Going for Gold: Lessons from the TEF provider submissions

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HEPI Report 99

About the Author

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Foreword: Ten TEF lessons

Professor Chris Husbands, Vice-Chancellor of Sheffield Hallam University and first Chair of the Teaching Excellence Framework panel

The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) is both new and not new. A commitment of the Conservative Party manifesto for the 2015 election, it nonetheless draws on more than a quarter of a century of policy and professional interest in teaching audit and assessment in higher education. Its name, quite deliberately, echoes and parallels the Research Excellence Framework (REF), itself the evolutionary product of 30 years' experience with the Research Selectivity Exercise (RSE) and the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE). The development of the RSE/RAE/REF tells us something important: that the TEF will not stand still.

I was appointed to chair the TEF Panel, and thus to oversee the process of TEF assessment, ensuring that the interpretation of core and split metrics, the analyses of contextual material and of the 15-page provider statements were all consistent with the TEF specification, were robust and thorough and were conducted with professionalism and integrity. It was an enormous privilege to chair the TEF, to lead assessors and panellists and to work with the quite exceptional professional support team at the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE).

While there have been other assessments of teaching quality in higher education – such as the subject review process two decades ago – it has never before been attempted at

institutional level, nor at this scale. In short, the running of the TEF was a massive technical challenge.

I have worked in higher education for long enough, and in enough different roles, to know that there are always critics, yet the running of the TEF was a triumph of commitment and professionalism. In one assessment session, I recall finding myself looking at deeply thoughtful assessors, supported by outstanding technical professionals, drawing on years of experience as leaders in the sector to analyse data and submissions with sensitivity and insight. I said then that it was a pity we could not video-record the proceedings.

The TEF has provided material for endless analyses, exploring the complexity of the datasets and the pattern of findings. Even as chair of the panel, I have learnt a good deal from these analyses, and I am sure that institutions and assessors alike will be taking those insights forward into future rounds of the TEF. I also do not doubt that across the higher education sector there are teams working through submissions from 'Gold' institutions. My immediate learnings from the TEF are more prosaic than many of the other analyses I have read.

While I recognise – after all, I am an educationist by profession – that the TEF cannot capture the richness, range and complexity of all that goes on in teaching in higher education, it does focus on things surveys – and not least HEPI's own – tell us that matter to students: routes to work; retention; assessment; and quality of teaching. The metrics may be proxies for these things, but all social statistics are flawed. The metrics provide a fix on important issues, which generate initial hypotheses for further investigation.

The TEF – alongside Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) and Learning Gain – is part of an increased focus around the world on outcomes for students. That is a challenge to some of the ways universities and higher education analysts have sometimes thought, which has been too often couched in terms of *inputs*, such as staff and technology, *processes,* including curriculum and assessment, or *outputs,* such as degree classifications or other measures of attainment. In this context, metrics matter, and looking at the metrics against institutional benchmarks is important.

As with the metrics, our benchmarking tools may not yet be perfect but they go a long way to enable us to look at institutional performance, taking account of the nature of the institution and the make-up of its student cohort. In the TEF methodology, metrics generate hypotheses and anchor initial judgements, but they do not determine outcomes. It is for this reason that this report makes a valuable contribution to the sector by highlighting some of the most influential elements of the accompanying provider submissions.

At the core of TEF, I think, is a strategic clarity, requiring assessors and thus universities and colleges to think hard about the relationship between institutional policies, institutional practices and student outcomes. This relationship – in large, complex institutions – will never be strictly linear. But the best accounts were able to articulate and evidence the relationships with subtle cogency.

There has been some sense, in some commentary, that the submissions played a more significant role in the assessment than had been expected. As chair, I was, and remain, determined

that the role of assessment is to make a judgement across a range of data, drawing the various TEF sources into analytic tension. In this context, the best provider submissions did not describe initiatives – of which no institution is short – but systematically demonstrated the difference they had made. Change initiatives carried conviction when part of a coherent strategy for improvement which commanded support across the institution, and assessors were able to deploy a range of techniques and tools to interrogate the consistency, coherence and conviction of submissions.

For me, there were some specific reflections emerging from the TEF assessment. I am an enthusiast for learning analytics, and I am personally sure that the ability to make effective use of analytics will mark out the successful institutions of the future. At present, however, there is a gap between the technology tools for analytics and institutional capacity to make use of them. Closing this gap will be important. Almost all institutions made claims about student engagement, but genuine student involvement stood out. Those institutions who were able to describe and show an embedded culture of engagement at every level were distinctive. On the other hand, rather too many institutions used their context as explanation for their performance rather than analysing and responding creatively to the challenges it offered; the most creative and telling responses were exceptional.

The outcomes of the TEF (Year 2) – the TEF results published in June 2017 – provide an exceptional window into a varied, diverse and successful higher education sector. Before the results were published, there had been a considerable amount of speculation about how the process might discriminate against

some institutions or types of institution. The methodology, and the skill with which assessors and panellists deployed it, proved those speculations wrong. The TEF demonstrated that excellence is distributed across the sector and matches its diversity. The country needs a diverse, excellent higher education system: it needs to celebrate the importance of teaching in higher education. If one result of the TEF is further to stimulate the development of teaching in a diverse sector, it is a result from which institutions, students and the nation will gain.

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Introduction

On 22 June 2017, the results were released from the pilot exercise of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). Intended to recognise excellent undergraduate teaching and learning in universities and colleges, the TEF was rolled out in its first national trial in the academic year 2016/17, with the aim of helping to inform prospective student choices. Institutions participating in the trial exercise – also known as the TEF (Year 2) – received a Gold, Silver or Bronze award, depending on their overall scores.[1]

Reaction to the TEF results has been mixed. With some Russell Group institutions receiving Silver and Bronze awards and other newer providers achieving Gold status, it is safe to say the TEF sent shockwaves through the UK higher education sector, testing assumptions of conventional hierarchies and ranking systems.

Part of this shock has come about due to the way the TEF awards were determined, through a mix of quantitative metrics, acting as proxies for teaching excellence, together with qualitative evidence submitted by participating institutions asked to assess their own quality and impact and to explain how they are tackling shortcomings. These written submissions took account of the nuance and diversity in the sector and allowed institutions to tell their own story alongside the metrics.

The final TEF results nevertheless reveal the qualitative evidence to be more influential than many had assumed, with almost one-quarter of participating higher education

institutions moving up or down the ranking initially suggested by their metrics.

This report considers the significance of these provider submissions to the TEF rankings to uncover which features – themes, types of evidence and presentation strategies – may have influenced the judging panel to change some institutions' awards.

Overall, this report takes the form of a lessons-learned exercise, offering informal, yet practical recommendations to participating institutions, as well as to Government and the bodies administering the TEF, about what can be done to improve the qualitative element of the exercise for the future.[2]

Context

Participation in the TEF (Year 2) assessment exercise was voluntary across the UK. In total, 134 higher education institutions took part, plus 94 further education colleges and six alternative providers, with the vast majority of participants based in England.[3] Despite higher education being a devolved matter, five Scottish institutions entered the TEF, along with six Welsh institutions, although no providers in Northern Ireland opted to take part in the exercise.[4] Most notably, the Open University opted not to participate in the TEF (Year 2), believing the exercise in its current form to be a poor fit with an institution that mainly attracts part-time, distance learners, in many cases without prior qualifications.[5]

Institutions which volunteered to take part in the TEF (Year 2) were assessed against 10 criteria covering the three broad areas of:

1)   Teaching Quality;
2)   Learning Environment; and
3)   Student Outcomes and Learning Gain.[6]

The results were decided by an independent panel of experts, comprising academics, students and employer representatives. The panel determined the final TEF awards on two distinct elements:

i.   A set of **quantitative metrics** using different national datasets, measuring factors such as student satisfaction levels, continuation rates and employment outcomes. The metrics for each provider were benchmarked to account for differences in the make-up of the student body, entry

qualifications and subjects studied. Institutions were graded using a flag system, with positive flags (+ or ++) awarded for high performance against a benchmark and negative flags (- or --) for poor performance. A neutral flag (=) was awarded where there was no significant deviation from the benchmark.

ii. **Qualitative evidence** submitted by the providers, up to 15 pages in length. This gave institutions the opportunity to highlight any areas of excellence not covered by the quantitative metrics or, indeed, to account for any negative flags, which would suggest institutions are performing below the required benchmark.

The provider statements were included in response to concerns that institutions may be unfairly judged on restrictive, quantitative evidence alone. These concerns are not new. A 2015 study into research assessment found there is 'considerable scepticism' around the broader use of metrics in the sector and argued that 'a variable geometry' of expert judgement, quantitative indicators and qualitative measures is needed to ensure robust decision-making.[7] MillionPlus, the Association of Modern Universities, told the Government during the TEF consultation stage that:

> TEF assessments should not be based solely on quantitative judgements. The provider submission should be able to include information that demonstrates improvements and trajectories, rather than focusing only on outcomes.[8]

Despite the sector actively calling for the inclusion of qualitative evidence, however, some higher education leaders did not feel it was necessary in all cases. In June 2016, Graham

Galbraith, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Portsmouth, recommended institutions be given provisional awards on the basis of the benchmarked metrics and argued provider submissions should be made 'only in borderline cases' to save institutions from unnecessary bureaucracy.[9]

The formal guidance issued for the TEF (Year 2) eventually said all participating institutions should submit written evidence, with the provider submissions being 'used to determine whether the initial hypothesis should remain unchanged'.[10] It was clear, therefore, that the provider statements would play a pivotal role in the assessment process.

Subsequent analysis of the TEF results by *Times Higher Education* proves the case. By comparing the final results to data from the quantitative assessment released by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE), *Times Higher Education* determined that almost one-quarter (34) of higher education institutions participating in the exercise saw their final ranking shift up or down on the basis of their provider submissions.[11] In 33 of these cases, the provider submissions resulted in institutions receiving higher awards than originally suggested. In one case – the Royal Veterinary College – the provider submission saw the institution move up two places from Bronze to Gold.

In another case – Buckinghamshire New University – the institution dropped from Silver to Bronze after consideration of its provider submission, exposing the risk that the written evidence could work against institutions as well as to their advantage.[12]

For the other institutions participating in the exercise, the impact of the provider statements was more ambiguous. Some 18 providers lodged appeals over their ratings, with the majority believed to be based on concerns over 'the consistency in approach' to the qualitative evidence adopted by the judging panel. In the end, only one institution was successful in its appeal (namely the University of East Anglia), which saw its ranking rise from Silver to Gold on the basis of a 'misinterpretation of information relating to part-time students'.[13] This sends a clear message to the Government and the bodies administering the TEF of the need to publish clear guidelines for providers, covering what is expected of them in future submissions and protocols for how the TEF panel will assess any evidence provided.

Questions have long been asked about whether the rules of the exercise should be tweaked to take account of lessons learned. On the one hand, this could be unfair to providers that do not wish to re-submit to the exercise every year, given that TEF awards can last for up to three years.[14] On the other hand, there is an argument that the rules of the TEF should continually change to stop the system from being 'gamed'.[15]

On 7 September 2017, Universities Minister Jo Johnson confirmed there would be 'no changes to the overall approach' of the exercise, but that 'a small number of refinements' will be made, including halving the weighting of the National Student Survey (NSS) metric and including new measures to tackle grade inflation and account for student labour market outcomes. He also confirmed a move towards a subject-level TEF, with pilots beginning in the Autumn.[16]

A review of the TEF (Year 2) by Universities UK has highlighted issues for consideration in future iterations of the exercise, including 'the comparability of provider submissions'.[17] What is clear, for now then, is – assuming the rules and requirements of the exercise stay broadly the same, as promised – many institutions remain eager to understand how they can use the provider submissions to their advantage to secure, or maintain, a higher award next time round. A study highlighting the key features of successful provider submissions is therefore certain to make a timely contribution to the debate.

Aims and methodology

This report seeks to uncover the key features of influential provider submissions by looking at the provider submissions from a range of institutions among the 34 cases found by *Times Higher Education* to have had their award changed during the TEF process. The sample size is 12, roughly one-third of the institutions in this group:

1. University of the Arts London
2. University of Bedfordshire
3. University of Birmingham
4. Bournemouth University
5. University of Bristol
6. University of Derby
7. Edge Hill University
8. Imperial College London
9. Leeds Beckett University
10. Newcastle University
11. Royal Veterinary College
12. University College London

These institutions reflect the variety of the English higher education sector, taking into account geographical differences and institutional types.

Every provider statement in this study comes from institutions that have moved up either one or two TEF rankings from those originally indicated by the quantitative data – six were eventually ranked Gold and six were ranked Silver.

One-quarter of the provider statements in this analysis come from London-based institutions, including one moving up from Silver to Gold (Imperial College London), one moving up from Bronze to Silver (University College London) and one specialist institution (University of the Arts London).

Other provider submissions include institutions from the East of England (University of Bedfordshire), the North-East (Newcastle University), the North-West (Edge Hill University), Yorkshire (Leeds Beckett University), the West (University of Bristol), the South coast (Bournemouth University) and the Midlands (University of Birmingham and University of Derby).

Two of the provider submissions reflect different institutional specialisms, including Veterinary Science (Royal Veterinary College) and the Arts (University of the Arts London), while another two have a strong focus on vocational qualifications (Edge Hill University and the University of Bedfordshire).

It is hoped that by covering a variety of institutional types, this report holds important lessons for the entire UK higher education sector.

Approach

To determine the key features of influential provider submissions, this report asks the following questions:

- What key themes emerge?

- What buzzwords, if any, recur?

- What types of evidence are used?

- Are there common presentation strategies (structure, style or tone)?

It also asks whether there is a marked difference between the provider statements from institutions receiving Gold awards and those receiving Silver.

Reference is made throughout to the statements of findings released by the TEF panel to explain the award given to each institution. These help to substantiate claims about what worked in the submissions.

A spotlight is shone on the Royal Veterinary College, the only institution to move up two TEF rankings on the basis of its provider submission. This case study asks what it is about this provider statement that differentiates it from the others, providing lessons for preparing qualitative evidence for future incarnations of the TEF.

Disclaimer

We acknowledge this report examines only a handful of provider submissions and makes no use of a 'control group' to determine just how representative this sample is of the totality of submissions submitted as part of the TEF (Year 2) exercise. We nonetheless trust the features highlighted in this study provide a good indicator of the types of themes, evidence and presentation styles that persuaded the TEF panel to award an institution a higher ranking on account of the narratives submitted.

Central themes

Just as there is no 'one size fits all' higher education institution, there is certainly no 'one size fits all' provider submission, for each institution is diverse in character. Some institutions, aware of their downfalls in the quantitative assessment, start from the defensive. Others, wishing to highlight areas of excellence not conveyed by the metrics, approach the submissions as a marketing exercise, promoting their merits using case studies and examples. With these differences in mind, this report asks if institutions with the most influential provider submissions employ common themes, types of evidence and presentation strategies.

Teaching Quality

Research-led teaching

Many institutions in our sample refer to the concept of research-led teaching to show learning is kept current and inspiring. Several institutions highlight their institutional Research Excellence Framework (REF) scores to illustrate the links between research and teaching. The University of the Arts London says 83 per cent of its research was assessed as 'world leading and internationally excellent' in the REF 2014 and 'all staff engaged in research also teach'.[18] Imperial College London summarises the need to expose students to a 'research-rich environment' to ensure they understand their subjects 'as professional practices as opposed to disembodied corpuses of knowledge'.[19] In several instances, the TEF panel commended institutions for their 'commitment to research-led teaching'.[20]

One of the drivers behind the TEF is, nevertheless, to prevent research-intensive institutions riding on their reputations, so institutions with weaker REF scores need not be disadvantaged by the assessment process. Bournemouth University, for example, does not mention the REF once in its provider submission, yet still demonstrates how 'students benefit from routine contact with staff who are engaged in research'.[21] The TEF panel recognised Bournemouth's 'effective student engagement that is supported by a number of initiatives such as the development of a well-received Student Research Assistant programme'.[22] The University of Derby, another Gold-rated institution, also omits any reference to the REF and draws attention instead to its 'Learning and Teaching Strategy 2016-2020' and its emphasis on 'building research-based and research-led curricula'.[23] Despite not being research-intensive by nature, Derby shows it is possible to find alternative ways to prove research informs and inspires students.

As the University of Bedfordshire's submission shows us, 'in the context of highly vocational curricula', demonstrating 'recent or current professional practice' can be just as important as the research expertise of staff. For this reason, 'each unit descriptor now specifies the relationship to current research or professional practice and staff explicitly reinforce these connections'.[24]

Co-creation

The idea of co-creation was common to many of the provider submissions in this sample. Bournemouth University alludes to the concept of co-creation as 'Fusion', which is the name of its own matrix combining the three elements of education,

research and professional practice.[25] It exemplifies 'Fusion' with staff 'undertaking a piece of research with students who are on a taught unit or involving an external stakeholder'.[26] The University of Birmingham similarly evidences co-creation when describing that, in Medical and Dental Sciences, 'students study alongside staff in research teams that are finding solutions to major health challenges of modern society'.[27]

Some institutions refer to this process as a student-staff partnership. The University of Derby has a 'student as partner' vision, which involves 'staff and students working together in partnership to drive and deliver high quality teaching for all learners'.[28] This allows students to contribute to curriculum design and delivery. Imperial College London outlines a similar strategy, which sees 'students as partners in their education, with a clearer understanding of the roles and responsibilities of staff and students towards one another'.[29] Both these institutions received Gold awards, suggesting that demonstrating student-staff partnerships may be a successful strategy to enhance perceptions of teaching quality, and the TEF panel commended Imperial on its 'active philosophy of students as partners that supports retention, achievement and outstanding career outcomes'.[30]

Academic employment contracts

Several institutions in this study recognise that demonstrating teaching quality does not just require that attention be paid to students, but also to academic staff and their career development. The University of Birmingham highlights its 'teaching-focused career-pathway', which recognises talented academics via teaching-focused appointments and

promotions.[31] The TEF assessors commended Birmingham for its 'embedded culture of teaching development, appraisal and reward'.[32]

Similarly, Bournemouth University speaks of its 'Academic Career Framework' which supports pay progression and promotion for its academic staff.[33] It also emphasises that it 'does not use Teaching Only contracts of employment' and only deploys 'Hourly Paid Lecturing contracts where there is a short term need', thereby adding to the sense of value it puts on its academic staff.[34] The TEF panel praised Bournemouth for its 'systematic and well-embedded staff development mechanisms'.[35]

Specialist institutions may, however, be more inclined to use flexible employment contracts as a means of bringing in practitioner expertise. At the Royal Veterinary College 'nine per cent [of staff] are on non-permanent contracts; of these, 74 per cent are full-time', yet 'none are on "zero hours" contracts'.[36] By contrast, the University of the Arts London admits it has 'an unusually high proportion of hourly paid Associate Lecturers and many permanent staff are part-time'.[37] The University explains this is important to bring in industry expertise and it still supports these staff with training and development opportunities.[38] Being honest about its employment methods helped the TEF assessors recognise the benefits of involving 'input from professionals in relevant creative industry sectors', ultimately contributing to the University's eventual Silver award.[39]

Rewards and recognition

All institutions in this study show they have established

reward processes to recognise excellent teaching among their staff. Many have some form of student-led teaching awards, including the University of Bristol's 'Bristol Teaching Awards' and Leeds Beckett University's 'Golden Robes Awards'.[40] Award schemes like these that incorporate the student voice are effective instruments to show how students have actively identified examples of teaching excellence, as they are not just 'top-down' awards given to staff for presumed excellence based on impressive CVs or strong research credentials. The TEF assessors commended Bristol for its 'well-embedded culture of valuing, recognising and rewarding academic staff involved in teaching and learning'.[41] They also praised Leeds Beckett for its 'institutional culture that facilitates, recognises and rewards excellent teaching'.[42]

Learning Environment

Student input

Several institutions use their provider statements to explain how they work in consultation with students to design resources. Newcastle University, which received a Gold award, declares it used 'two student interns to conduct market research to identify what our students wanted to see from a planned refurbishment of our main library site'. This led to the creation of a 'Student Communication Team in the Library that provides an ongoing mechanism for working with students to improve our provision'.[43] The library space at Imperial College London, which also achieved Gold, has similarly been 'developed with input from students'.[44] The TEF panel praised this 'embedded culture of student engagement', suggesting it contributed to Imperial's eventual higher award.[45]

Showing how students are involved in wider decision-making processes within institutions may also hold value. At Leeds Beckett University, we learn that 'student feedback informs the development and investment in resources', while at University College London consultation with students is 'key' and 'sabbatical officers are full members of the Project Board'.[46] The University of Bedfordshire's process for recognising excellent teaching among its staff also involves 'students as reviewers', contributing to the 'well-embedded student experience projects that further enhance their learning experience' recognised by the TEF panel.[47]

Extra-curricular concerns

Resources that are considered key to the learning experience do not just include lecture halls, libraries or laboratories. Various provider statements show that large and small institutions share concerns over providing suitable student accommodation. University College London, for example, explains how it used a 'perceived lack of a sense of community' in its halls of residence to instigate a 'rapid-response turnaround programme', while Edge Hill University says it has 'invested significantly in on-campus residences' because its 'evidence shows that giving students the opportunity to live on campus maximises their chances of retention'.[48] In fact, Edge Hill University, which was awarded Gold, sees the provision of good quality accommodation and extra-curricular opportunities as being as central to a high-quality learning environment as the delivery of good teaching. In its provider submission, we learn that it strongly encourages students to 'become involved in wider student life, taking advantage of the opportunities available to them', recognising that 'such activities not only enhance a sense

of belonging but can boost an individual's sense of esteem and wellbeing'.[49]

Other institutions emphasise the benefits extra-curricular activities bring to students in preparing for a future career. The Royal Veterinary College recognises 'it is essential for students to have extra-curricular opportunities to develop employability skills that complement those developed through their courses'.[50] The TEF assessors praised this 'tailored approach to the student life cycle that supports student learning, achievement and welfare'.[51] The University of Birmingham similarly points to its 'provision of extra-curricular opportunities in the widest possible range of activities', as well as 'one of the most diverse extra-curricular internship and work experience programmes in any UK university'.[52] Since these institutions were both awarded Gold, it may be worth other institutions looking beyond academic curricula to show how they nurture their students socially, emotionally and vocationally as well as educationally.

Digital connectivity

Improving digital infrastructure appears essential to evidencing a high-quality, modern learning environment. Many institutions in this sample highlight their Virtual Learning Environments (VLE) and video platforms, which facilitate support and communication. Newcastle University, which obtained a Gold award, explains it has implemented 'a University-wide VLE Threshold Standard', which ensures a minimum set of resources and information is available online for every undergraduate module.[53] The University of Bedfordshire, which was awarded Silver, incentivises staff to

maximise its VLE presence through its 'Vice-Chancellor's annual Student Experience Awards' which 'include recognition for the staff member who has made the most outstanding contribution to student learning through the use of technology'.[54] The University of Bristol, which was also awarded Silver, has invested in a video platform 'used across the University to record teaching and thereby support better comprehension and revision'.[55] The TEF assessors acknowledged Bristol's 'strategic investment in infrastructure' and 'innovative learning technologies' as deserving of its higher award.[56]

Gold-status universities seem to go above and beyond standard VLE and video conventions to employ digital technology in innovative ways. At Imperial College London 'all undergraduate medical students are provided with an iPad, which is used to capture and refer to information both in the classroom and in clinical settings'.[57] The University of Derby has developed 'a new Derby mobile app which also includes access to personalised timetables'.[58] The TEF panel highlighted this 'state-of-the-art' timetabling as one of Derby's 'outstanding physical and digital resources which pervade all aspects of student experience', demonstrating how institutions can draw on technology to illustrate its positive transformational power on the learning environment.[59]

Accessibility

Detailing state-of-the-art facilities is, however, only one part of the equation. Influential provider submissions also show that provisions are accessible to as many students as possible. For some institutions, this means enhancing their utility to disabled students. Leeds Beckett University uses its provider

submission to explain how its 'dedicated Disability Support team works with students, academic staff and other colleagues across the institution to ensure that services and resources are accessible by students with disabilities'.[60] The University of Birmingham similarly highlights the 'suite of personalised support' it provides to disabled students, including named Key Workers, individual Action Plans and specialist '1-2-1' tutors and mentors.[61] The TEF assessors explicitly recognised the 'embedded culture of personalised learning' at Birmingham 'evidenced by a comprehensive pastoral and academic support programme'.[62]

Edge Hill University sees accessibility through a wider social mobility lens. Its provider submission says its facilities are designed to recognise that many of its students 'come from backgrounds where there is little experience of higher education and effective learning spaces may not be readily accessible'.[63] Recognising that, for some students, 'apparent "opportunities" are inaccessible due to financial constraints', the University has established 'a seven-figure Student Opportunity Fund' to support study enhancement activities as well as life-enhancing opportunities for disadvantaged students.[64] By interpreting accessibility in its broadest sense, Edge Hill's commitment 'to support achievement and welfare throughout the student journey' was recognised by the TEF panel as deserving of Gold status.[65]

Mentoring schemes

Another way high-scoring institutions demonstrate they integrate students into their learning environments and facilitate progression is via mentoring schemes. Newcastle

University speaks extensively of its 'peer mentoring' system, which it sees as helping new students 'to integrate into the University and their programme, academically, socially and culturally'.[66] Its 'exceptional levels of staff and peer support offered to all groups of students' were commended by the TEF panel for 'helping them to achieve outstanding outcomes'.[67] At the University of Bedfordshire, 'each student has a Personal Academic Tutor (PAT) who meets students regularly during the year to provide more individualised support'.[68] The University also promotes 'Peer-Assisted Learning (PAL)' which 'typically involves second year students assisting first years through timetabled, structured, learning activities'.[69] The TEF panel praised Bedfordshire for 'effective processes' like these which 'enhance the student experience'.[70]

The University of Birmingham similarly recognises that 'some students require very specific forms of mentoring support in order to be successful' and has dedicated support schemes for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) and Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) students.[71] This 'comprehensive pastoral and academic support programme' received praise from the TEF assessors.[72]

It may also be worth showing that mentoring schemes are used for other purposes. The University of Bristol explains that it offers 'mentoring opportunities to all staff who teach to allow them to continue developing and enhancing their practice', while Leeds Beckett University says its Law School offers 'the opportunity for law practitioners and alumni to mentor students who gain real life insights into the legal profession'.[73] The TEF assessors commended Leeds Beckett for providing 'opportunities for students to increase their employability by

engaging with professional practice', showing how referencing employer-based mentoring schemes can help to strengthen submissions.[74]

Student Outcomes and Learning Gain

Geographical factors

Providers use geography in competing ways. On the one hand, some institutions draw on their proximity to significant resources to demonstrate added value. This is particularly true of Silver-status, London-based institutions with a wealth of opportunity on their doorsteps, providing a convenient way to counteract some of the relatively challenging data for London institutions. For example, University College London tells the TEF panel it benefits from its 'central London location, with access to the British Library and to Senate House Library, as well as the British Museum and other significant cultural and intellectual resources'.[75] The University of the Arts London notes 'London is an extraordinary teaching, learning and professional resource for students' – something which it turns into 'a major competitive advantage'.[76]

On the other hand, virtually every institution in this study outside London, particularly those in the north, use their provider submissions to account for regional factors that could otherwise work against them. Newcastle University emphasises it operates in 'the region with the lowest employment rate in the country', while the University of Derby ensures the TEF panel appreciates that it is in 'one of six new "Opportunity Areas" identified by the Government as the most challenged when it comes to social mobility'.[77] By mentioning geographical factors, institutions from different regions are therefore able to

either boost perceptions of their added value or account for negative conditions not explained by the quantitative data. It is an important part of contextualising the data.

Employability programmes

Several institutions use their provider submissions to tell the TEF panel about the extra help they provide to students to boost their employability. Smaller and more vocational institutions, in particular, appear to focus more on initiatives dedicated to enhancing employability skills. The University of the Arts London, for example, explains how its students work with social enterprises, charities and community groups to provide creative input while gaining valuable skills that could get them 'the job that will kick-start their career'.[78] Edge Hill University also includes in all its programmes 'the opportunity for work experience either as part of a vocational programme or in the form of sandwich degrees'.[79] The TEF assessors praised Edge Hill for its 'strategic focus on the employability of students from all backgrounds, ensuring students acquire knowledge, skills and understanding that are most highly valued by employers'.[80]

Many large institutions still mention dedicated employability schemes, such as University College London's 'Skills4Work programme' or Newcastle University's employability modules, which address 'readiness to work' in a focused way.[81] Larger institutions also tend to promote entrepreneurship, hence the University of Bristol's 'student start-up accelerator basecamp' and University College London's 'Enterprise Boot Camp', which both provide a foundation in the fundamentals of business.[82] The TEF panel commended University College London for

its 'highly successful approach to supporting students into employment'.[83]

The University of Derby credits the Apprenticeship Levy for allowing it to work in partnership with industry to develop degree-level apprenticeships contributing to growth and productivity in the region.[84] The TEF panel explicitly recognises Derby's 'strategic engagement with employers', particularly its 'placement programmes', suggesting that going above and beyond to illustrate the benefits of employability initiatives to the individual may well contribute to a higher TEF ranking.[85]

Careers support

Institutional careers services are frequently mentioned by providers when attempting to demonstrate they provide positive outcomes. Imperial College London says its careers service offers additional support to students at risk of finishing their degree with no fixed plans for the future, while the University of Bristol details how its careers service 'actively supports local SMEs [Small and Medium-sized Enterprises] to create paid internships for Bristol students', thereby helping connect students with prospective future employers.[86]

Several institutions detail their duty of care to students after graduation. Newcastle and Derby, for example, explain how graduates can access support from their careers services for up to three years after graduation.[87] Since both these institutions were ranked Gold, it may be worth institutions mentioning their continued support for graduates after their studies end.

Types of evidence

The evidence used in the provider statements is both quantitative and qualitative and comes from a wide range of sources – from government bodies to students. The most common types of evidence are listed below.

QAA endorsement

When attempting to demonstrate teaching quality, many institutions in this sample refer to endorsements from the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). Most notably, Leeds Beckett University refers to the QAA 24 times in its 15-page submission, which is considerably more than any other provider in this sample.[88] The University ends various sections of text with the QAA's assessment of its work, showing how it considers the QAA to be the authoritative voice on teaching quality in the UK. One example is as follows: 'The QAA confirms the effectiveness of our approach to reviewing our resources to help students develop their potential'.[89]

Data from other sector bodies

To support claims of teaching quality, every provider in this study includes statistics from official sources as well as other sector bodies. The most commonly cited sources are those that contributed to the quantitative assessment. Sources include:

- Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE) survey;

- Higher Education Academy (HEA) UK Student Engagement Survey (UKES);

- Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) UK Performance Indicators;

- International Student Barometer (ISB) survey;

- Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) data;

- National Student Survey (NSS) data;

- Society of College, National and University Libraries (SCONUL) data; and

- Universities and Colleges Admissions Service (UCAS) data.

Some institutions think more broadly when it comes to employing alternative data sources. Leeds Beckett University, for example, cites research from the pay data website Emolument to show how it is the fourth most likely university 'to yield successful business leaders', while the University of Bristol cites HEPI's *Student Academic Experience Survey* to demonstrate its students' higher engagement levels.[90] League table rankings also feature heavily. The University of Bristol mentions its position in the *QS*, *Times Higher Education* and *Shanghai Jiao Tong* global rankings, while Edge Hill University mentions its ranking in the *Sunday Times Good University Guide 2017*.[91]

Qualitative feedback

Several institutions in this study employ qualitative feedback to strengthen claims of teaching excellence. Most feedback comes from students, having been collected via in-house surveys, particularly at Gold-status institutions. The University of Birmingham uses direct quotations from students to show

how its Academic Writing Advisory Service has benefited learning, while the University of Derby includes feedback on its Student Study Advisors to illustrate how they boost study skills.[92] The TEF panel found 'elements of exemplary good practice' in Derby's quality monitoring and collection of student feedback.[93]

Not all qualitative feedback comes from students. The University of Derby's submission includes comments from external examiners to illustrate the quality of feedback and assessment methods, while the University of Bristol employs an external examiner's comment to strengthen claims of excellent curriculum design.[94] Smaller, specialist institutions are particularly imaginative when it comes to supporting statements. For example, the University of the Arts London's submission features a statement from alumnus Les Bicknell, the internationally renowned book artist, describing how its Collections 'opened up a world of possibilities' for him as a student, while Edge Hill University uses a quotation from the judges at the *Times Higher Education*, who named it 'University of the Year 2014/15'.[95]

Other qualitative elements to feature in provider submissions come from primary sources, particularly academic articles. The submission by Leeds Beckett University, for instance, includes successive citations from academic studies to explain why a significant number of its graduates are likely to stay in the city region rather than relocate for a highly-skilled job elsewhere in the country. This helps to justify its DLHE metric on employment outcomes or further study.[96]

Student Union statements

It is not uncommon for institutions to draw on the support of their student unions in provider submissions. Both the University of Derby and Bournemouth University include formal statements from their student unions, which confirm they have been directly involved in the composition of their TEF submissions.[97] Leeds Beckett University's submission contains the most substantial quotation from a student union in any of the submissions in this sample, which exemplifies how much the student body appreciates the institution's staff:

> *The nominations [for the Golden Robes Awards].... revealed how much students respect and appreciate staff.... The staff at Leeds Beckett are amazing example of kind, caring and compassionate people who genuinely care about students, their learning and their experience... Enthusiasm was listed for making subjects easier to understand, inspiring and motivational... Many students made reference in nominations about how much their course feels like a community, a family, and how much they value that. This is created, not only by students but by staff members. Nominations made reference to how they felt supported by all staff members of a course, how they could approach staff with issues.*[98]

University College London and the University of Bristol's TEF submissions also include statements from their student unions explaining how they felt unable to contribute as partners to the provider submissions. In Bristol's case, the University explains that its student union is 'supporting the National Union of Students' stance against the TEF' and has decided not to engage

with the submission.[99] University College London's submission contains, however, a more nuanced rejection of co-operation from its student union, which we learn did not want to risk either increasing fees for future students at the University or bringing about 'real and immediate reputational and financial consequences for the institution'.[100] By emphasising the student union's reasoning, this statement actually helps convey the close partnership between the University and its student body.

Costs and expenditure

Many institutions in this study explicitly tell the TEF panel how much they have invested in their learning environments and provisions. We learn, for example, that Leeds Beckett University invested £57 million between 2013 and 2016 to deliver its 'state-of-the-art learning and teaching environments'.[101] University College London tells us that, despite being restricted in terms of space, it has allocated £51 million towards the redevelopment of its teaching estate in the same three-year period, with a further £77 million of improvements being delivered in 2016-17.[102]

While institutions tend to round up numbers when talking about investments in estates, they are nevertheless extremely precise when mentioning investment in library services and resources. Taking the same two institutions as above, we learn that Leeds Beckett University spent £945,379 on e-books and £82,837 on student-led purchasing for library stock, while University College London spent £9,907,992 in 2015-16 on information resources.[103]

User analytics

To demonstrate services are being used by students, many institutions incorporate in their provider submissions various forms of user analytics. These may include:

- application rates (for example, to scholarship schemes);

- interactions with the careers service;

- download rates (for example, of online articles and e-books);

- library usage and library service requests;

- participation rates (for example, in mentoring schemes or enterprise programmes);

- response rates (for example, to surveys);

- social media interactions, particularly via Twitter and LinkedIn;

- viewing rates (for example, of online lecture recordings); and

- website visits and page views (for example, of student support services).

All this data is used to emphasise the transformative changes providers have made to their learning environments and student experiences.

Name-dropping

Institutions which moved up on the basis of their provider submissions are not ashamed to name-drop when it comes

to demonstrating high-profile partners and the destinations of their leavers. The Gold-ranking University of Birmingham's submission includes long lists of companies it works with to provide internships and work experience programmes.[104] The University of the Arts London's submission names companies such as 'Microsoft, Levis, Hitachi and Unilever', as well as fashion giants 'Gucci, Balenciaga, McQueen, Stella McCartney'.[105]

Leeds Beckett University even singles out some academic staff, whom it describes as 'researchers of national or international standing'. These include:

> *David Bowie's music producer Ken Scott and Oscar-nominated cinematographer Phil Robertson, alumni, such as Piers and Kesi from Rudimental and Oscar winner Peter Baumann; and award winning artist-curator Peter Lewis.*[106]

Mentioning high-profile names may impress the TEF panel and give institutions an advantage over others.

Presentation styles

Despite being the first national trial of the TEF, the only presentation advice given to providers was to keep the submissions to 15-pages, to use a specific font and to stay within a specific margin size. This gave institutions a free licence to design their submissions as they saw fit. The most prevalent presentation styles are outlined below.

Vision

The majority of institutions in this sample begin their provider submissions by outlining their mission, values or purpose. Some mission statements are local, such as Leeds Beckett University's aim to be a 'globally engaged university contributing positively to the northern economy', while others are broader, such as Imperial College London's mission 'to achieve enduring excellence in research and education in science, engineering, medicine and business for the benefit of society'.[107] The University of Derby's opening paragraph mentions its official strapline, 'Great people, original thinking, inspiring individuals… changing lives', while University College London's submission opens with a direct quotation from its President and Provost, Professor Michael Arthur, suggesting the 15-page submission that follows it has the seal of approval from the highest echelons of university management.[108]

The University of Bristol begins its submission with a declaration of support for the TEF, boldly pronouncing: 'We believe that our performance in teaching warrants recognition at the Gold level'.[109] This sets a vision for the TEF panel as to what to expect from the rest of the submission, yet it may not have been a

wholly successful strategy considering Bristol was eventually awarded Silver after obtaining Bronze in the metrics.

Ownership

Every institution in this study takes ownership of its achievements and writes using the first-person plural (namely, *we, our, us*). Some institutions do this more convincingly than others. Silver-status Bournemouth University, for example, tends to oscillate between the first-person plural and talking about itself in the third-person as 'BU' – an abbreviation it uses over 200 times. Gold-ranking Edge Hill University, by contrast, only refers to itself by name nine times in its submission, suggesting that using 'we' throughout conveys a far more definite sense of care, ownership and belonging.

Flattery

Certain institutions in this study frame their provider submissions in a form of flattery for the Government and the TEF assessors. The University of Bristol opens by stating it 'welcomes the Government's ambition to further raise the standards of teaching and learning in the UK university system'.[110] Similarly, the University of Derby concludes by declaring it 'embraces the introduction of the TEF and its aim to recognise and reward excellence in teaching quality'.[111] Whether flattery alone contributed to these institutions moving up from their initial TEF rankings is doubtful, yet it does convey institutional commitment and compliance.

Pride

The concept of pride is common to a number of the provider

submissions in this study. Edge Hill University notably frames its own submission firmly in a sense of pride, stating at the outset that it is 'proud' of its institutional origins and concluding by saying it is 'proud' of its legacy.[112] This leaves the reader in no doubt that this submission comes from a provider that is confident in its mission and takes full ownership of its heritage. The University of the Arts London similarly states that it is 'proud' of the 'Creative Attributes Framework' it has developed – 'understood to be the first to address the capabilities and entrepreneurial context of creative graduates'.[113]

This sense of pride is not unique to smaller, specialist institutions, but also effectively employed by larger Gold-ranking universities. In the first line of its submission, the University of Birmingham states that it is 'proud of its civic roots and mission' before going on to describe how it has grown into one of the largest universities in the UK.[114] The University of Derby also expresses its intention to be an institution of which students and staff 'can be proud'.[115] Employing a sense of pride in this way can soften perceptions of larger institutions, making them appear aware of their duty to others and their origins.

Humility

Some Silver-ranking institutions in this sample, which moved up from a Bronze ranking, are not afraid to acknowledge their shortcomings. University College London, for one, explicitly acknowledges at the outset that its students are 'dissatisfied' with some important elements of its provision, particularly with how they are assessed and receive feedback.[116] The University of the Arts London similarly recognises flaws with its own policy of 'continuous formative feedback', which it explains is

not necessarily recognised as formal feedback by students, while the University of Bedfordshire tells us it is 'aware of the attainment and employability gap for certain sections of its student population and has been taking a number of steps to specifically address this'.[117] The TEF panel acknowledged that 'these shortfalls were effectively addressed' by Bedfordshire in its provider submission, thereby showing how employing humility can be an effective way of demonstrating a strategy for improvement.[118]

A similar approach is also evidenced by Gold-status institutions. Imperial College London recognises that 'it is not always as effective as it could be at ensuring that initiatives are co-ordinated, and that successful innovations are moved into the mainstream of College-wide provision'.[119] It goes on, however, to demonstrate how it has taken steps to develop a new Education Strategy to address this, thereby showing how negative flags can be effectively used as catalysts to talk about improvements.

Visuals

Although space is tight in the 15-page submissions, some institutions forgo text space to highlight important statistics in data tables and charts. The University of Bedfordshire, for one, employs data tables throughout its submission to illustrate data from sources including the NSS, LEO and internal monitoring exercises.[120] Edge Hill University's submission also includes a colour graph to underscore the regional disadvantage in the labour market, which it wants to be taken into consideration when assessing its success in supporting the social mobility of its students.[121] University College London's submission even

Case study: Royal Veterinary College

The Royal Veterinary College uses its provider statement particularly effectively to explain how it is addressing shortcomings. It tells the TEF panel that it needs to provide 'a careers service with a significant breadth of experience' as its Biosciences courses grow, so it has started to work with the University of London Careers Group to get access to careers guidance beyond the veterinary sector[i]. Its success in using its provider statement to demonstrate improvements and trajectories in this way suggests that higher education institutions should be open about their weaknesses in their submissions if it helps demonstrate a commitment to change.

The College also uses its status as a small, specialist institution to its advantage to account for its otherwise poor performance against the metrics. Due to its small student intake, the College is able to explain that its own contact with graduates revealed a 'travelling tour' had had a disproportionate impact on the percentage of those employed after six months, as well as account for the 33 graduates classed as unemployed in its individualised files.[ii] Although it is more difficult for larger providers to account for the destinations of their leavers so precisely, the extent to which it strengthened this particular submission holds an important lesson for the sector about improving institutional data collection mechanisms.

[i]   RVC, p.12
[ii] RVC, p.2

features different coloured text for its subject headings, which helps readers to distinguish between sections, particularly in the absence of bullets and numbering.

Individuality

Several institutions in this sample clearly establish their own buzzwords and themes in the course of their provider submissions, which serve to make their narratives unique as well as memorable. These institutions include:

- The University of the Arts London, which leaves us in no doubt that it is a creative institution, with the word 'creative' appearing 57 times in its account;

- The University of Birmingham, which places high emphasis on the quality of its provisions, using the word 'outstanding' 33 times in its report;

- Bournemouth University, which clearly prides itself on its commitment to 'Fusion', with the concept appearing 16 times in its narrative;

- Edge Hill University, which is unmistakeably student-centred and concerned about its impact on individuals, using the word 'personal' (and its derivatives) 27 times;

- Leeds Beckett University, which seeks to emphasis its regional identity, featuring the word 'north' (and its derivatives) 20 times; and

- University College London, which seeks to promote its 'Connected Curriculum', mentioning the concept on 18 different occasions.

The TEF panel credited University College London for its 'introduction of innovations to ensure stretch in the curriculum' and the University of Arts London for its students' 'creative development', thereby affirming how employing key phrases can help to convey a particular institutional image.[122]

Impactful conclusions

While many institutions in this sample formally conclude their provider submissions with summaries, a handful of institutions are not afraid to go one step further and tell the TEF panel the level of award they expect to receive. Bournemouth University uses the very last line of its narrative to tell the TEF panel 'our provision is in the Silver category', while the University of Bedfordshire says it is 'confident that we meet at least the definition of a Silver institution'.[123] The University of Birmingham similarly states that its metrics and evidence 'underpin our application for a Gold level award'.[124] All institutions received the award requested, however the use of the word 'application' in Birmingham's submission is noteworthy, considering the provider submissions were officially part of an assessment process and not an application system. This adds weight to claims that the sector may not fully understand the role and purpose of the provider submissions.

For other submissions in this sample ending with a formal conclusion, there is a clear sense that they are looking to the future and that the changes they are making will be long-lasting. Newcastle University uses the last sentence of its submission to tell the TEF panel that the features it has detailed 'characterise undergraduate education at Newcastle, and will continue to do so in the future', while the staff at University

College London state they 'look forward to the point in the near future where our metrics and our narrative submission both point clearly and unambiguously to the same evidence of our success'.[125] Most notably, the University of Bristol's submission features a whole page of text on how it is 'looking to the future', detailing its new strategic plan that will 'further enhance teaching quality, learning environment and student outcomes'.[126] Including forward-planning can therefore help to portray a firm sense of progress.

Conclusion

As this analysis shows, no two institutions share the same approach to their narratives. It is nevertheless possible to observe some common features and, as a result of studies like this one, we should expect the provider submissions to become more universal in their approach in the future, should the requirements of the TEF remain similar. Based on this study, we can conclude:

- Most institutions in this sample allude to common themes, including research-led teaching, co-creation and employability initiatives. Several institutions recognise that demonstrating teaching excellence is about more than describing what goes on in the lecture hall and, therefore, draw attention to their staff employment strategies, as well as their provision of extra-curricular activities and student support systems. Many institutions also realise that simply listing their facilities and resources is not enough: some detail how they were designed with student input, others detail how they facilitate their accessibility and usage. All refer to geography, however, with some using their location to boost perceptions of their offerings to students, while others (particularly in the north) draw on regional trends to raise awareness of the challenging surroundings in which they operate. In both cases, this helps to counter poor metric scores.

- All institutions draw on quantitative and qualitative evidence to substantiate claims of teaching excellence. Quantitative evidence usually comes from relevant sources of authority, including government departments and sector

bodies. User analytics are often included, particularly in the context of library services and digital media; so too are costings to emphasise investments made in the learning environment. To illustrate performance, some providers mention league table positions, as well as other sector awards and accolades. In terms of qualitative evidence, the most commonly referenced source is the QAA, with institutions using extracts from its reports to evidence the quality of their learning. Other qualitative content includes quotations from students, staff, external examiners and alumni, which all help to boost perceptions.

• Every provider submission in this sample is distinctive, with some institutions using their narratives to bring out certain aspects of their style and character. The frequent occurrence of some words and concepts adds individuality to the submissions, with some institutions appearing confident, some appearing student-centred and others appearing creative or concept-driven. This links, in many ways, to the institutional mission and vision outlined by most providers at the start of their submissions. Without fail, every institution employs the first-person plural to some degree in their narratives to convey ownership and responsibility. Some providers portray pride in their actions, while others express humility when recognising their faults. Some providers also employ flattery, expressing agreement with the TEF and the Government's efforts to measure teaching quality. This may help to convey a sense of commitment and compliance.

• Institutions receiving a Gold award seem to think more broadly when discussing key themes and appear to mention additional provisions such as digital developments

and mentoring schemes. These institutions also tend to put students at the heart of their services, either by including student input or enhancing accessibility initiatives. The Royal Veterinary College's submission reveals it is worth being open and honest about institutional shortcomings to emphasise the importance of improvements being made. It also demonstrates the value of collecting robust graduate data to explain and contextualise.

Recommendations

For higher education institutions

- Be clear about your institutional starting point and the tone you wish to convey, be it one of confidence and pride or humility.

- Demonstrate a clear sense of ownership and responsibility by using the first-personal plural (*we, us, our*) wherever possible.

- Show a commitment to research-led teaching to boost perceptions of teaching quality, irrespective of whether your institution is research-intensive or otherwise.

- Think about factors outside the lecture hall which contribute to a high-quality teaching environment, such as satisfied staff, the provision of student accommodation and the availability of student/staff support systems.

- Show that your students matter by giving examples of co-creation activities, student input into consultations and, where possible, student union cooperation.

- List investments made in facilities and resources, including full costings (wherever possible) and impact achieved.

- Emphasise the accessibility of institutional facilities, paying particular attention to disabled students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

- Include qualitative evidence, particularly quotations from staff and students, to evidence teaching quality and impact, yet keep these quotations concise and to the point.

- Use quantitative evidence from a wide variety of sources to substantiate claims.

- Mention the names of top partners, investors or employers, as well as referencing relevant awards and accolades.

- Consider employing visual aids such as graphs, charts and colours to help to highlight key facts or sections of text.

- Convey your individuality in the narrative by using words and concepts that define your institution and its ethos.

For the Department for Education and bodies administering the TEF

- Include in the forthcoming official 'lessons learned' review specific observations on the provider statements, so that providers gain a better idea of expectations of their content and structure (taking on-board lessons from this study as well as studies by other sector bodies).

- Reconsider what role the provider statements should play in future TEF assessments, i.e. whether they should have the power to shift institutional awards up or down an award-level, and whether they should be given equal importance irrespective of whether an institution is on the 'borderline' between award categories or safely within a certain award bracket.

- Devise formal guidance for the TEF panel for comparing different provider submissions, so that institutions know exactly how the panel will be using their narrative statements to determine their future TEF awards.

- Ensure the format of the provider submissions does not become too prescriptive and prevent institutions from continuing to express their individuality and institutional culture, as well as issues that are unique to them.

Endnotes

1   Although the TEF (Year 2) represents the first full trial year of the TEF, a more limited pilot took place in the academic year 2015/16 and this is referred to as TEF (Year 1). For definitions of the Gold, Silver and Bronze award categories in the TEF (Year 2), see 'Frequently asked questions about the TEF' on the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) website (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/tef/whatistef/teffaq/)

2   At the time of writing, HEFCE administers the TEF. However, this function is expected to pass over to the Office for Students from January 2018.

3   '299 universities and colleges take part in Year Two of the Teaching Excellence Framework', HEFCE press release, 27 January 2017 (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/newsarchive/2017/Name,112796,en.html)

4   No Scottish or Welsh institutions feature in this study because no institutions from the devolved nations received a different TEF rating on the basis of their provider submissions, as per this report's methodology. It is nevertheless hoped that institutions in Wales and Scotland will benefit from the report's findings.

5   Peter Horrocks, 'Why my university is not entering the TEF', *Times Higher Education*, 26 January 2017 (https://www.timeshighereducation.com/blog/why-my-university-not-entering-tef)

6   For definitions of what the TEF panel was looking for in these areas, see 'New assessment highlights excellence of teaching and learning across UK universities and colleges', HEFCE, 21 June 2017 (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/newsarchive/2017/Name,114556,en.html)

7   James Wilsdon et al., *The Metric Tide*, Report of the Independent Review of the Role of Metrics in Research Assessment and Management, July 2015 (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Pubs/Independentresearch/2015/The,Metric,Tide/2015_metric_tide.pdf)

8   'Teaching Excellence Framework: year two and beyond', Government technical consultation response, September 2016 (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/557140/Teaching_Excellence_Framework_-_Technical_Con_Response.pdf)

9   Graham Galbraith, 'More bureaucracy please?', HEPI blog, 29 June 2016 (http://www.hepi.ac.uk/2016/06/29/proposed-article-hepi-bureaucratic-implications-tef/)

10 'Teaching Excellence Framework: year two specification', September 2016 (https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/556355/TEF_Year_2_specification.pdf)

11 Simon Baker, 'TEF: in-depth analysis of the results', *THE,* 29 June 2017 (https://www.timeshighereducation.com/features/tef-in-depth-analysis-of-results)

12 According to the *THE*'s analysis, Buckinghamshire New University was the only higher education institution to drop an award category on the basis of its provider statement. There may well, however, have been more further education colleges in a similar predicament.

13 John Morgan, 'UEA upgraded to gold in teaching excellence framework on appeal', *THE*, 15 August 2017 (https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/uea-upgraded-gold-teaching-excellence-framework-appeal)

14 TEF awards are valid for up to three years so institutions need not re-apply every year.

15 Steven Jones, 'Seven rules the Teaching Excellence Framework should follow', *The Guardian*, 7 July 2015 (https://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2015/jul/07/seven-rules-the-teaching-excellence-framework-should-follow)

16 Jo Johnson, Speech to UUK annual conference, 7 September 2017 (https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/jo-johnson-speech-to-uuk-annual-conference)

17   *Review of the Teaching Excellence Framework Year 2: Process, Results and Next Steps*, Universities UK, 31 August 2017, p.38 (http://www.universitiesuk.ac.uk/policy-and-analysis/reports/Documents/2017/review-of-the-teaching-excellence-framework-year-2.pdf)

18   University of the Arts London, provider submission, p.11 (paragraphs 3.12 and 3,13) (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning,and,teaching/TEF/TEFYearTwo/submissions/TEFYearTwoSubmission_10007162.pdf)

19   Imperial College London, provider submission, p.11 (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning,and,teaching/TEF/TEFYearTwo/submissions/TEFYearTwoSubmission_10003270.pdf)

20   See, for example, Statement of findings: Newcastle (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning,and,teaching/TEF/TEFYearTwo/statements/TEFYearTwoStatement_10007799.pdf)

21   Bournemouth University, provider submission, p.10 (paragraph 61) (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning,and,teaching/TEF/TEFYearTwo/submissions/TEFYearTwoSubmission_10000824.pdf)

22   Statement of findings: Bournemouth (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning,and,teaching/TEF/TEFYearTwo/statements/TEFYearTwoStatement_10000824.pdf)

23   University of Derby, provider submission, p.11 (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning,and,teaching/TEF/TEFYearTwo/submissions/TEFYearTwoSubmission_10007851.pdf)

24   University of Bedfordshire, provider submission, p.8 (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning,and,teaching/TEF/TEFYearTwo/submissions/TEFYearTwoSubmission_10007152.pdf)

25   Bournemouth, p.2 (paragraph 13)

26   Bournemouth, p.4 (paragraph 22)

27 University of Birmingham, provider submission, p.4 (http://www. hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning,and,teaching/TEF/ TEFYearTwo/submissions/TEFYearTwoSubmission_10006840.pdf)

28 Derby, p.8

29 Imperial College London, p.2 (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/ HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning,and,teaching/TEF/TEFYearTwo/ submissions/TEFYearTwoSubmission_10003270.pdf)

30 Statement of findings: Imperial (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/ HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning,and,teaching/TEF/TEFYearTwo/ statements/TEFYearTwoStatement_10003270.pdf)

31 Birmingham, p.6

32 Statement of findings: Birmingham (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/ HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning,and,teaching/TEF/TEFYearTwo/ statements/TEFYearTwoStatement_10006840.pdf)

33 Bournemouth, p.4 (paragraph 22)

34 Bournemouth, p.4 (paragraph 24)

35 Statement of findings: Bournemouth

36 Royal Veterinary College, provider submission, p.5.(http://www. hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning,and,teaching/TEF/ TEFYearTwo/submissions/TEFYearTwoSubmission_10007779.pdf)

37 UAL, p.4 (paragraph 2.9)

38 UAL, p.4 (paragraph 2.9)

39 Statement of findings: UAL (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/ HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning,and,teaching/TEF/TEFYearTwo/ statements/TEFYearTwoStatement_10007162.pdf)

40   University of Bristol, provider submission, p.6 (http://www.hefce.
      ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning,and,teaching/TEF/
      TEFYearTwo/submissions/TEFYearTwoSubmission_10007786.pdf);
      and Leeds Beckett University, provider submission p.6 (http://www.
      hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning,and,teaching/TEF/
      TEFYearTwo/submissions/TEFYearTwoSubmission_10003861.pdf)

41   Statement of findings: Bristol (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/
      HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning,and,teaching/TEF/TEFYearTwo/
      statements/TEFYearTwoStatement_10007786.pdf)

42   Statement of findings: Leeds Beckett (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/
      HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning,and,teaching/TEF/TEFYearTwo/
      statements/TEFYearTwoStatement_10003861.pdf)

43   Newcastle University, provider submission p.4 (paragraph 17) (http://
      www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning,and,teaching/
      TEF/TEFYearTwo/submissions/TEFYearTwoSubmission_10007799.
      pdf)

44   Imperial, p.8

45   Statement of findings: Imperial

46   Leeds Beckett, p.8 (paragraph 38); and University College London,
      provider submission, p.8 (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/
      Content/Learning,and,teaching/TEF/TEFYearTwo/submissions/
      TEFYearTwoSubmission_10007784.pdf)

47   Bedfordshire, p.5; Statement of findings: Bedfordshire (http://www.
      hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning,and,teaching/TEF/
      TEFYearTwo/statements/TEFYearTwoStatement_10007152.pdf)

48   UCL, p.8; and Edge Hill University, provider submission, p.9
      (paragraph 9.2) (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/
      Content/Learning,and,teaching/TEF/TEFYearTwo/submissions/
      TEFYearTwoSubmission_10007823.pdf)

49   Edge Hill, p.2 (paragraph 2.5)

50   RVC, p.14

51   Statement of findings: RVC (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/
      HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning,and,teaching/TEF/TEFYearTwo/
      statements/TEFYearTwoStatement_10007779.pdf)

52   Birmingham, pp.13-14 (paragraphs 3.20 and 4.4)

53   Newcastle, p.10 (paragraphs 46-47)

54   Bedfordshire, p.8

55   Bristol, p.9

56   Statement of findings: Bristol

57   Imperial, p.10

58   Derby, p.10

59   Statement of findings: Derby (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/
      HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning,and,teaching/TEF/TEFYearTwo/
      statements/TEFYearTwoStatement_10007851.pdf)

60   Leeds Beckett, p.8 (paragraph 41)

61   Birmingham, p.8 (paragraph 2.27)

62   Statement of findings: Birmingham

63   Edge Hill, p.9 (paragrph 9.2)

64   Edge Hill, p.2 (paragraph 2.6)

65   Statement of findings: Edge Hill (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/
      HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning,and,teaching/TEF/TEFYearTwo/
      statements/TEFYearTwoStatement_10007823.pdf)

66   Newcastle, p.9 (paragraph 41)

67	Statement of findings: Newcastle

68	Bedfordshire, p.9

69	Bedfordshire, p.10

70	Statement of findings: Bedfordshire

71	Birmingham, p.14 (paragraph 4.9)

72	Statement of findings: Birmingham

73	Bristol, p.6; and Leeds Beckett, p.10 (paragraph 48)

74	Statement of findings: Leeds Beckett

75	UCL, p.8

76	UAL, p.4 (paragraph 2.10) and p.1 (paragraph 1.6)

77	Newcastle, p.11 (paragraph 50); and Derby, pp.1-2

78	UAL, p.15 (paragraph 4.14)

79	Edge Hill, p.13 (paragraph 15.4)

80	Statement of findings: Edge Hill

81	UCL, p.13; and Newcastle, p.12 (paragraph 54)

82	Bristol, p.13; and UCL, p.14

83	Statement of findings: UCL (http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE,2014/Content/Learning,and,teaching/TEF/TEFYearTwo/statements/TEFYearTwoStatement_10007784.pdf)

84	Derby, p.15

85	Statement of findings: Derby

86	Imperial, p.15; and Bristol, p.13 (section 3.2)

87   Newcastle, p.15 (paragraph 67); and Derby, p.14

88   For comparison purposes, the University of Derby mentions the QAA four times, Bournemouth University mentions it seven times, and the University of Birmingham mentions it 10 times.

89   Leeds Beckett, p.8 (paragraph 38)

90   Leeds Beckett, p.14 (paragraph 65); and Bristol, p.4

91   Bristol, p.2; and Edge Hill, p.3 (paragraph 3.3)

92   Birmingham, p.6; and Derby, p.13

93   Statement of findings: Derby

94   Derby, p.6; and Bristol, p.4

95   UAL, p.10 (paragraph 3.7); and Edge Hill, p.14 (paragraph 17.1)

96   Leeds Beckett, p.3 (paragraph 15)

97   Derby, p1; and Bournemouth, p.15

98   Leeds Beckett, p.6 (paragraph 29)

99   Bristol, p.4

100 UCL, p.4

101 Leeds Beckett, p.8 (paragraph 38)

102 UCL p.8

103 Leeds Beckett, p.8 (paragraph 41); and UCL, p.8

104 Birmingham, p.13

105 UAL, p.10 (paragraph 3.9)

106 Leeds Beckett, p.9 (paragraph 46)

107 Leeds Beckett, p.1 (paragraph 2); and Imperial, p.1

108 Derby, p.1; and UCL, p.1

109 Bristol, p.1

110 Bristol, p.1

111 Derby, p.15

112 Edge Hill, p. 1 (paragraph 1.2) and p.15 (paragraph 17.9)

113 UAL, p.7 (paragraph 2.23)

114 Birmingham, p.1

115 Derby, p.1

116 UCL, p.1

117   UAL, p.8 (paragraph 2.29); Bedfordshire, p.14

118 Statement of findings: Bedfordshire

119 Imperial, p.2

120 Bedfordshire, pp.3-14

121 Edge Hill, p.5 (paragraph 4.10)

122 Statements of findings: UCL and UAL

123 Bournemouth, p.15 (paragraph 101); Bedfordshire, p.15

124 Birmingham, p.15

125 Newcastle, p.15 (paragraph 68); and UCL, p.15

126 Bristol, pp.14-15 (section 4.0)

This report analyses a sample of provider submissions submitted as part of the Teaching Excellence Framework (Year 2) exercise.

It asks which features – themes, types of evidence and presentation strategies – may have influenced the TEF panel to change some institutions' final awards.

As a lessons learned exercise, it offers informal, yet practical recommendations to participating institutions, as well as to Government and the bodies administering the TEF, about what can be done to improve the qualitative element of the exercise for the future.