



Department
for Education

Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework: lessons learned from Year Two

October 2017

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Executive Summary

Purpose

1. The government has considered the lessons learned from Year Two of the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF), for which outcomes were published on 22 June 2017. The lessons learned exercise has focused on the practical operation of the TEF, in line with the commitments made earlier this year.

Scope

2. The TEF Year Two lessons learned exercise focused on six main issues:
 - Whether the process of application and assessment worked smoothly and effectively;
 - Whether the guidance to providers was clear and understandable;
 - The way in which the metrics were used, in particular the use of significance flags and their role in generating initial hypotheses;
 - The balance of evidence between core metrics and additional evidence;
 - Whether commendations should be introduced for the next round of TEF assessments;
 - The number and names of the different ratings and their initial impact internationally.

Method

3. The lessons learned exercise was conducted by means of:
 - a survey of all UK participating providers;
 - a survey commissioned by Universities UK of its members;
 - feedback from students involved in the provider submission;
 - feedback from the Devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland;
 - feedback from key national stakeholders;
 - feedback from panellists and assessors;
 - desk-based research and analysis of TEF provider metrics;
 - input from providers (and their representatives) who chose not to participate in the trial year, as well as those who did not have sufficient data to receive a full assessment.

Key Findings

4. The operation of Year Two of the TEF has demonstrated that the process has operated in a fair and transparent way.
5. Assessors were able to come to clear and robust findings on the basis of the metrics, provider submissions and guidance; the balance of evidence between metrics and submissions was broadly right; the moderation process worked well; and the results are generally perceived as credible and reflecting teaching excellence across the sector.
6. Statistical analysis of the results has confirmed that there were no significant biases by region, gender, ethnicity, social disadvantage, subject breakdown and research income.
7. We are therefore making no changes to the overall structure or methodology of the TEF, and will be retaining the method and process of assessment, the centrality of peer review, the criteria, the ratings, the core metrics and the use of the provider submission. The lessons learned exercise did, however, also highlight a number of areas for improvement: either refinements to the existing assessment process to ensure excellence is fully recognised, or steps to strengthen the way that TEF holds providers to account for delivering excellent teaching.
8. We will also be changing the name of the scheme to the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF). This reflects feedback that the previous name could be misinterpreted as implying a narrow focus on teaching as it is conducted in lecture halls and seminar rooms, rather than the broad-based assessment of teaching and outcomes that is assessed by TEF. The new name better reflects the fact that the TEF has always had a strong focus on student outcomes and that this focus is being further strengthened through the inclusion of new metrics from the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes dataset.
9. In recognition of the fact that many providers and third parties are currently actively communicating with students about the TEF, to maintain continuity and avoid confusion the acronym for the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework will continue to be 'TEF'. HEFCE will provide updated branding guidance before the results of the next assessment round is released in summer 2018.

Refinements

10. Principal refinements to the assessment process include:
 - a. *Weighting of National Student Survey (NSS) metrics*

The NSS remains a key component of TEF but, in order to achieve a more balanced assessment, the weight of each NSS metric will be halved.

b. Part-time provision

In order to recognise excellence in part-time provision appropriately, we will offer providers with a majority of part-time provision the opportunity to submit an additional page of quantitative information alongside their metrics and refine the assessment procedure for providers with similar numbers of full-time and part-time students.

c. Very high and low absolute values

Whilst benchmarking will remain at the heart of TEF assessment, the flagging and benchmarking system has limitations at the extreme ends of the metrics. We will therefore explicitly mark the top and bottom 10% of absolute values for each metric.¹ These indicators will be taken into account in the calculation of the initial hypothesis, where a provider is not already flagged.

d. Benchmarking factors

We will amend slightly the TEF benchmarks to ensure that they properly reflect all types of disadvantage, in particular by including ethnicity and social disadvantage as benchmarking factors for the non-continuation metric.

Strengthening Accountability

11. The principal ways we will be strengthening the way that TEF holds providers to account for delivering excellent teaching include:

a) Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data

We will include supplementary metrics derived from LEO data in order to exploit the rich data about graduate employment now available. As supplementary metrics, these will not affect the initial hypothesis but will be considered alongside the provider submission.

b) Grade inflation metric

A new supplementary metric on grade inflation will be linked to the existing criterion on 'Rigour and Stretch' to aid assessors in making judgement in this area and allow providers that are taking genuine steps to tackle grade inflation to be recognised for doing so.

c) Allow the Director for Fair Access, or successor, to comment on whether 'gaming' has taken place

¹ Excluding small providers

The Director for Fair Access² will have the opportunity to determine whether ‘gaming’ has taken place (i.e. a significant alteration in a provider’s student profile that involves a reduction in the proportion of students from disadvantaged groups), which in the most severe cases could lead to a provider being disqualified from TEF.

d) Power of referral

Where the assessment process suggests concerns about the underlying quality of a provider, the TEF Chair will have the right to refer the provider to the Office for Students with a recommendation that the OfS should consider an investigation to confirm whether the provider continues to meet baseline quality requirements.

Next Steps

12. The findings of the lessons learned exercise will inform the operation of TEF until such time as the Independent Review concludes. This is expected to be for the assessment rounds taking place in 2017/18 and 2018/19 (‘TEF Years Three and Four’) at provider level.
13. HEFCE and, in future, the Office for Students, will publish annual procedural guidance which will, amongst other things, set out time-dependent elements for the relevant year, such as the dates on which the application window opens and closes.
14. In parallel to this, the subject pilots will take place, as will the consultation on subject-level TEF. The main changes implemented as a result of this lessons learned exercise will also be implemented in the subject pilots that are taking place during 2017/18 and 2018/19. The purpose of these pilots and consultation is not to determine whether to proceed to subject-level assessment, but how to do so in the best and most proportionate way. The first full assessments for subject-level TEF will, as previously announced, take place in academic year 2019/20 (‘TEF Year Five’).

Transition to the Office for Students and Independent Review

15. The Government intends to commence Clause 25 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA) on 1 January 2018, in line with the creation of the Office for Students (OfS). Between January and April 2018, HEFCE will implement the TEF on behalf of the OfS and, from April, the OfS will be solely responsible. This will not cause disruption for providers involved in the process or for students.
16. We therefore anticipate the Independent Review will take place in academic year 2018/19, in line with the timetable set out in the Act. We intend for the Independent Review to report in time to determine the assessment specification for 2019/20, which will also be the first year of assessments at subject level.

² Or, in future, the Director for Fair Access and Participation.

17. The assessments taking place in academic year 2019/20 will therefore constitute the completion of the TEF development process. At this point, subject to the findings of the Independent Review, we anticipate that TEF will move to a five-year cycle: TEF ratings will last for five years, with providers able to reapply for assessment either three, four or five years after their last application. This will deliver value for money for the sector and be a proportionate approach to adopt once the TEF has been independently reviewed.

Chapter One - Introduction

18. The White Paper, [*Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice*](#) (May 2016), reiterated the government's commitment to introduce a Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF). The TEF will provide clear information to students about where the best provision and outcomes can be found and drive up the standard of teaching across the sector.

19. UK higher education has a justly deserved global reputation for excellence. The TEF will build on the existing high standards we expect of providers, assured through the broader quality assurance system, stretching the best and placing pressure on those with variable quality to improve. The TEF will also help to drive UK productivity by ensuring a better match of graduate skills with the needs of employers and the economy. It will ensure better outcomes for all students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

20. As set out in the White Paper and the Teaching Excellence Framework: Year Two specification, the government has undertaken a lessons learned exercise into this first, trial year of the TEF. This continues our approach of partnership working with the HE sector during the development, implementation and refinement of the TEF model.

Purpose of the Lessons Learned exercise

21. The findings of this lessons learned exercise will inform the operation of TEF until such time as the Independent Review concludes. This is expected to be for the assessment rounds taking place in 2017/18 and 2018/19 – i.e. TEF Years Three and Four – at provider level.

22. The changes implemented as a result of this lessons learned exercise will also be implemented in the subject pilots that are taking place during 2017/18 and 2018/19.

Transition to Independent Review

23. As set out in [Section 26](#) of the Higher Education & Research Act 2017, the government has also committed to a statutory independent review of the Teaching

Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework – which will begin within one year of the commencement of Section 25 of that Act.

24. The Government intends to commence Section 25 of the Higher Education and Research Act on 1 January 2018, in line with the creation of the Office for Students (OfS). Between January and March 2018, HEFCE will take forward the implementation on behalf of the OfS; from April 2018 onwards the OfS will be solely responsible for the implementation of the TEF. This will not cause any disruption for providers participating in the process, or for students.
25. In accordance with the provisions set out in HERA, we therefore anticipate that the statutory Independent Review of the TEF will take place in academic year 2018/19 and will report in time to influence the assessment framework for assessments taking place in academic year 2019/20 (TEF Year 5). Depending on the findings of the Independent Review, this will also be the first year in which assessment at subject level is fully integrated into the TEF assessment process. The assessments taking place in academic year 2019/20 will therefore constitute the completion of the TEF development process.
26. The TEF Specification³ published alongside this lessons learned review is not a specification for Year Three, but for all years of provider-level TEF up until the conclusion of the Independent Review, unless it is subsequently updated.
27. Similarly, the Specification published following the Independent Review, which takes into account the findings of that Review and fully integrates subject assessment into TEF, will be a Specification for all future years of TEF, until such time as it is updated.
28. HEFCE and, in future, the Office for Students, will publish annual procedural guidance which will, amongst other things, set out time-dependent elements for the relevant year, such as the dates on which the application window opens and closes.

Scope of the exercise

29. This lessons learned exercise covered all higher education providers participating in TEF Year Two - Higher Education Institutions, Further Education Colleges and Alternative Providers. Student representatives who were involved in their institution's provider submission were also asked to participate.
30. The TEF Year Two lessons learned exercise focused on six main issues:

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-excellence-and-student-outcomes-framework-specification>

- a) Whether the process of application and assessment worked smoothly and effectively;
- b) Whether the guidance to providers was clear and understandable;
- c) The way in which the metrics were used, in particular the use of significance flags and their role in generating initial hypotheses;
- d) The balance of evidence between core metrics and additional evidence;
- e) Whether commendations should be introduced for the next round of TEF assessments;
- f) The number and names of the different ratings and their initial impact internationally.

31. Other significant issues raised by those spoken to were also considered.

32. This lessons learned exercise considered the practical operation of TEF Year Two, for which providers applied by January 2017 and for which outcomes were published on 22 June 2017. Year Two of the TEF was delivered by HEFCE, working with the QAA, on behalf of the government. As set out in the White Paper, TEF Year Two was a trial year.

Method

33. The lessons learned exercise was conducted by means of:

- a survey of participating providers
- feedback from students involved in the provider submission
- a survey conducted by Universities UK of participating members
- feedback from the Devolved Administrations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland
- feedback from key national stakeholders
- feedback from panellists and assessors, employer and WP experts
- desk-based research and analysis of TEF provider metrics

34. The government also sought input from providers (and their representatives) who chose not to participate in the trial year, as well as those who did not have sufficient data to be eligible for an assessed award.

35. DfE asked the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to lead, with their input, on the survey of providers on the process and operation of TEF Year Two. DfE also asked HEFCE to work jointly with them to collect feedback from assessors and panellists, including the Chair, through focus groups.

36. HEFCE surveyed all participating providers. Overall 221 responses were received,

representing 73% of providers contacted. See Annex A and Annex B for copies of the survey questions. Annex C provides a breakdown of respondents and a summary of the quantitative responses.

37. DfE and HEFCE then conducted a number of follow up phone interviews with a sample of student representatives who had been involved in their provider submission – to explore different models for effective student engagement.
38. After the Year Two results had been published, DfE and HEFCE jointly facilitated three focus groups of assessors and panellists. These were held on 19th and 22nd June 2017 for assessors and 23rd June 2017 for panellists. The agenda for each focus group is provided in Annex D.
39. In all, 33 stakeholders attended the focus groups, providing a broadly representative mix of participants, including student representatives and members from different sized institutions, provider type and UK nations.
40. Assessors and panellists who were not able to attend a focus group were invited to provide feedback by email to DfE.
41. To complement the provider surveys and the assessor/panel focus groups, DfE held a series of discussions with key national stakeholders and the Devolved Administrations in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales – to seek their views on the issues in paragraph 2. See Annex E for a detailed list of organisations consulted. Some stakeholders chose to provide written feedback and, in particular, the lessons learned review has made use of a survey of members carried out by Universities UK.
42. The final piece of evidence for the lessons learned exercise was a detailed analysis of TEF metrics and provider data by DfE analysts. This included exploration of: the breakdown of TEF results in each category by provider type and geographical location.
43. Analysts also looked into:
 - the issues of regional variations in metrics and results;
 - correlation of individual metrics with final results;
 - difference between the initial hypotheses and final awards;
 - the issues of high absolute values; and
 - how the process affected providers with a majority or significant minority of part-time students.

Linked Documents

44. This document is one of a suite of documents being published setting out the government response to the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework Year Two.

45. Alongside this document DfE are publishing:

- Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework Specification October 2017 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-excellence-and-student-outcomes-framework-specification>)
- Analysis of metrics/outcomes in the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework: Research Report, October 2017 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-excellence-framework-analysis-of-metrics>)
- Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework: analysis of final award: Research Report, October 2017 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-excellence-framework-analysis-of-final-award>)
- Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework example workbook (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-excellence-and-student-outcomes-framework-specification>)

46. HEFCE will be publishing:

- TEF application guidance (October); and
- Benchmarking Review (November).

Chapter Two – whether the overall TEF process was robust and fair

Summary of results from TEF Year Two

47. This section presents the results from TEF year Two by award providers received, provider type and region in which the provider is located.

48. Overall, 295 higher education providers from across the UK participated in the TEF. Within this figure:

- 231 providers applied for a TEF assessment (resulting in a gold, silver or bronze award)
- The remaining 64 providers opted in for a provisional award.
- 134 providers were higher education institutions
- 106 providers were further education colleges
- 55 providers were alternative providers.

49. The 231 providers that applied for a TEF assessment received the following awards.⁴

Table 1: distribution of TEF awards

Gold	Silver	Bronze
26% (59 providers)	50% (116 providers)	24% (56 providers)

50. The spread of results across different types of provider is shown in Table 2 below. The majority of alternative providers that took part in Year Two received a provisional award.

Table 2: distribution of TEF awards by provider type

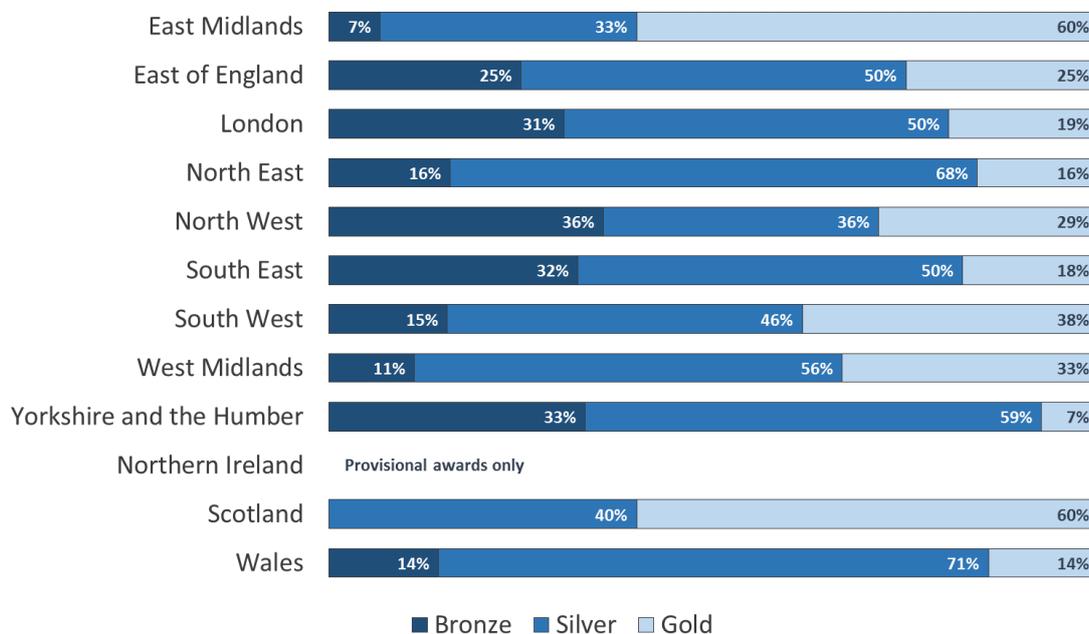
Provider types	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Provisional
Higher Education Institutions	43	67	24	0
Further Education Colleges	14	46	31	15
Alternative Providers	2	3	1	49

⁴ This analysis was conducted prior to the outcomes of the appeals process.

51. The final ratings by region can be viewed in Figure 1. The wide spread of results across the regions demonstrates that excellent provision can be found nationwide.

Figure 1: TEF year Two awards by region of provider

TEF Year Two awards by region of provider



Source: Department for Education, 2017

Analysis of the results based on provider characteristics

52. This section presents analysis of the relationship between provider characteristics and the final award received to investigate whether a provider was more likely to receive a certain award due to their underlying characteristics. It draws upon a mixture of government analysis and analysis conducted by Universities UK (UUK) in their review of the TEF Year Two.

Provider and student characteristics:

53. Key findings from analysis conducted by DfE analysts and peer reviewed by Professor Gavin Shaddick, Chair of Data Science and Statistics at the University of Exeter showed that:

- a) There was no statistically significant difference (after adjusting for the effects of other characteristics) between the proportion of bronze, silver or gold awards between the different provider types (Higher Education Institutes (HEIs),

Further Education Colleges and Alternative Providers);

- b) The proportion of bronze awards in HEIs with low entry tariff is higher than in those with high entry tariff but the difference is not statistically significant;
- c) The proportion of bronze awards is higher for providers in London/South East area compared to providers located elsewhere (after adjusting for the effects of other characteristics) but the difference is not statistically significant;
- d) The proportion of gold awards is lower for providers in London/South East area compared to providers located elsewhere (after adjusting for the effects of other characteristics) but the difference is not statistically significant;
- e) There is no evidence that having a higher percentage of students from deprived areas has an adverse effect on getting a gold award;
- f) For providers with a high percentage of older students (aged over 30 at start of study) who are local students, the proportion of bronze awards is significantly lower than for those who have high percentage of older students who are not local students;
- g) The student characteristics, ethnicity; gender and disability, are not statistically associated with TEF award type.

54. The analysis is published at <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/teaching-excellence-framework> and consists of:

- Analysis of metrics/outcomes in the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework: Research Report, October 2017 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-excellence-framework-analysis-of-metrics>)
- Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework: analysis of final award: Research Report, October 2017 (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-excellence-framework-analysis-of-final-award>)

55. These findings are consistent with those of the UUK report⁵. This found that:

“there was no significant correlation between TEF outcomes and the size of undergraduate student population; study mode (full-time versus part-time); proportion of black and minority ethnic (BME) students; domicile of undergraduate

⁵ Review of the teaching excellence framework year 2: process, results and next steps, UUK. <http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2017/review-of-the-teaching-excellence-framework-year-2.pdf>

students; subject breakdown by undergraduate student population; total research income; research income as a percentage of total income; Times Higher Research Excellence Framework (REF) grade point average and rank; the proportion of students from different POLAR3 (the participation of local areas) quintiles; the age of the institution; offer rate; and number of applications.”

56. UUK did find that institutions with a higher average entry tariff were slightly more likely to receive a gold award, and that institutions with a higher proportion of students living at home or recruited locally were more likely to receive a bronze. The report noted that this relationship was not straightforward, as the average entry tariff was found to be inversely correlated with the proportion of students living at home, and suggested that one reason for this effect could be that institutions with the highest quality teaching were able to recruit higher tariff students.

Government Response

57. We are very pleased to note that our detailed analysis showed that the TEF outcomes were not affected by the characteristics of students (ethnicity, gender, disability or background), nor the region where a provider was located.
58. We have noted the correlations between final TEF outcome and provider type, mode of study and proportion of mature and local students. We have taken these findings into account in assessing evidence from the lessons learned exercise in the subsequent chapters of this report and in considering refinements to the process and metrics for next year and beyond.

Chapter Three – Eligibility and Participation

Background

59. In designing the Teaching and Student Outcomes Excellence Framework for Year Two, we set eligibility requirements which would, where possible:

- enable participation from all types of higher education provider and from all parts of the United Kingdom; whilst
- build upon existing arrangements to assure quality and standards in each part of the UK; and
- reflect our ambition to integrate a commitment to widening participation; and
- ensure that assessors had sufficient evidence to make an assessment.

60. Overall, there was good participation in TEF Year Two – from 295 higher education providers from across the UK. Within this figure:

- 231 providers applied for a TEF assessment (resulting in a gold, silver or bronze award);
- The remaining 64 providers opted in for a provisional award;
- 134 providers were higher education institutions;
- 106 providers were further education colleges; and
- 55 providers were alternative providers.

61. In addition to seeking feedback from providers who participated in TEF Year Two, we undertook to explore reasons for non-participation – by consulting with providers, stakeholder representatives and the Devolved Administrations.

Lessons Learned Feedback

62. Our feedback revealed that those who did not participate fell into three main categories:

a. Providers with insufficient metrics

This does not include the 64 providers who applied for the provisional award.

b. Providers who were eligible but chose not to apply

This includes the Open University and some providers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, as well as some further education colleges.

c. Providers who were ineligible because of legislative limitations

This consisted of a small number of alternative providers in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

a. Providers with insufficient metrics

63. In Year Two, we set the requirement for a “full” set of metrics as: three years of reportable data for each of the core metrics for their majority mode of provision (full or part-time). We also made provision for providers with one or two years of data to receive a reward for a reduced duration (to reflect their data).
64. As stated above, 64 providers with insufficient metrics showed their interest in TEF by opting for a provisional award. However, not all of those with insufficient metrics considered a provisional award a sufficient incentive to take part in TEF.
65. We understand that many of these providers will become eligible to apply for an assessed TEF award in Year Three and Year Four.

b. Providers who were eligible for TEF but chose not to apply

66. In England the only university who chose not to apply for TEF was the Open University (OU). Their Vice-Chancellor has said that they chose not to apply in Year Two because there were issues with how their particular student population fitted with TEF metrics.
67. We recognise that there are refinements that can be made in terms of assessing providers with a high proportion of part-time students and are introducing some changes in this area (see Chapter Six). Not all further education colleges chose to take part. Feedback has indicated that this was for a range of reasons, including focusing on other priorities, not requiring the financial incentive of an inflationary fee uplift or not requiring the reputational advantage due to recruiting from a small and local area.
68. Although UK higher education has many common features, higher education policy is devolved in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. We have tried to ensure, where possible, that providers outside England are able to apply for TEF if they so choose – and the other Government Ministers in Scotland and Northern Ireland confirmed they were content for non-English providers to apply for Year Two. In Wales, it was a matter for individual providers whether or not they wished to participate in TEF.
69. In Year Two, five providers from Scotland and seven from Wales applied for full TEF awards. Two providers from Northern Ireland applied for provisional awards.
70. Reasons cited for non-participation include a lack of a financial incentive, a preference to engage with their own nation’s quality assessment arrangements and, in some cases, the fact that the provider in question is recruiting primarily from a regional pool and so does not require the reputational benefits.

c. Providers who were ineligible because of legislative limitations

71. Higher Education is a devolved matter. As such, the three devolved administrations operate under a different regulatory regime. Providers have contacted the TEF team

to highlight where they may be ineligible, due to the regulatory regime in place in the Devolved Administration.

Government Response

72. Feedback from the TEF assessors and panellists has confirmed that having at least one year's worth of data in each metric enabled them to make consistent assessments of the Initial Hypothesis. We will therefore maintain this requirement. We anticipate that for TEF Year Three and Year Four many providers, including those who applied for a provisional award in Year Two, will become eligible to apply for an assessed award. We will not therefore make any change to this eligibility requirement.
73. Further, the Lessons Learned review did not highlight any evidence that we need to change any of the other eligibility requirements.
74. We recognise that, under the pre-HERA eligibility requirements, some providers outside of England are ineligible for TEF. It is a matter for the Devolved Administrations to determine which providers in their respective nations they wish to regulate and how they wish to do so.
75. Whilst HERA makes it legally possible for these providers to participate in TEF in the future, there is no obligation on the OfS to include them where it would be inappropriate to do so. We consider it important that confirmation that a provider has met the relevant national quality assurance requirements where they are subject to them, and that a commitment to access and participation remain important parts of the eligibility requirements for TEF. We propose therefore, to only accept providers into TEF where the regulatory authorities in the relevant nation are able to provide such assurances.

Chapter Four - Whether the guidance to providers was clear and understandable

Background

76. The evidence on this issue was primarily gathered from a survey of participating providers (for both the full TEF award and the provisional TEF award). DfE asked HEFCE to lead on these surveys.
77. All UK HE providers that participated in TEF were invited to complete a survey. For the assessed award, 171 out of 234 providers (73%) responded and 50 out of 67 (75%) providers opting-in for a provisional award responded to the survey (see Annex C for breakdown of responses).

Survey Responses

Overall

78. There was a good deal of very positive feedback on the guidance and support provided.
79. Four overarching themes for further improvement were suggested, which were repeated in many of the qualitative comments. These were around:
- The tight timing of the process;
 - The complexity of data and metrics;
 - Resource limitations in providers (including on metrics/data);
 - Exacerbation of the above issues for smaller providers (especially some FECs and APs), some of whom thought that some of the guidance was rather HEI-centric.

Guidance

80. Overall, there was considerable positive feedback about the guidance. Respondents noted its helpfulness and clarity. Providers appreciated that the guidance was being updated/supplemented in response to sector feedback. They also valued the clarification provided through the briefing events and helpdesks.

“While it would have been useful to have all of the Guidance in one go, we understand that, as this was the first iteration of the TEF exercise this necessitated further additional guidance following discussions with the sector which we were very pleased to be a part of.”

81. All survey respondents indicated they had used one, other or both of the two key guidance documents in preparing for the TEF – the DFE’s TEF Year Two Specification and/or HEFCE’s TEF Year Two Additional Guidance.
82. Respondents were asked to rate the timeliness, level of detail and clarity of guidance documents. Overall, 70% of respondents thought the guidance was clear, 71% thought it sufficiently detailed but only 48% thought it was timely.
83. On timeliness, there was quite a variance between the two surveys and by provider type. Provisional award respondents were broadly happy with the timing - with 74% agreeing or strongly agreeing it was timely. Among assessed award respondents, 62% of FEC/AP respondents, but only 37% of HEIs, agreed/strongly agreed that the publication of the guidance was timely. Almost half of HEIs (48%) strongly disagreed or disagreed that the publication was timely.
84. Respondents were asked to specify any aspects that were missing or not sufficiently clear or detailed. Eighty-one respondents provided qualitative comments, which mainly described difficulties with the timing. Some providers commented that this limited their scope for engagement with institutional committees, students and partners - particularly where TEF applicants were the teaching (but not the registering) institution.

“That subject-level TEF is now to be subject to two years’ of trialling is welcome, and certainly future iterations should provide institutions with sufficient time to plan and resource their submissions.”

85. In terms of practical usage, feedback on the layout was generally positive but the need to ‘flick’ between DfE and HEFCE sections for guidance on the submission content was considered unhelpful.
86. The length of the guidance attracted some comment, with demand expressed for simpler and shorter guidance for non-expert audiences, notably students. Some FEC and AP respondents found the guidance HEI-centric. The issue of (lack of) specialist resource exacerbated these concerns.

“Most of the advice was aimed at HEIs with large provision and additional guidance for FE colleges with HE provision would have been very useful”.

87. In terms of the guidance content, the common themes were a desire for more information on:

- the fee link;
- the assessment process, especially the weighting of the submission and the metrics in the assessment process;
- the use of contextual data;
- the content of the submission (particularly the audience for the submission and whether it should be retrospective or current); and

- the detailed composition of the benchmarks.

88. Provisional award applicants requested additional detail on the specifics of the provisional award and clarification on its name and status. They would also welcome guidance on presenting Widening Access and Participation information in a TEF context.

Metrics

89. Most applicants (for the assessed award) agreed that the metrics data were received in time to inform the submission (60% agreed/strongly agreed and 24% disagreed/strongly disagreed). There was no significant variance in response by provider type.

90. 15% of respondents had considered making a data amendment request and, of these, 17% reported experiencing barriers to the data amendment process.

91. Applicants were also asked about the usefulness of the metrics support available. The results show the support most (technical documentation and webinar) and least accessed (metrics helpdesk) by providers. The feedback on the support that was accessed was broadly positive, as presented in the overall results in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Usefulness of metrics data support (overall) The following resources were available to support your understanding of the TEF metrics data. To what extent do you agree that each of the resources were useful?

	Did not use	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Individualised student data files	18%	0%	2%	27%	41%	13%
TEF metrics technical documentation	4%	0%	4%	18%	59%	15%
TEF metrics webinar	7%	4%	6%	21%	49%	12%
HEFCE's metrics help desk	48%	1%		20%	21%	9%

92. There was also some feedback on how specific metrics were used, particularly a suggestion by some that the framework placed too high an emphasis on the NSS, the time-lag in the data and difficulty of linking metrics and benchmarks back to institutional practice

Support

93. Providers were asked to rate the usefulness of each of the resources they used to support the TEF application process. The most useful were: Year Two provider briefing events; TEF team email updates; HEFCE's TEF webpages; supplementary guidance for assessors/panellists; and TEF Year Two Questions and Answers.

94. Providers also accessed other sources of support such as UUK and GuildHE guidance, sector conferences, professional networks and HEA briefings.

95. Provisional award applicants highlighted the usefulness of the one to one support they received from the TEF team and the Alternative Providers team. They felt this dedicated support was necessary for APs, since they thought the guidance and process was aimed at mainstream public sector institutions.

96. Providers were asked for suggestions on how to improve the support on offer, particularly with respect to advising students. Respondents suggested student involvement could be enhanced in future by:

- making available guidance on the panel decision making process;
- creating student-appropriate guidance to TEF and student-focussed webinars;

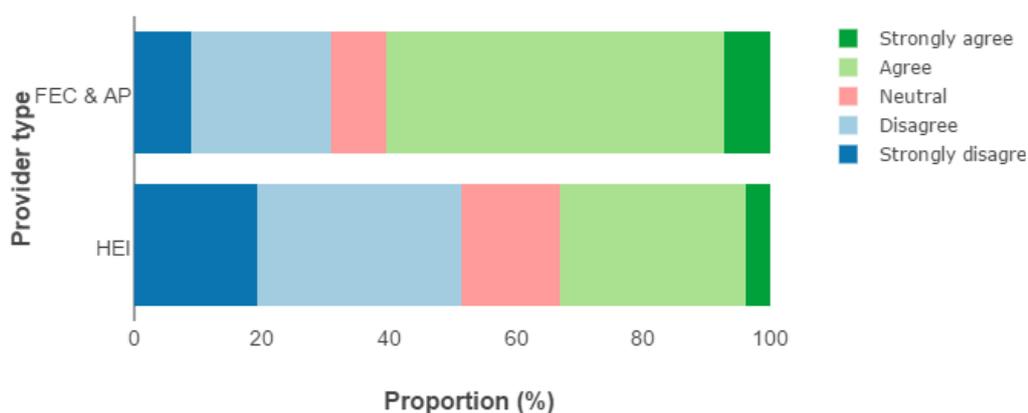
- informing parents about TEF results; and
- encouraging providers to promote TEF on their website and notice boards.

Provider Submission

97. Respondents were divided on whether the time available to prepare the submission was sufficient - 44% of respondents thought the time was sufficient and 43% disagreed or strongly disagreed. There were also patterns within these headline figures by provider type.

98. Proportionately more FECs and APs (60%) than HEI respondents (33%) agreed or strongly agreed that the time to prepare the submission was sufficient. By contrast, the majority of HEIs (51%) disagreed or strongly disagreed the time was sufficient, as illustrated in Figure 2 below.

Figure 2: The time available to prepare the provider submission was sufficient-by provider type



*Source: TEF Y2 Lessons Learned Survey
 Note: Further education colleges (FEC) & alternative providers (AP) responses are combined.
 103 higher education institutions (HEI) and 68 FEC's & AP's are included in this sample.*

99. Providers were also asked about their ideal page limit for the provider submission. The vast majority (74%) of the 149 responses indicated that fifteen pages was about right for a provider level submission. A significant proportion of respondents suggested some flexibility would be helpful, for example by using word count rather than number of pages to allow for the inclusion of graphics, or to have a percentage leeway on the maximum, or to allow extra pages for appendices.

100. Of the minority of responses that suggested a change in the limit, there was no clear consensus. Some suggested more, some less and most commented that it should depend on the size and complexity of the provider. Other respondents said it would need reviewing for a subject-level TEF and that no comment on the length was sensible until the outcomes of the exercise were known.

101. Opinions over whether provider submissions should be templated in future were strong and divided – with 52% of HEIs not wanting a template and 66% of FECs and APs wanting one. The vast majority of the qualitative comments, however, were strongly against a standard template.
102. Qualitative comments about any constraints experienced in making the provider submission again echoed earlier themes around the limited time available, the resource involved and the desirability of more information on the balance in assessment between the metrics and submission.

Student Engagement

103. 79% of respondents indicated that students had participated in developing their provider submission. Those that had not involved students indicated this was due to: the NUS boycott, time constraints and already having a good grasp of the student view through existing mechanisms.
104. One hundred and thirty-five assessed award respondents provided qualitative comments on how students had participated. Broadly these fell into two camps, the first where providers had mainstreamed TEF into existing student engagement mechanisms and the second where discrete TEF mechanisms had been developed. Examples included focus groups, surveys, building into the curriculum and some independent student union activity. Many providers had taken a multi-pronged approach to student engagement. The quotes provide a flavour of the responses received.

“Students were asked to respond to specific TEF related questions via an on-line survey and via meetings with their representatives.”

“Following endorsement to proceed with a TEF submission by the relevant University committees, all of which have 2 or more student representatives as full members, we prepared the TEF narrative together with our student representatives”

105. In contrast, 72% of provisional award survey respondents stated that students did not participate in the providers’ decision to opt in for a provisional TEF award. A variety of reasons were cited for not engaging with students, commonly limited time, the provisional nature of the award, the decision being made at a strategic level and little demonstrable student interest.

Government Response

106. We would like to acknowledge the excellent support provided by HEFCE during TEF Year Two – in producing their additional guidance and in their briefing and

support for providers. It is clear that, overall, the guidance provided allowed the majority of providers to submit high quality and well-evidenced submissions.

107. We recognise that some providers felt that the time in which to complete submissions was tight; however, it was broadly consistent with the recommended time-frame to respond to a government consultation and, moreover, appears to have been adequate given the high quality of submissions was received. A necessary constraint on the process is the need to conclude assessment by early summer, in order to have maximum impact on the student application cycle and ensure that students considering higher education options have the latest information available to them. We also note that, in future rounds of the TEF, providers will be able to, if they wish to, begin preparing to apply in advance of the application window formally opening. We will therefore not be making substantive changes to the timetable.
108. On the number of guidance documents, we will use the experience and feedback of Year Two to reflect on the number of documents issued and the content of each. We can confirm that there will be two main documents – the DFE policy specification for TEF Year Three and HEFCE procedural guidance – and we will seek to reduce or eliminate the number of supplementary publications.
109. We have also asked HEFCE to review how smaller providers can be best supported in their applications for Year Three provider level. For example, whether there may be additional/specific provider briefing events, tailored guides or additional support or information to help understand the metrics.

Chapter Five - Whether the process of assessment worked smoothly and effectively

Background

110. In June 2017, DfE invited both assessors and panellists to attend roundtable events, providing an opportunity to feedback key messages, and suggestions, on all aspects of the assessment process.
111. Most of the feedback on the issue of assessment was gathered from these focus groups discussions.

Lessons Learned Feedback

Timing and Workload

112. Overwhelmingly, assessors and panellists thought that the process of assessment was robust and effective. They were confident that they were able to make clear, defensible judgements in line with the guidance based on the evidence provided to them.
113. The workload however was heavy and intense and they would like advance notice of how the workload will be phased and to be provided with better estimates of their expected workloads and timing.
114. It was felt that the timetable pressure was due largely to it being the first time it had ever been done and therefore was developmental in some respects. This pressure would naturally be alleviated in future by the learning from the trial year. It was suggested that there should be continuity of assessors between years to ensure learning was shared.
115. Despite timing concerns, the overall consensus was that the caseload of 12 submissions assigned to each panellist and assessor was about right. Assessors and panellists reported that they became more efficient in assessing the metrics as they became more practised but that there were no time gains in assessing submissions, as the narratives were so varied.

Job Roles

116. In addition to more time, assessors and panellists also felt that the process could be further refined by providing greater clarity on some aspects of their respective roles and the division of labour between them at particular points in the process.

Trajectory

117. In Year Two, the guidance stated that trajectory between the Year splits should not be considered as a trajectory, and the presence or absence of a trend should form no part of assessment. Metrics should be considered as a 'snapshot' of performance aggregated over a given period.
118. Feedback from assessors and panellists was that where a trajectory occurred, and where provider submissions referred to it, the positive trajectory could in future be used as evidence that the policies referred to in the submission were actually working. There was a suggestion that whilst trajectories themselves should not be rewarded, the guidance could be rephrased to make clear that this was an acceptable use of the metrics. There was consensus that trajectory should only be considered within the three year TEF period and not as a predictive measure of trend.

Criteria

119. Year Two guidance instructed assessors and panellists to use evidence from the core and split metrics, supplemented by additional evidence in the provider submission to assess performance against a set of common criteria to determine a provider's TEF rating. Providers were not required to address each criterion.
120. Assessors and panellists offered differing opinions on whether addressing each criterion should be made mandatory. However, some panellists suggested that the criteria should be made more explicit in the guidance that provider submissions would be assessed against the criteria.

Contextual Data

121. Assessors and panellists were supplied with a provider's contextual data (including size, location and student population) to aid their understanding of the nature and operating context of the provider, as well as aiding the interpretation of core and split metrics. Almost all assessors and panellists found this contextual information useful in providing meaning and 'richness' to the metrics.
122. A few specific suggestions for improvement that were raised were:
- a. that the information on the proportion of students that were 'local' was replaced with the proportion of commuter students, as this was a more useful measure in understanding the context of the provider
 - b. to remove, or split out contextual data that covers out of TEF scope provision, particularly non-credit bearing provision

c. to split 'unknown' entry qualifications into home and international students

123. Assessors and panellists were also supplied with sector and national contextual data to support the interpretation of employment/destination measures, some of which were provided in map form. This information was used to support interpretation of performance but did not itself form the basis of any judgement. Assessors and panellists suggested specific improvements to the presentation and type of information, such that:

- a. maps would be improved with greater colour definition and consistent usage of percent and provider location labels
- b. that the national contextual statements follow the same templates
- c. the granularity of employment information be increased through the use of an authoritative source of information on regional employment/social deprivation mobility.

124. Additionally, assessors and panellists recommended providing a single definition of 'widening participation'.

Available Support (widening participation and employer experts, TEF officers, and HEFCE TEF team)

125. Assessors and panellists felt that the involvement of Widening Participation (WP) and Employer experts enhanced the consideration of issues and should be retained but with further thought given to their roles and inputs. There was no consensus on the shape of the ideal role.

126. Assessors and panellists found the metrics webinar particularly useful and praised both the HEFCE TEF team, the analytical support and the TEF officers for their high level of support and fast response rate.

127. With regard to providers that had merged after the submission deadline, panellists noted that it would be useful to have sight of a merged data set as early in the process as possible to aid assessment.

Student Involvement

128. Another area of discussion during the assessor and panellist roundtable events was the involvement of students.

129. Student assessors and panellists were resoundingly commended by the academic assessors and panellists and analysis also showed there was no systematic difference in the judgements reached by students and academics. It was agreed that the ratio of one student to two academics undertaking the assessment should be

maintained. Increased student representation on the panel should also be considered.

130. There was some discussion around how to engage and involve students in the provider submission. Year Two guidance stated that no provider would be disadvantaged in the event of non-cooperation by their students or Student Union. Recognising the NUS position on TEF and the variable student voice mechanisms (or lack of) in different types of HE provider, most assessors felt that student involvement in the provider submission should not be mandatory.
131. Some assessors and panellists also concluded that it could be beneficial to publish further guidance for providers on how to engage students throughout the process and how to feature the student voice within provider submissions, along with clearer guidance for assessors and panellists on the treatment of evidence of student engagement within the assessment process.

Conflicts of Interest (COI)

132. Assessors and panellists were required to declare any conflicts of interest held with any UK HE providers to avoid them being involved in the assessment of those providers. This principle was strictly adhered to. However, the categories of conflict of interest were extensive, for example validation arrangements, or having applied for a job, meaning some assessors were excluded from assessing long lists of providers even though that individual had no personal knowledge or involvement with the providers.
133. A suggested improvement by assessors and panellists was to split the COI's into two categories; major and minor conflicts. For minor conflicts, such as applying, but being unsuccessful, for a job at a provider, you would not be required to leave the room when discussions were taking place.

IT Issues

134. Assessors and panellists did experience some technical problems which hindered the process, such as poor compatibility with some browsers, notably that the workbooks could not be downloaded from iPads and tablets.
135. The uploading and saving process was clunky and users were required to change passwords too frequently. Assessors and panellists also commented that it would have been desirable to have a safe platform to contact other assessors and share comments and questions in the first stage of independent assessment.

Recruitment Process

136. For future years the Panel membership should reflect the range of providers taking part. For example; there should be an increased number of AP and FEC representation to reflect the likely increase in AP and FEC's who are eligible for Year Three.
137. For future years it should be made clearer that not all of the assessors and panellists initially recruited would be required for the actual assessment stages.

Government response

138. We are pleased to note that the overall conclusion from assessors and the Panel was that the process worked very well and resulted in robust assessments.
139. We are working with HEFCE to identify where future TEF guidance can be made even better - for both providers or assessors. This includes the following key changes:
- **Non-continuation** will be presented as 'continuation', so that all metrics point in the same direction (i.e. higher values are positive);
 - **Population sizes** will be displayed alongside all core metrics;
 - **Entry qualifications** will be split by home and international students in the 'unknown' category;
 - **Non-credit** bearing provision will be split out from the contextual data;
 - **Trajectory** guidance will be clarified further;
 - **Terminology** will be refined where possible to avoid confusion and enhance the clarity of guidance;
 - **Panel membership** will be rebalanced slightly to increase representation of FE colleges and alternative providers to be more reflective of the likely range of providers taking part in future years;
 - **Experts' role** on the panel will be clarified and input from employment experts enhanced;
 - **Conflicts of interest** will be split into major and minor conflicts to allow for a less unwieldy procedure to deal with minor conflicts; and
 - **Contextual map** presentation will be improved to increase accessibility.

Chapter Six - The way in which the metrics were used

Background

140. As described in the previous chapter, the focus groups of assessors and panellists discussed how they used the core metrics and split metrics in producing their Initial Hypothesis - and in considering this alongside the Provider Submission in producing the holistic assessment.

Overall Process Feedback

141. Assessors and panellists confirmed that the process worked. The consideration of core metrics and the Flags, alongside the split metrics and contextual data, allowed the Initial Hypothesis to be determined robustly.

142. They confirmed that providers did 'move' through this process – and that consideration of the metrics highlighted issues for them to explore through the provider submission.

143. Although a large group of providers defaulted to Silver at step 1a, this wasn't seen as a problem – ensured that appropriate consideration was given to the provider submission.

144. It was acknowledged that the metrics were complex – and suggested that there could be masterclasses or additional training offered to assessors without a background in handling advanced data.

145. There was a long discussion over whether step 1a should be conducted automatically – but the consensus was against this. It was felt that the process of working through the detail individually and in groups helped them to begin the process of assessment, discussion and judgement.

Major Issues for exploration

146. Since Metrics are such an important component of the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework, feedback from assessors and panellists identified a number of issues for consideration – alongside wider sector feedback and detailed analysis of the TEF data and metrics by DfE analysts (supported by HEFCE).

147. The remainder of this chapter covers the following issues in detail:

- a. Very high and low absolute values
- b. National Student Survey metrics, including weighting;
- c. Regional data effects (including London)
- d. Benchmarking;
- e. Part-time issues

148. The government response is included in each section because of the complexity of the issues.

Very High and Low Absolute Values

Background

149. Some stakeholders have argued that the benchmarking method disadvantages providers that perform very strongly in absolute terms against the metrics. There is evidence to support that perspective as, based on the Year Two metrics, providers with very high absolute scores are less likely to achieve a flag (positive or negative).

150. There is a clear causal mechanism why this may be the case. In particular, the materiality condition for achieving a flag – that a provider exceed its benchmark by 2% - is a clear constraint at the high end: reducing marginal gains mean that it is easier to improve a metric from 60% to 62% than from 96% to 98%. Furthermore, there may be an upper limit beyond which a metric cannot, or should not, be improved further. To take the example of Non-Continuation, a provider should be able to fail poor performing students and should not be disincentivized from doing so. Similarly, some students may be forced to discontinue their course due to severe illness or death – matters outside the control of the provider.

151. From a student perspective, some have also suggested that absolute measures may be more important, as if – for example – satisfaction rates on Assessment and Feedback, or progression to Highly Skilled Employment and Further Study are very high, this is what will matter most to an individual student. Others have raised concerns about very low absolute results where, even if the provider is on benchmark, in practice a large number of students will not be receiving positive outcomes.

152. On the other hand, the strong feedback received from the majority of stakeholders and assessors was that, whilst these points had validity, it was critically important not to undermine the benchmarking mechanism that lies at the heart of the TEF.

153. Benchmarking is essential if providers are to compete on a level playing field, allowing assessors to recognise excellence wherever it is found. It enables assessors are able to recognise the ‘value-add’ by a provider, the element of a student or graduate’s performance that is due to the teaching at that provider, particularly on metrics where it is known that other factors, such as gender, ethnicity and prior attainment, have an impact on the results. Benchmarking also plays an important role in helping to ensure that providers do not have an incentive to ‘game’ the TEF by preferentially recruiting students from more advantaged backgrounds.

154. In Year Two, panellists and assessors were able to take into account absolute values as well as benchmarked values; however, absolute values did not play a role in the initial calculations that form the initial hypothesis; and in subsequently

considering absolute values there was no guidance as to what did, or did not, constitute a very high or very low absolute value. Feedback indicated that some assessors felt that if absolute values are to be an element of their judgement, a more structured approach would be helpful.

155. A number of possible methods were suggested to address the limitations of the benchmarking mechanism at the very high and very low ends of each metric. These included setting a 'target' for each metric, explicitly indicating the top and bottom X%, strengthening the guidance to assessors and using a sliding materiality threshold that varied depending on the absolute value.

Government response

156. Government recognises that, whilst benchmarking should and will remain at the heart of TEF assessment, the flagging and benchmarking system does have limitations at the extreme ends of the metrics. It further considers that in the interests of transparency and objectivity, it would be desirable to recognise this more systematically than was the case in Year Two. In considering how to do this, we have been mindful that any change should:

- a. Not undermine the primacy of benchmarking within TEF assessment.
- b. continue to recognise outstanding teaching at providers which take large numbers of disadvantaged students
- c. recognise only the very highest and lowest of absolute values.

157. We have therefore decided that – in addition to the current system of flagging, based on benchmarks –we will explicitly mark the top and bottom 10% of absolute values⁶ for each metric in each mode of provision. These indicators will be visible on the core metrics page (indicated by a star for the top 10% and an exclamation mark for the bottom 10%) and will be taken into account by panellists and assessors when forming the initial hypothesis.

158. Where a metric is flagged, the flag will form the basis of determining the initial hypothesis. However, where a metric is not flagged, a high or low absolute value will be treated as, respectively, a positive or negative flag in that metric. To ensure providers maintain their focus on achieving positive outcomes for all, a high absolute value will not impact the initial hypothesis if there is a negative flag in any split for that metric.

159. Assessors will continue to be able to consider all evidence holistically and exercise their academic judgement accordingly in the subsequent stages of assessment.

⁶ Excluding small providers

National Student Survey (NSS) weighting

Background

160. During the passage of HERA, significant concern was expressed in Parliament about the use, or overuse, of the NSS metrics in the TEF. This concern has been echoed by significant numbers of sector stakeholders from all parts of the sector. Critics argue, variously, that:

- the NSS is not a strong reflection of teaching quality;
- that students are not able to accurately compare one provider with another (as most have only been to one);
- that it is biased against women and ethnic minorities;
- that NSS scores are shaped by prior expectation;
- that overreliance on NSS supports a 'snowflake' culture to the detriment of rigour and stretch; and
- that NSS results can be gamed by providers lowering standards and making courses easier.

161. The NSS also has its advocates. Arguments presented to government in favour of the NSS include that:

- the NSS has been used in the sector and in league tables for over ten years and is widely recognised;
- it is regularly used by universities in their own internal performance management and planning which they would not do were it not meaningful;
- that it is a critical way of capturing the student voice in TEF assessments;
- that NSS results genuinely reflect real things that are happening in teaching on the ground.

162. The Chair and panellists confirmed to us that they felt that the NSS metrics were helpful in guiding their decisions and that all three metrics provided useful information about the quality of teaching at the provider.

163. To determine how much the NSS metrics had influenced the results, a formal Multiple Correspondence Analysis was carried out, which statistically evaluates how much influence each metric had on shaping the final judgement (i.e. final TEF rating, not just initial hypothesis).

164. In summary, the NSS metrics appear to have impacted significantly on the final

ratings:

- a) This analysis shows that there is a strong relationship between the core metrics of the TEF and the final award. There is some variation in the impact of individual metrics on the final award, with the National Student Survey (NSS) metrics having the strongest influence.
- b) The NSS metrics ('teaching on my course', 'assessment and feedback', 'academic support') have a large influence on the final award. We see that they are highly correlated i.e. being positive in one is associated with being positive in another. The bivariate correlations between the three NSS metrics are all greater than 0.95 whereas the correlation between the two employment metrics is markedly lower at 0.67.
- c) Providers are more likely to get a bronze award if they have negative flags for all three NSS metrics.
- d) Providers are more likely to get a gold award if they have positive flags for all three NSS metrics.
- e) Negative employment metrics are more influential on the final award than positive employment metrics.

Government response

165. We consider that – because the TEF uses only the NSS scales relevant to teaching⁷ and not the overall satisfaction score – the NSS metrics genuinely do reflect teaching excellence and that this outweighs the downsides. We consider it important to maintain a strong role for the student voice within TEF and to ensure that students' direct experience of teaching has an impact on providers' TEF rating.

166. However, although there are arguments on both sides which could justify maintaining the status quo, on balance we consider that in future we should reduce the weighting of the NSS. We consider that doing so will further support our aim that the weighting given to the NSS recognises the importance of the other metrics, as well as the provider submission.

167. Furthermore, the very high degree of correlation supports a decision to reduce the weighting, as each NSS metric is not in practice giving substantially new information compared to the other two NSS metrics. We will therefore in future halve weighting of the NSS metrics, so that each NSS metric has a weighting of $\frac{1}{2}$ whilst the other metrics have a weighting of 1.

⁷ Teaching on my Course, Assessment and Feedback, Academic Support

168. In consequence, this means that the rules for calculating the initial hypothesis also need to be altered. The rules which we consider would create the greatest harmony with Year Two and that will therefore be applied are:

- A provider with positive flags (either + or ++) in core metrics that have a total value of 2.5 (after accounting for the weighting set out in 7.10) or more and no negative flags (either - or - -) should be considered initially as **Gold**.
- A provider with negative flags in core metrics that have a total value of 1.5 or more should be considered initially as **Bronze**, regardless of the number of positive flags.
- All other providers, including those with no flags at all, should be considered initially as **Silver**.

Other NSS issues - New scales/questions/boycott

Background

169. In 2015, HEFCE ran a consultation on changes to the National Student Survey, Unistats and information provided by institutions⁸.

170. These changes have been implemented this year and are the first major changes to the survey since its introduction in 2005.

171. This year there are nine new questions on student engagement, updated questions on assessment and feedback and learning resources and the removal and transfer of personal development questions to the optional question banks. Changes to the questions used in TEF are shown in table 4 below:

Table 4: NSS Questions by Year for TEF use

2016 Questions	2017 Questions
The teaching on my course	The teaching on my course
1. Staff are good at explaining things.	1. Staff are good at explaining things.
2. Staff have made the subject interesting.	2. Staff have made the subject interesting.
3. Staff are enthusiastic about what they are teaching.	3. The course is intellectually stimulating.

⁸ <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/nss/>

4. The course is intellectually stimulating.	4. My course has challenged me to achieve my best work.
Assessment and feedback	Assessment and feedback
5. The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance.	8. The criteria used in marking have been clear in advance.
6. Assessment arrangements and marking have been fair.	9. Marking and assessment has been fair.
7. Feedback on my work has been prompt.	10. Feedback on my work has been timely.
8. I have received detailed comments on my work.	11. I have received helpful comments on my work.
9. Feedback on my work has helped me clarify things I did not understand.	
Academic support	Academic support
10. I have received sufficient advice and support with my studies.	12. I have been able to contact staff when I needed to.
11. I have been able to contact staff when I needed to.	13. I have received sufficient advice and guidance in relation to my course.
12. Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices.	14. Good advice was available when I needed to make study choices.

172. In the 2017 survey there was a boycott of the NSS by some student unions. 12 providers at which the NSS boycott took place did not meet the 50% response threshold.

Government response

NSS Changes

173. We consider that the changes made to the scales used in TEF are small but real. The TEF metrics for future years will include NSS data from students who completed the survey in 2015, 2016 and 2017 and will include 'year' as a benchmarking factor, to take into account the change.

Boycott

174. The boycott had no impact on the metrics or results in TEF Year Two.

175. No provider shall suffer disadvantage as a result of the NSS boycott.

176. If a provider does not have reportable metrics for the 2017 National Student Survey and there is evidence of a boycott of the NSS by students at that provider, the provider shall be treated as if it had reportable metrics for that year for the purposes of eligibility and award duration.

177. A core metric for all providers will be constructed either by, as for other providers, aggregating across all three years (if the three-year response rate is above 50%) or, if this is not the case, omitting 2017 from the metrics calculation.

178. The guidance will also explicitly say that panellists and assessors should be careful to ensure that no provider should suffer disadvantage due to the boycott.

London/regional effect

Background

179. Different providers operate in different regional circumstances. Some localities have higher or lower rates of regional employment; the student experience may be different in a big city compared to a rural campus. Furthermore, different providers relate to their region in different way, with some recruiting nearly all students locally and training for the regional labour market, whilst others are much more nationally engaged.

180. All of these factors could influence the TEF metrics and there have been suggestions that we should account for them more formally than in TEF Year Two,

either by benchmarking the metrics by region or by issuing guidance to assessors to explicitly consider certain specific regional effects. However, there is no consensus as to how this should be done or which factors are most important. Furthermore, given the way providers engage with their region in such different ways, it would be very difficult to create any form of benchmarking that would be simultaneously fair to Newcastle, Sunderland and Bangor (for example).

181. One of the most frequently cited regional issues from stakeholders is ‘the London effect’, which asserts that providers in London are systematically disadvantaged because they do worse on the NSS and that POLAR is not a complete measure of social disadvantage and this is most pronounced in London. Looking at the raw numbers, a lower proportion of providers in London received Golds than was the case in other regions.

182. In Year Two, assessors were provided with regional maps that showed local and national employment figures, as well as where students studying that provider had previously lived and subsequently found work. Providers were also able to address regional issues in their provider submission.

Government response

183. We have carried out statistical analysis on the TEF results. This has found that:

- The proportion of bronze awards is higher for providers in London/South East area compared to providers located elsewhere (after adjusting for the effects of other characteristics) but the difference is **not** statistically significant;
- The proportion of gold awards is lower for providers in London/South East area compared to providers located elsewhere (after adjusting for the effects of other characteristics) but the difference is **not** statistically significant;
- There is no evidence that having a higher percentage of students from deprived areas has an adverse effect on getting a gold award; and
- Having a high proportion of students from a disadvantaged area does not increase a provider’s probability of getting a bronze award, or decrease their probability of getting a gold award.

184. This indicates strongly that the Year Two approach worked. The TEF Chair and Panel also felt that they were able to account for regional issues effectively with the materials they had been provided with and that the current flexible approach allowed them to recognise genuinely individual issues associated with each provider.

185. Regarding the London effect, it is hard to separate out regional affects from other issues, such as having a large number of local students, which is the case for many providers within London but also some providers not in London. Feedback from London providers was also mixed, with some saying that they did not consider London should be given ‘special treatment’, as every region faced its own distinct

challenges.

186. Overall, we consider that the flexible approach to addressing region in Year Two has worked. It has allowed the panel to consider regional issues in a holistic, considered way. There is low evidence that any systematic regional issues have impacted the ratings and any attempt to incorporate region more formally would be likely to create more problems than it would solve, given the different ways providers interact with their regions.
187. Including region in the benchmarking would also fundamentally destroy the ability of TEF to compare providers across the UK, as providers in each region would only be compared with other providers in that region.
188. We will not therefore make any change to the framework on regional issues. We will, however, make an explicit reference to local students in the guidance to assessors.

Benchmarking

Background

189. The benchmarking factors used in year two were largely determined by reference to the HESA UK Performance Indicators and have not been updated for some years. Since then, the nature of higher education has changed considerably: alternative providers have become a much larger section of the market, participation has increased (including from disadvantaged groups) and the wider economy has also changed. All these changes could alter which benchmarking factors should be used.
190. Accordingly, when we were developing the TEF, we asked HEFCE to carry out a detailed statistical analysis to consider whether the existing factors remained appropriate, and these recommendations are based on their report.
191. The new supplementary metrics that we will introduce based on information from the Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data does not share the same history as the existing core TEF metrics and so does not have a pre-existing set of benchmarking factors. HEFCE were therefore asked to extend their statistical analysis to examine factors that would be appropriate to benchmark these new metrics.

Government response

192. In considering whether any changes should be made from Year Two, therefore, we used three principal criteria:
- a. The size of the effect. The larger the effect, the stronger the rationale for inclusion.

- b. The extent to which there a clear causal mechanism that is not within the provider's control, or that is undesirable for a provider to control for.
- c. The extent to which controlling for this aligns with wider Government priorities, including the Departmental focus on social mobility and the Public Sector Equality Duty.

193. Based on these criteria, the principal changes we are implementing are:

- a. Adding POLAR, age, and ethnicity to the benchmarking factors for non-continuation. These all show strong effects and are known to influence drop-out rates. It is critically important to social mobility and widening participation to ensure providers are not penalised for taking students from these backgrounds.
- b. Adding a new level of study benchmarking factor to all metrics.
- c. Adding 'year' as a new factor to the NSS, reflecting the fact that some of the questions changed this year. This will also help control for the impact of the NSS boycott.
- d. The subject of study benchmarking factor will no longer consider subjects grouped by JACS subject groups. The NSS-based metrics and the highly-skilled employment metrics (in both modes) will consider subjects grouped at Level 2 of the HECOS Common Aggregation Hierarchy. The employment and continuation metrics (in both modes) will consider nine groups of subjects, based on a slight modification of the seven subject areas defined for the purposes of the TEF Year Three subject pilots.

194. Based on the same criteria, HEFCE's analysis identifies an appropriate set of benchmarking factors for the new LEO-based metrics that is similar to those used in the benchmarking of the core TEF metrics for employment or further study and highly-skilled employment or further study.

195. There are also a small number of technical changes. The full set of new benchmarking factors can be found in table 5 below.

Table 5: Revised TEF Benchmarking factors for Year Three onwards

Factor	Description (no. of categories)	NSS	Continuation	Employment or Further Study	Highly Skilled Employment or Further Study	Sustained employment	Above median earnings threshold
Subject of study	CAH Level 2 groupings ⁹ (variable)	✓ (33 groups)	✓ (9 groups)	✓ (9 groups)	✓ (33 groups)	✓ (33 groups)	✓ (33 groups)
Entry qualifications	A variance of those described on the HESA website (variable)		✓ (28 groups, full time only)	✓ (4 groups)	✓ (4 groups)	✓ (Full-time only, 4 groups)	✓ (4 groups)
Age on entry (as at 30 September in the academic year of entry)	Young (including unknown), Mature (2) Mature is defined as 21 and over. Students under 21 are Young	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓ (Full-time only)	✓ (Part-time only)
Ethnicity	Asian, Black, White (including unknown), Other (4)	✓ (full time only)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

⁹ Except Celtic studies, which has been collapsed into languages because of its size

Factor	Description (no. of categories)	NSS	Continuation	Employment or Further Study	Highly Skilled Employment or Further Study	Sustained employment	Above median earnings threshold
Sex	Male, Female (including Other) (2)			✓	✓	✓ (Full-time only)	✓
Disability	Disabled, Not Disabled (2)	✓			✓		✓
Social disadvantage (measured by POLAR3 for all UK domiciled students, regardless of their age)	POLAR 1 or 2, POLAR 3, 4 or 5 (including unknown) (2)		✓		✓		✓
Level	First degree, other undergraduate, programmes at the undergraduate / postgraduate boundary (3)	✓ (full time only)	✓ (full time only)	✓	✓	✓	✓

Factor	Description (no. of categories)	NSS	Continuation	Employment or Further Study	Highly Skilled Employment or Further Study	Sustained employment	Above median earnings threshold
Year	Three academic years relevant to the metric definition (3)	✓					
Total distinct benchmarking groups		4,752 for full-time, and 396 for part-time	11,664 for full-time, and 144 for part-time	1,728	25,344	6,336 for full-time, and 396 for part-time	12,672 for full-time, and 25,344 for part-time

Part-time provision

Background

196. The TEF Chair and other panellists have informed us that the assessment process made it more challenging to identify excellence in providers that had a large proportion of part time students. The panel considers that, overall, they managed to work robustly around this, but consider that clearer guidance and a slightly revised process would help to ensure that part-time providers had the same opportunities to demonstrate excellence as full-time providers.
197. We have also had similar concerns being raised by part-time providers, including the Open University, which did not take part in Year Two due to these concerns. There have been concerns raised by a wide range of part-time providers that some of the metrics, in particular on non-continuation and employment, do not work as well for part-time students as they do for full-time students.
198. An analysis of the results confirms that there is a direct correlation between the proportion of part-time students at a provider and the likelihood of it receiving a Gold award.

Table 6 – TEF award by percentage of part-time students

	0% to 20%	20% to 40%	40% to 60%	60% to 80%	80% to 100%
GOLD	45	11	3	0	0
SILVER	71	23	13	2	7
BRONZE	26	20	4	5	1

199. There are two scenarios that need addressing:
- Where a provider has a similar proportion of full-time and part-time students.** Currently assessors calculate an initial hypothesis for the ‘major mode’ – i.e. the mode (full-time or part-time) in which the students have most students. They then adjust the hypothesis by considering split metrics, including the minority mode, before going on to consider the submission. However, where the two modes are very similar in size, this can lead to too little weight being put on the minor mode.
 - Where the majority of a provider’s students are part time.** Some of the metrics do not work very well for part-time providers. In particular, the employment metric (as many students continue working in their existing job whilst they study) and the non-continuation metric which is only calculated for students aiming for a first degree. The metrics also suffer from the fact that the

OU makes an unusually high contribution to the benchmarks, distorting the statistics.

Government response

200. We agree that, whilst the assessment process was able to work robustly round the issue, the process should be refined to ensure that excellence in part-time provision would be recognised more systematically.

201. We therefore will be making a number of changes to the assessment process for providers with significant proportions of part-time students, whilst working within the overall assessment framework to maintain consistency for both full and part-time providers.

Similar proportions of full-time and part-time students

202. Where the minority mode is at least 35% of provision, the assessors should now formulate the initial hypothesis separately for each mode, following each of the steps and guidance for Steps 1a and 1b. The variant procedure for calculating the initial hypothesis for the part-time mode should be used for the part-time mode. At the end of Step 1b, assessors should then combine the two initial hypotheses to produce a single initial hypothesis for the provider, which may be either Gold, Silver or Bronze, or a borderline rating between these.

Majority of part-time students

203. We do not think it would be advisable to fully abandon the use of the metrics; nor we do we think the difficulty with the metrics is sufficiently small that it can be addressed by guidance alone or the provider submission¹⁰.

204. We have decided that majority part-time providers should be invited – if they so wish – to submit an additional page of quantitative information relating to non-continuation and employment outcomes, to supplement their metrics. This would be considered alongside their core metrics in forming the initial hypothesis. Although the quantitative information would not be standardised, we will set out clearly the type of information that would be valid to provide, including long-term employment destination statistics (including on earnings and/or on entry to chosen professions), module completion statistics, employer validations and similar.

205. Those whose minority mode was part-time but where part-time was more than 35% of provision would also be invited to submit this additional page.

¹⁰ The OU, for example, has said that there is ‘too far to climb’ with the provider submission, given the way the current assessment process is set out.

206. We consider that this approach offers the best solution to genuinely offering part-time providers the opportunity to display excellence, maintaining integrity and robustness and maintaining overall consistency in approach.

Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) - supplementary metrics

207. Two of the core metrics in the TEF are employment measures, covering rates of employment or further study and rates of highly skilled employment or further study both at 6 months after graduation which derive from the DLHE survey. However, these measure are limited as they only cover outcomes of students 6 months after they have graduated and do not indicate sustained graduate outcomes which would span over a longer time period.

208. A richer data set based on administrative data rather than self-reported survey data about graduate employment has become available. Therefore, two new supplementary metrics will be introduced as an additional measure of sustained employment produced using information from the Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data. LEO data matches higher education and tax data together to chart the transition of graduates from higher education into the workplace.¹¹

209. In selecting these metrics, it is critical to ensure that we recognise graduate jobs with high public value but low private returns, such as nursing, midwifery or teaching and do not create incentives that would discourage the pursuit of such jobs, as well as recognising that graduate earnings can be influenced by a number of factors outside a provider's control, such as gender, ethnicity, social class and prior attainment.

210. Accordingly, we will not be introducing a crude earnings metric, looking at median or mean salaries, but instead will be introducing a threshold metric, where the threshold is set at a level below the starting salary of professional, socially valuable graduate jobs such as those referred to previously. Furthermore, as set out above, the metric will be benchmarked in line with principles for the core metrics.

211. The two metrics that will be introduced are:

- The proportion of graduates in sustained employment or further study three years after graduation.
- The proportion of graduates in sustained employment that are earning over the median salary for 25-29 year olds or in further study.

¹¹https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/619512/SFR_18_2017_LEO_mainText.pdf

212. The median salary for taxpayers aged 25-29 is currently £21,000¹². The threshold has been calculated using the ONS/HMRC publication, Personal Incomes Statistics 2014-15 which is a survey of income data from HMRC and DWP. Annual income includes earnings through PAYE and Self-Assessment as well as interest on savings etc. and benefits.
213. Taken together, these supplementary metrics will inform how graduates are, or are not, progressing into positive outcomes on a longer time horizon of 3 years, rather than 6 months as in the metrics produced from the DLHE survey.
214. As these metrics will be supplementary metrics, they will not be used to inform the initial hypothesis; instead, the assessors will take them into account alongside the provider submission and as part of the holistic judgement. This will ensure that they can be taken account of in determining the overall rating, but will also ensure that providers are able to suitably contextualise them for assessment.
215. Furthermore, the LEO data from which this metric is drawn is currently experimental. In particular, the employment data covers those with records submitted through the Pay As You Earn (PAYE) system, therefore would not include salary data for self-employed graduates who do not pay PAYE. Therefore, guidance will set out that assessors should be cautious when using these metrics for providers with higher proportions of graduates with self-assessment records.

¹² Rounded to the nearest £500. This value will be updated annually in accordance with the relevant dataset.

Chapter Seven - The balance of evidence between core metrics and additional evidence

Background

216. As set out in the TEF Specification for Year Two [7.1], the overall judgement of teaching quality is the final step in the TEF assessment process, following:

- Review of core and split metrics, leading to an Initial Hypothesis;
- A review of the provider submission – to determine whether the Initial Hypothesis should be changed or remain unchanged;
- Assessors and Panellists make their overall, holistic, assessment based on the criteria.

Lessons Learned feedback

217. In our focus groups of assessors and TEF panel members, we asked them:

- how they balanced and weighted evidence from the metrics and the provider submission;
- how the process worked;
- how they distinguished between well-written submissions and clear evidence;
- whether the guidance needed improving; and
- whether they were able to exercise professional judgement.

Holistic assessment – balancing metrics and provider submissions

218. The overall feedback was that the assessment process worked – that the steps were logical and, specifically, that they allowed for a thorough assessment/examination of evidence, supported by a rigorous validation and confirmation process.

219. Assessors reported that consideration of the core and split metrics, together with contextual data, enabled them to make an initial view about the provider – to form the initial hypothesis.

220. It also allowed them to log a series of questions/queries about the provider – which were then tested through the evidence in the provider submission.

221. By linking the submission to the data, assessors were able to triangulate the evidence and validate the narrative, especially to test claims of impact.

222. So by considering the provider against the criteria throughout each step of the process, it meant that they were in effect making a continuous overall assessment, which was confirmed and tested in the final step.

223. They felt that academic judgement was evident in decision making and that panellists and assessors had sufficient space to exercise it – using consistent guidelines.
224. Some assessors felt that the guidance could be refined to provide more detail on their approach to identifying positive and negative performance by reference to the criteria. However, the majority believed that the process as it stood was satisfactory.

Rating Descriptors and Outcomes

225. Assessors also discussed the need to triangulate their recommended outcomes with the criteria and rating descriptors. They confirmed that the rating descriptors enabled them to make 'best fit' holistic judgements. (As noted elsewhere there is evidence that providers are already beginning to use the statement of findings in their communication to prospective students.)
226. Some stakeholders have suggested that it would be more useful for students if the statement of findings included negative, as well as positive, information about providers. However, others felt that this could cause reputational damage for institutions and that, in practice, a provider could understand where it had performed less well by the lack of comments in certain areas.

Government Response

227. The feedback from assessors and panel members confirms that the TEF assessment process (including its steps and its stages) did enable them to make a consistent holistic assessment of teaching quality for each provider. We are not therefore making any significant change to the overall model in TEF Year Three nor are we introducing an explicit weighting between the metrics and submissions.

Chapter Eight - Whether Commendations should be introduced for the next round of assessments

Background

228. The introduction of Commendations was initially suggested as method of recognising excellence within the Higher Education sector; indicating that a university is sector leading in a particular area. Any provider who was awarded a Commendation would display this beside their TEF award.
229. In May 2016 we proposed the introduction of Commendations to the sector, in the technical consultation, with the question “*Do you think the TEF should issue commendations?*”. The reaction of the sector was largely positive, with 54% of respondents thinking that Commendations were a good idea, 28% disagreeing and 16% unsure.
230. However, the narrative responses had very little cross sector consistency. The most common opinion cited by those in opposition to Commendations was that they would add unnecessary complexity to the process, and that it would be difficult to robustly assess the ‘top 5-10% of providers’ in a particular area on the basis of a 15-page provider submission. The government, therefore, decided to defer the introduction of Commendations for TEF Year Two and instead agreed to consider their introduction in TEF Year Three institutional level.

Lessons Learned feedback from Sector

231. As part of the Lessons Learned process, the Government posed the question of whether commendations should be introduced for the next round of TEF assessments. We consulted national stakeholders, assessors and panellists.
232. Feedback showed some support for introducing Commendations – i.e. that they could help recognise areas of excellence throughout the sector and provide students with additional, positive, information about providers. For example, some assessors and panellists suggested that Commendations could also be a useful addition in recognising the different levels of excellence within the three, relatively broad, award categories.
233. However, overall, there was no real appetite for introducing Commendations – the overall consensus was firmly against – and no suggestion of how we might do so. Assessors argued that this would add unnecessary complexity to the process. Assessors and panellists would be required to know the ‘baseline’ for each commendation, and understand how to recognise providers that are achieving over and above that baseline. The introduction of Commendations could also undermine the core objective of TEF; giving students better/clearer information, by providing three pieces of data per provider (institutional level award, subject level award, and

commendations) for students to take into consideration.

234. Sector representatives and assessors also took the view that the statement of findings, which are also publicly available, in effect provide many of the benefits of Commendations; providing an explanation of a providers TEF result, as well as recognising areas of exemplary practice. Furthermore, the move to subject level is likely to succeed in giving more granular and informative information to students.

Government Response

235. The Government have concluded not to introduce commendations for Year Three institutional level TEF, or subject level pilots. This is because introducing commendations could overcomplicate information for students and create a burdensome, convoluted process for the assessors. Additionally, despite a minority of the sector holding the opinion that commendations may be helpful, the overall consensus is firmly against.

236. The Government further considers that the principal benefits of commendations are or will be met by a combination of the statement of findings and the move to subject level TEF. There are therefore no plans to introduce commendations at any point in the future.

Chapter Nine - The number and names of the ratings and their international impact

237. We sought feedback from a wide range of stakeholders on the number and names of the three TEF ratings; and their initial impact internationally.
238. On the name and number of the awards we consulted two focus groups of assessors and a group of panellists. We also sought feedback from the TEF Chair and a number of national HE stakeholders and mission groups.
239. On the international impact of the TEF awards, we had separate conversations with: the Devolved Administrations, Higher Education Academy, QAA, Russell Group, British Council and the British Universities' International Liaison Association (BUILA). The British Council have also carried out a survey of their contacts in key international markets.

Key Findings

240. On the number of TEF awards, we had a strong consensus from key stakeholders, assessors and panellists – that we should keep the system of three awards.
241. Assessors and panellists agreed that it was helpful to effectively have 5 categories available in Stage 2 of the process (for the recommended outcomes from the groups of 3 or 9) – by having cases marked as borderline – in addition to recommendations of gold, silver or bronze.
242. However, they were convinced that the subsequent moderation – either in the group of 9 panellists and assessors, or by the TEF panel, worked as a process.
243. Furthermore, assessors and panellists were fully confident that the process had been conducted in a rigorous fashion and that assessors and panellists were content with the validity of the final outcomes.
244. We are aware of the argument – articulated by assessors/panellists and some stakeholders – that a system of three ratings means that there are 'cliff edges' between bronze/silver and silver/gold; and that there is a range of provider performance reflected within each of the 3 categories.
245. For example, it may be that the difference between a high bronze assessment and a low silver assessment may be less than that between a low silver and high silver assessment.
246. However, assessors/panellists were convinced that the 3 categories enabled them to make clear, defensible judgements based on the published criteria. In spite of the 'cliff edge' argument they saw no reason to change the number of ratings, since a different system would just have different cliff-edges.

247. The benefits of maintaining the current system of three awards were seen as follows:

- The system of three awards is simple and easy for students to understand;
- Confusion for the sector, students and the public if we change the rating system after only one year;
- Real difficulty of comparability between TEF Years if we change the number of awards between Year Two and Year Three.
- Inability to build up an evidence base for the Independent Review of how the TEF was influencing student decisions.

248. On the name of the awards, the current ratings have been widely adopted by providers and feature prominently in marketing material, on websites and in other communications to students. However, the consistent messages from assessors/panellist and key stakeholders (including those with international links) was the concern that providers receiving a bronze TEF rating would be viewed unfavourably by the international audience.

249. Research by Hobsons suggests that only 24.5% of international students think a Bronze award means that teaching quality is 'unsatisfactory'. Whilst this is still too high, it nevertheless represents only a relatively small proportion of students, indicating that further communication as TEF becomes more established may reduce this proportion still further.

250. There is also evidence that some TEF providers, particularly those with a Gold rating, are using their TEF rating to promote themselves overseas more effectively. There are therefore potentially positive international benefits to the current TEF ratings, as well as potential negative ones, and there is as yet insufficient evidence to confirm which effect will prove to be dominant.

251. Furthermore, there was no consensus on how to change the names of the three awards (for example keeping silver and gold, but renaming bronze, or moving to a set of descriptors). Nor was there any guarantee that a renamed set of awards, in itself, would overcome the issue of how to communicate the meaning of the lowest TEF award.

Government Response

252. Based on lessons learned feedback, we will keep both the current number and names of the TEF awards – gold, silver, bronze.

253. We appreciate that there will be 'cliff edges' in any system and recognise that there is a range of performance in each category. However, we did not receive any evidence or any strong representation to change from the current system of bronze, silver, gold. This is easy for students to understand and we think it would be very confusing to change the ratings after only one year of operation. The Independent Review has a statutory requirement to consider the names and number of ratings and

we believe it would do so more effectively if it has a consistent evidence base on which to draw.

254. During TEF year Two we recognised that explaining TEF to an international audience would be a challenge, specifically to communicate the subtle message that TEF bronze shows teaching excellence – and builds upon very high national quality assurance thresholds throughout the UK. We have worked with stakeholders to try and mitigate this risk – e.g. through developing an international script - and will continue to do.

Chapter Ten - Other Issues

Grade Inflation

255. In the context of higher education, grade inflation is the upward trend in the average grade awarded to students over time, i.e. a larger proportion of students achieving a first class or upper second class honours degree - compared with students in the past.
256. Unchecked, grade inflation could undermine the reputation of the entire UK HE sector, creating a dangerous impression of slipping standards, undermining the efforts of those who work hard for their qualifications, and poorly serving the needs of employers.
257. The statistics show that grade inflation is occurring - there has been a significant increase in the proportion of people receiving first and 2:1 degrees that cannot be explained by rising levels of attainment. Almost three-quarter of students now secure a first or upper second, compared to 66% in 2011/12 and fewer than half in the mid-1990s.
258. On average across the sector, there has been a threefold increase in the percentage of firsts since the mid-1990s. In the last five years alone HESA figures show the proportion of students who gained a first class degree has increased by over 40 per cent, with almost a quarter of students now securing the top grade, up from 17 per cent in 2011/12.
259. This is a general phenomenon, but some institutions are seeing a more rapid degree inflation than others. Over the summer, the Press Association reported that several institutions had seen the proportion of their students securing top honours more than double between 2010/11 and 2015/16.
260. The TEF already explicitly incorporates Grade inflation. In the Year Two specification, one of the examples of evidence under the teaching quality aspect of Rigour and Stretch (TQ3) is "how the provider is achieving positive outcomes for students, whilst also successfully identifying, addressing and preventing grade inflation."
261. However, panellists have confirmed that, from the evidence they had available from the metrics and the provider submissions, it was difficult in most cases to determine whether or not grade inflation was taking place.
262. We have therefore decided to introduce a supplementary metric on grade inflation – with each provider supplying information for the percentage of students awarded a first, upper second and third/pass from those who have obtained a classified degree award over a number of years.
263. This will be linked to the existing criterion on 'Rigour and Stretch' to aid assessors

in making judgement in this area and allow providers that are taking genuine steps to tackle grade inflation to be recognised for doing so.

264. The purpose of this metric is solely to assess whether grade inflation has taken place. The proportions of 2:1s and firsts awarded will not be considered to provide any positive evidence as to the excellence of teaching or outcomes at that provider.

Gaming

265. The Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework is designed to ensure that HE providers provide an excellent learning experience for all their students, irrespective of background.

266. The government has consistently made clear that it would be unacceptable for a provider to seek to 'game' the TEF by adjusting its student population in order to improve its metrics, particularly if this was at the expense of students from disadvantaged backgrounds.

267. The government committed to giving the Director for Fair Access a formal role in guarding against any potential 'gaming'. Introducing this procedure is not a suggestion that such behaviour has occurred already, it is simply a sign of the importance that is placed upon preventing any possibility of it in the future.

268. The Director for Fair Access¹³ will therefore have the opportunity to determine whether 'gaming' has taken place (i.e. a significant alteration in a provider's student profile that involves a reduction in the proportion of students from disadvantaged groups).

269. In extreme cases, if the Director for Fair Access is confident that a provider has 'gamed' the TEF deliberately, with a principal aim of reducing the proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in order to improve their TEF metrics, this could lead to a provider being disqualified.

270. The Director for Fair Access will not assess or consider a provider's absolute student profile, only changes in a provider's student profile since its last TEF assessment.

Links between TEF and Quality

271. Providers need to demonstrate a high quality threshold before they can apply for the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework. However, it is also important that any concerns that come to light during a TEF assessment are able to be fed back into baseline quality assessment.

272. Where the assessment process suggests concerns about the underlying quality of

¹³ Or, in future, the Director for Fair Access and Participation

a provider, the TEF Chair will have the right to refer the provider to the Office for Students with a recommendation that the OfS should consider an investigation to confirm whether the provider continues to meet baseline quality requirements.

273. The Chair will write to the Chief Executive of the OfS, naming the providers in question and stating briefly the factors which gave rise to this concern. No broader public statement will be made.
274. The OfS will take account of this letter and consider carefully whether or not further action should be taken under baseline quality assessment to investigate whether these providers continue to meet baseline quality requirements. Should a subsequent investigation determine that a provider is not meeting baseline quality requirements, a provider may lose its TEF award.
275. Any providers who are referred to the OfS in this way will be informed of the fact that they have been referred, the reason for that decision and whether or not the OfS is taking any further action as a result of that referral.
276. If such a concern relates to a provider in one of the devolved administrations, the TEF Chair will instead write privately to the head of the relevant funding authority in that nation. It will be entirely at the discretion of the relevant funding authority as to whether any further action is taken.
277. Any providers who are referred to a devolved funding authority in this way will be informed of the fact that they have been referred and the reason for that decision. It will be for the relevant funding authority as to whether any further communication occurs with that provider as to its actions.

Annex A: Provider Survey (full award)

Introduction and completion instructions

Thank you for participating in the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) Year Two.

This online survey is the first stage in the Department for Education's (DfE) TEF Year Two lessons learned exercise. Responses will be used to inform the development of Year Three processes and implementation.

We are keen to understand how the application process operated from a provider point of view. Please liaise with your senior management team, students and other colleagues involved in your TEF Year Two application to provide a single institutional-level response.

Please answer openly and honestly. Responses will be treated in confidence by HEFCE and individual responses will not be published. Anonymised summaries will be shared with DfE and published in summer 2017 as part of a wider report on the lessons learned.

The survey itself will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. You may complete the survey in one go or leave it and return to it later if you need to. It will close on 23:59 on 10th March 2017.

If you have any questions, please contact Hazel Crabb-Wyke: h.crabb-wyke@hefce.ac.uk , 0117 931 7238.

Thank you very much

The HEFCE TEF Team

TEF guidance

1. In preparing for the TEF, did you use the Department for Education's (DfE) TEF Year Two Specification and/or HEFCE's TEF Year Two Additional Guidance? *

- Yes - we used one, other or both documents
- No - we didn't use either the DfE or HEFCE document

2. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the DfE TEF Year Two specification document and HEFCE's TEF Year Two Additional Guidance? *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The publication of the specification followed by the additional guidance was timely.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
The content covered all the necessary aspects of the TEF in sufficient detail.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
The content was sufficiently clear.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Please specify aspects that were missing or not sufficiently clear or detailed.

Metrics data

3. To what extent do you agree with the following statement? The metrics data were received in sufficient time to inform the submission. *

- Strongly disagree
- Disagree
- Neutral
- Agree
- Strongly agree

4. Data amendment process: Did you consider making a data amendment request? *

- Yes
- No

5. Were there any barriers preventing you from making a data amendment request? *

- Yes
- No

6. If yes, please describe the barriers you faced and how they could be overcome. *

7. The following resources were available to support your understanding of the TEF metrics data. To what extent do you agree that each of the resources were useful? *

	Did not use	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Individualised student data files (downloadable from the extranet)	<input type="checkbox"/>					
TEF metrics technical documentation	<input type="checkbox"/>					
TEF metrics webinar	<input type="checkbox"/>					
HEFCE's metrics helpdesk (TEFMetrics@hefce.ac.uk)	<input type="checkbox"/>					

8. Please use this space to tell us anything else you would like us to know about the metrics data, specifying any constraints you experienced.

Support

9. The following resources were available to support the TEF application process. To what extent do you agree that each of the resources were useful? *

	Didn't use	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
HEFCE's TEF web pages	<input type="checkbox"/>					
TEF Year Two provider briefing events in Nov and Dec 2016	<input type="checkbox"/>					
TEF team email updates to your TEF contact	<input type="checkbox"/>					
HEFCE's TEF helpdesk (tef@hefce.ac.uk)	<input type="checkbox"/>					
DfE helpdesk (tef.queries@bis.gsi.gov.uk)	<input type="checkbox"/>					
DfE newsletter	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Student guide to the TEF	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Supplementary technical guidance for panel members and assessors	<input type="checkbox"/>					
TEF Year Two Questions and Answers	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Other source(s) of support - please state

10. How could the support be improved? In particular, please note any suggestions you have for support with advising students about TEF.

11. Please rate the usability of the TEF extranet as a mechanism to: *

	Not applicable	Very poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good
Log into	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Download your metrics data	<input type="checkbox"/>					

	Not applicable	Very poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good
Upload your provider submission and authorisation letter	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Provider submission

12. To what extent do you agree with the following statements? *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The time available to prepare the provider submission was sufficient.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
The page limit (15 pages) for the provider submission was sufficient to present the evidence that we wished to.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

13. What number of pages should the limit for the provider submission be set at ideally?

14. For future years, do you think there should be a template for the provider submission? *

- Yes, we would like a standard template
- We have no preference
- No, we would like it to remain open for providers to decide the structure

15. Please add any other comments you would like to make about the provider submission, specifying any constraints you experienced.

Student Engagement

16. Did students participate in developing your provider submission? *

- Yes
- No

17. Please describe how students were engaged in the submission process. *

18. Please tell us why students were not engaged with the submission process. *

Final comments

19. Please provide any final comments about your experience of the TEF Year Two application process:

Annex B: Provisional award provider survey

Introduction and completion instructions

Thank you for opting in for a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) Year Two provisional award.

This online survey is the first stage in the Department for Education's (DfE) TEF Year Two lessons learned exercise. Responses will be used to inform the development of Year Three processes and implementation.

We are keen to understand how the opt-in process operated from a provider point of view. Please liaise with your senior management team, students and other colleagues involved in your decision to opt-in to TEF Year Two to provide a single institutional-level response.

Please answer openly and honestly. Responses will be treated in confidence by HEFCE and individual responses will not be published. Anonymised summaries will be shared with DfE and published in summer 2017 as part of a wider report on the lessons learned.

The survey itself will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. You may complete the survey in one go or leave it and return to it later if you need to. It will close on 23:59 on 10th March 2017.

If you have any questions, please contact Hazel Crabb-Wyke: h.crabb-wyke@hefce.ac.uk , 0117 931 7238.

Thank you very much

The HEFCE TEF Team

TEF guidance and support

1. Did you use the Department for Education's (DfE) TEF Year Two Specification and/or HEFCE's TEF Year Two Additional Guidance? *

- Yes - we used one, other or both documents
- No - we didn't use either the DfE or HEFCE document

2. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the DfE TEF Year Two specification document and HEFCE's TEF Year Two Additional Guidance? *

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
The publication of the specification followed by the additional guidance was timely.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
The content covered all the necessary aspects of the TEF in sufficient detail.	<input type="checkbox"/>				
The content was sufficiently clear.	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Please specify aspects that were missing or not sufficiently clear and detailed.

3. The following resources were available to support the TEF opt-in process. Please rate the usefulness of each that you used. *

	Didn't use	Very poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good
HEFCE's TEF web pages	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Provisional awards webinar	<input type="checkbox"/>					
TEF Year Two Questions and Answers	<input type="checkbox"/>					
TEF team email updates to your TEF contact	<input type="checkbox"/>					
HEFCE's TEF helpdesk (tef@hefce.ac.uk)	<input type="checkbox"/>					
DfE helpdesk (tef.queries@bis.gsi.gov.uk)	<input type="checkbox"/>					
DfE newsletter	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Student guide to the TEF	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Other source(s) of support - please state

4. How could the support be improved? In particular, please note any suggestions you have for support with advising students about TEF.

The TEF Extranet and metrics data

5. Please rate the usability of the TEF extranet as a mechanism to: *

	Not applicable	Very poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good
Log into	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Upload your opt-in letter	<input type="checkbox"/>					
View metrics data (where available)	<input type="checkbox"/>					

6. The following resources were available to support your understanding of the TEF metrics data. Please rate the usefulness of each that you used. *

	Did not use	Very poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good
TEF metrics webinar	<input type="checkbox"/>					
HEFCE's metrics helpdesk (TEFMetrics@hefce.ac.uk)	<input type="checkbox"/>					
Individualised student data (where available, these were downloadable from the extranet)	<input type="checkbox"/>					

Student Engagement

7. Did students participate in your decision to opt-in for a provisional TEF award? *

- Yes
 No

8. Please describe how students were engaged in the decision to opt-in. *

9. Please tell us why students were not engaged in the decision to opt-in. *

Final comments

10. Please provide any final comments about your experience of the TEF Year Two opt-in process:

Annex C: Provider survey completion rates and Quantitative question responses

Survey completion rates

Table 1: Providers with assessed TEF award eligibility

Provider type	Nation	TEF applications (number)	Completed surveys (number)	Response rate (%)
AP	England	6	3	50%
FEC	England	93	63	68%
FEC	Wales	1	1	100%
HEI	England	123	96	78%
HEI	N. Ireland	0	0	0%
HEI	Scotland	5	4	80%
HEI	Wales	6	4	67%
Total		234	171	73%

Table 2: Provisional TEF award eligibility and survey completion rates

Provider type	Opted in (number)	Completed survey (number)	Survey response rate (%)
FEC	15	12	80%
AP	52	38	73%
Total	67	50	75%

Table 3: Overall survey completion rates

Provider eligibility	Surveyed (number)	Completed survey (number)	Survey response rate (%)
Assessed TEF award	234	171	73%
Provisional TEF award	67	50	75%
Total	301	221	73%

Annex C (contd.)

Quantitative Survey responses

Guidance

1. In preparing for the TEF, did you use the Department for Education's (DfE) TEF Year Two Specification and/or HEFCE's TEF Year Two Additional Guidance?

All survey respondents used 1 or both sets of guidance.

2. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the DfE TEF Year Two specification document and HEFCE's TEF Year Two Additional Guidance?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Response Total
The publication of the specification followed by the additional guidance was timely.	5.5% (10)	30.6% (56)	16.4% (30)	41.5% (76)	6.0% (11)	183
The content covered all the necessary aspects of the TEF in sufficient detail.	2.2% (4)	12.0% (22)	14.2% (26)	63.4% (116)	8.2% (15)	183
The content was sufficiently clear.	2.2% (4)	12.6% (23)	13.7% (25)	62.3% (114)	9.3% (17)	183

Metrics

3. To what extent do you agree with the following statement? The metrics data were received in sufficient time to inform the submission.

		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Strongly disagree	 6.56%	12
2	Disagree	 16.94%	31
3	Neutral	 15.85%	29
4	Agree	 49.18%	90
5	Strongly agree	 11.48%	21

4. Data amendment process: Did you consider making a data amendment request?

			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		15.30%	28
2	No		84.70%	155

5. Were there any barriers preventing you from making a data amendment request?

			Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes		16.94%	31
2	No		83.06%	152

7. The following resources were available to support your understanding of the TEF metrics data. To what extent do you agree that each of the resources were useful?

	Did not use	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Response Total
Individualised student data files (downloadable from the extranet)	17.5% (30)	0.0% (0)	1.8% (3)	26.9% (46)	40.9% (70)	12.9% (22)	171
TEF metrics technical documentation	3.5% (6)	0.0% (0)	4.1% (7)	18.1% (31)	59.1% (101)	15.2% (26)	171
TEF metrics webinar	7.6% (13)	3.5% (6)	6.4% (11)	21.1% (36)	49.1% (84)	12.3% (21)	171
HEFCE's metrics helpdesk (TEFMetrics@hefce.ac.uk)	48.0% (82)	1.2% (2)	1.8% (3)	19.9% (34)	20.5% (35)	8.8% (15)	171

Support

9. The following resources were available to support the TEF application process. To what extent do you agree that each of the resources were useful?

	Didn't use	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Response Total
HEFCE's TEF web pages	5.3% (9)	1.2% (2)	3.5% (6)	20.5% (35)	61.4% (105)	8.2% (14)	171
TEF Year Two provider briefing events in Nov and Dec 2016	3.5% (6)	2.3% (4)	4.7% (8)	15.2% (26)	48.5% (83)	25.7% (44)	171
TEF team email updates to your TEF contact	1.2% (2)	1.2% (2)	1.2% (2)	26.3% (45)	58.5% (100)	11.7% (20)	171
HEFCE's TEF helpdesk (tef@hefce.ac.uk)	46.2% (79)	0.0% (0)	2.9% (5)	19.3% (33)	22.8% (39)	8.8% (15)	171
DfE helpdesk (tef.queries@bis.gsi.gov.uk)	71.3% (122)	0.6% (1)	2.9% (5)	17.5% (30)	5.8% (10)	1.8% (3)	171
DfE newsletter	32.2% (55)	3.5% (6)	8.2% (14)	43.3% (74)	11.1% (19)	1.8% (3)	171
Student guide to the TEF	20.5% (35)	2.3% (4)	5.3% (9)	29.2% (50)	38.0% (65)	4.7% (8)	171
Supplementary technical guidance for panel members and assessors	12.9% (22)	0.0% (0)	0.6% (1)	19.3% (33)	55.6% (95)	11.7% (20)	171
TEF Year Two Questions and Answers	8.2% (14)	2.3% (4)	2.9% (5)	24.6% (42)	53.8% (92)	8.2% (14)	171

11. Please rate the usability of the TEF extranet as a mechanism to:

	Not applicable	Very poor	Poor	Fair	Good	Very good
Log into	0.0% (0)	1.2% (2)	3.5% (6)	28.7% (49)	46.8% (80)	19.9% (34)
Download your metrics data	0.6% (1)	0.6% (1)	0.0% (0)	21.1% (36)	56.1% (96)	21.6% (37)
Upload your provider submission and authorisation letter	0.0% (0)	2.3% (4)	5.3% (9)	15.8% (27)	50.9% (87)	25.7% (44)

Provider Submission

12. To what extent do you agree with the following statements?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Response Total
The time available to prepare the provider submission was sufficient.	15.2% (26)	28.1% (48)	12.9% (22)	38.6% (66)	5.3% (9)	171
The page limit (15 pages) for the provider submission was sufficient to present the evidence that we wished to.	2.3% (4)	11.7% (20)	12.3% (21)	55.0% (94)	18.7% (32)	171

14. For future years, do you think there should be a template for the provider submission?

		Response Percent
1	Yes, we would like a standard template	45.03%
2	We have no preference	15.20%
3	No, we would like it to remain open for providers to decide the structure	39.77%

Student Engagement

16. Did students participate in developing your provider submission?

		Response Percent	Response Total
1	Yes	78.95%	135
2	No	21.05%	36

Annex D: TEF Assessor & Panellist Focus Groups Agendas

19 – 23 June 2017

Agenda

- 10.30 Registration & refreshments
- 10.45 Welcome by DfE
- 11.00 Assessment Steps 1a & 1b: provider core & split metrics
- 12.00 Assessment Step 2: provider submissions
- 12.30 Lunch
- 13.00 Assessment Step 3: holistic judgement
- 13.45 Process improvements
 - Pre-assessment
 - Steps 1,2 & 3
 - Stages 1, 2 & 3
- 14.30 Refreshment break
- 14.40 Shaping TEF Year Three and beyond
- 15.10 Key recommendations
- 15.30 Close

Annex E: Organisations consulted by DfE during the TEF Year Two Lessons Learned Exercise

Association of Colleges

Department for Employment and Learning, Northern Ireland

Higher Education Academy

Higher Education Funding Council for England

Independent HE

Million Plus

National Union of Students (NUS)

Quality Assurance agency (QAA)

Russell Group

Scottish Government

University Alliance

Universities UK (UUK)

Welsh Assembly Government



Department
for Education

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