trailed in both the Conservative Party's 2015 Manifesto and [speeches by Jo Johnson MP](#), Minister for Universities and Science, the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) was introduced formally in the 2015 Green Paper, [Higher Education: teaching excellence, social mobility and student choice](#).

According to the Minister, the new TEF would:

'...include a clear set of outcome-focused criteria and metrics. This should be underpinned by an external assessment process undertaken by an independent quality body from within the existing landscape.'

A [Technical Consultation](#), which closed on 12 July 2016, accompanied the [White Paper](#) that followed, and invited responses from the sector on the implementation and operation of TEF Year 2 (2017-18).

In the month that over 1,200 applications to become a TEF assessor were received by HEFCE, we present a summary of which elements in particular from the Technical Consultation will deliver a successful TEF.

It should be noted that QAA has actively worked with BIS, HEFCE, OFFA and HEA through the design of the TEF, and will continue work with BIS and HEFCE to drive its delivery at an operational level.

### The balance between metrics and provider submissions

A key concern from the sector following the Green Paper centred on a metric-only system distorting the true picture of teaching at a university or college. There was particular concern that metrics could harm diversity, with metrics discouraging innovative practice or support for underrepresented student groups, for example.

The White Paper makes it clear that this was not the intention. A provider submission will be part of the TEF assessment. As it stands, it will not be compulsory for providers to respond to every section in the provider submission - indeed, there is no minimum length, though the maximum is 15 pages. This will ensure the burden on universities and colleges is limited. However, it is important that providers consider carefully how to make the best use of the submission in order to put the metrics into context if necessary, and highlight and exemplify excellent practice across the institution.

## Peer review

Submissions from providers will be reviewed by panels made up of peers. Every submission will be read by working academics, experts in widening participation, and current or recent students: people who know what it takes to provide top-class teaching and learning experiences, or what it's like to be taught in the higher education sector today.

Employer input will also ensure that the TEF meets the needs of employers and the graduates looking to enter the workplace.

## Extending the scope of the TEF to all higher education levels

The TEF should recognise the diversity of the sector in the fullest sense. The consultation proposes including provision such as Higher Nationals and Foundation Degrees as TEF eligible programmes. Thousands of students enrol on a level 4 or 5 programme each year. If we are serious about how we define higher education, and widening access to it, it's important that students on these programmes are included in the TEF.

## Commending the best

The Technical Consultation proposes that, where a provider particularly excels in certain areas, assessment panels would be able to award a commendation. Commendations are easily understood and should help prospective students navigate the choices ahead of them.

However, the award of commendations also has the potential to complicate the assessment process and to increase the time it takes to reach conclusions. For commendations to add value, care must be taken to ensure they are the exception rather than the norm.

## Student involvement in the TEF

Students will be assessors and full members of the assessment panel, which allows for their views to be captured throughout the assessment phase.

Universities and colleges should also consider how they can use the provider submission to present students' views on teaching quality, the learning environment, and student outcomes. Student involvement has been part of the fabric of higher education quality for over a decade. Continuing this approach will help ensure that the TEF findings are credible and meaningful for future students.

## Guidance for providers will be crucial

Many of the uncertainties can be resolved with clear and helpful guidance for providers. We will work with BIS and HEFCE to ensure that providers have the support that is needed to offer the greatest chance of success in the TEF.