

NCUB submission to the BIS consultation on the Green Paper, 'Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice'

Submitted by: Aaron Porter
Organisation: National Centre for Universities and Business (NCUB) – Independent Charity
Address: Studio 11, Tiger House, Burton Street, LONDON. WC1H 9BY
Email: aaron.porter@ncub.co.uk

The National Centre for Universities and Business (NCUB) is delighted to present this submission in response to the Green Paper on 'Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice'. Our response is primarily focussed on the areas of teaching and the proposed Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).

This submission is made on behalf of our members (70 higher education institutions and 60 businesses), drawn from across the United Kingdom.

Question 2: How can information from the TEF be used to better inform student and employer decision making? Please quantify these benefits as far as you can.

The proposed TEF has the potential to provide a significant improvement in the quality of information provided to prospective students to help inform their decisions on what and where to study, but also provide a useful guide to employers on how provision and outcomes vary across the sector.

Central to the success of the TEF, will be the quality of the measures and data which are used to construct it. Care should be taken to ensure that this does not become a bureaucratic exercise for higher education providers, but equally it will need to be robust enough to say something meaningful about the provision it is judging. Particularly taking into account differences within, as well as between providers.

Whilst it is welcome that this consultation is open to allow perspectives to help inform TEF over time, further steps should be taken to ensure that the views of a range of employers (not just the large graduate recruiters) are able to input directly to offer a valuable view on the sorts of measures or information they would find useful.

Care should also be taken to ensure that the TEF is useful not just to employers of a range of sizes, but also of different sectors. Organisations that recruit in some sectors will necessarily be looking for different aptitudes and teaching excellence to other disciplines, and it is important that these subject differences are captured within TEF. If the TEF is constructed carefully, it may help to streamline the processes for business who try and identify the strengths, and differences of graduates coming out of the higher education system. At present, many employers report that it can be difficult to efficiently identify the sorts of graduates (both in terms of knowledge and skills) that would be most useful to them.

More generally, we would like to see the TEF include measures which demonstrate the extent to which curriculum is informed by industry, and how successful universities are at the translation of their research.

For students, the TEF could be beneficial to provide additional information on how the nature of courses from provider to provider varies. Not only will it bring together existing data on employability, but perhaps also inform students on the extent to which various courses and institutions engage meaningfully with employers. Caution should also be taken to ensure that TEF

does not look at teaching excellence through the lens of employability in a disproportionate way, we know that students are looking for a range of outcomes from degree study.

NCUB will continue to work with the department to support gathering further input, particularly from business.

Question 3: Do you agree that the ambition for TEF should be that it is open to all HE providers, all disciplines, all modes of delivery and all levels?

Yes No Not sure **YES**

In order for TEF to be of most use, it should be open to all higher education providers and at all levels. However the sorts of considerations that postgraduate students have will inevitably be different to undergraduates, and likewise employer judgements on graduates at different levels will also differ, so this needs to be taken into account.

TEF in particular needs to take into account discipline differences at the earliest opportunity. A TEF judgement which tries to account for an entire institution will not be able to articulate the distinctive differences which occur across institutions. Indeed articulating the differences across disciplines within institutions, is probably crucial to securing confidence in the TEF as a whole, and the government should consider how meaningful a single TEF score across institution is.

It is important to bear in mind that there are over 2.2million students in UK higher education at any one time, and therefore the TEF needs to be suitably encompassing to be relevant to students studying the full spectrum of degree programmes. For some industries, the creative sector being a good example, employers are looking for portfolios and creative flair, which will be particularly challenging to capture in a TEF so further thought needs to be given in this respect.

Furthermore, TEF ought to take into account that many students will quite deliberately choose one discipline area but then choose a career in another sector. If the TEF is going to be used to try and shape demand for certain subjects, this needs to be approached with caution. Indeed, the TEF may be better served at trying to capture the extent to which programmes prepare students to be inter-disciplinary and support them to work in a number of different sectors after graduation.

Question 4: Where relevant, should an approved Access Agreement be a pre-requisite for a TEF award? What other mechanism might be used for different types of providers?

Access agreements could certainly be further strengthened to take into account the support that is provided to students from non-traditional backgrounds into employment and specifically work experience. A greater focus on access agreements might also be on ensuring that students from non-traditional backgrounds are supported into work experience and placements, as we know these students are often unable to call upon contacts and networks for these opportunities.

NCUB is currently working on the development of a national online platform to connect students in higher education with work experience opportunities, we would be keen to support the department in examining how our work experience platform could be used by higher education providers and business to better connect their students with placements.

Question 5: Do you agree with the proposals on:

a) what would constitute a 'successful' QA review Yes No Not sure **YES**

b) the incentives that should be open to alternative providers for the first year of the TEF Yes No Not sure **YES**

c) the proposal to move to differentiated levels of TEF from year two? Yes No Not sure

NOT SURE

We agree that an ongoing external quality assurance process is important for all providers to be able to engage with, this provides confidence for the entire sector, and therefore makes a sensible contribution to the first level of TEF.

Before being able to arrive at an informed decision on the merit of differentiated levels of TEF from year two, greater detail on what attributes a provider needs to meet will need to be made available.

Question 6: Do you agree with the proposed approach to TEF assessments on

Timing? Yes No Not sure

NOT SURE

Assessment panels? Yes No Not sure

YES

and process? Yes No Not sure

NOT SURE

NCUB would like to ensure that employer and student input is an important component of the TEF assessment panels. We would be happy to work with government to offer our own support on assessment panels, but also to help identify employers too.

Question 7: How can we minimise any administrative burdens on Institutions? Please provide any evidence relating to the potential administrative costs and benefits to institutions of the proposals set out in this document.

The best way to minimise administrative burdens on institutions is to use existing measures as far as possible. Examples of this would include the current QAA external review process. If new measures are to be introduced, the government should consider running these themselves rather than burdening institutions on undertaking these exercises.

Question 8: Do you agree with the proposed approach to differentiation and award as TEF develops over time? Yes No Not sure

YES, the TEF will certainly need to develop over time. And in theory the ability to differentiate between levels of excellent teaching is welcome. But with a strong caveat, this is contingent on the information and measures being used to derive this judgement is fit for purpose and takes into account the different mission and aims of a diverse sector.

Once the initial TEF is developed, government will want to hear from providers, students and employers about the extent to which it is working and therefore how it might be further differentiated over time.

Question 9: Do you agree with the proposed approach to incentives for the different types of provider? Yes No Not sure

NOT SURE

Question 10: Do you agree with the focus on teaching quality, learning environment, student outcomes and learning gain? Yes No Not sure

YES, teaching quality, learning environment, student outcomes and learning gain are all important dimensions to feed into the TEF. At present, there are no comprehensive and simple measures to easily capture teaching quality in particular. This remains a central challenge for TEF. However their inclusion are crucial, as these probably represent the most important aspects of teaching excellence.

Criteria such as student satisfaction and employability are not direct proxies for how well a student has been taught, but provide information on outputs from that experience.

Question 11: Do you agree with the proposed approach to the evidence used to make TEF assessments - common metrics derived from the national databases supported by evidence from the provider? Yes No Not sure

NOT SURE. Because different institutions seek to achieve different aims, using common metrics from national databases will not always be appropriate. Sometimes this means that institutions will not be trying to achieve the same ends, and therefore measuring them on the same scale is not appropriate.

Likewise for employers, they will be looking at different elements of both skills and knowledge when making judgements about possible recruitment. Therefore TEF will need to be mindful that although common metrics may be desirable, it will need to satisfy very diverse students and employers.

Question 12: a) Do you agree with the proposals to further improve access and success for students from disadvantaged backgrounds and black and minority ethnic (BME) backgrounds?
 Yes No Not sure

YES, this is a very welcome announcement from the Prime Minister and will require close attention from the sector and the Office for Students in particular to help achieve this. NCUB is particularly committed to supporting students from non-traditional backgrounds and would like to explore with BIS how we might make our work experience platform available to better connect students with placements.

c) What other groups or measures should the Government consider?

NCUB would happily work with BIS to bring together employers to consider what more can be done to improve the graduate outcomes of non-traditional students and those from ethnic minority backgrounds.

Question 14: Do you agree with the proposed single route into the higher education sector? Yes No Not sure

YES, it is welcome to reform the entry route into higher education. However it is crucial that there continues to be a rigorous and robust scrutiny process in place to ensure that any provider who wishes to enter the HE sector meets a threshold standard. It is not in the interests of students or employers if we open up the system to weaker providers.

Question 17: Do you agree with the proposal to introduce a requirement for all providers to have contingency arrangements to support students in the event that their course cannot be completed? Yes No Not sure

YES. It is crucial that in a more marketised system, all providers have contingency arrangements in place for students should they not be able to complete the course. This should be made clear to students at the point of application and entry.