



Department  
for Education

# Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework Specification

October 2017



## About this guide

The Government has introduced the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) to recognise and reward excellent teaching in UK higher education (HE) providers.

Published in October 2017, this specification sets out the assessment framework and specifies the criteria, evidence and process for the TEF.

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) is responsible for implementing the TEF according to the DfE's specification.

## Structure of this document

This document comprises:

The DfE's specification for TEF, as published in October 2017.

Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF): Metrics example workbook, published separately [[insert link here](#)]

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# 1 Introduction

- 1.1 This document provides a specification for the operation of TEF from October 2017. It reflects the decisions made by the Government after the first, trial, year of assessments for which results were announced in June 2017 (TEF Year Two). A related document which summarises the lessons learned is also available. A Glossary of technical terms used in this document is in Annex A.
- 1.2 In October 2017, and at a similar time in subsequent years HEFCE will publish additional procedural guidance for UK higher education providers on how to participate in that year's assessment round.

## Purpose of the TEF

- 1.3 The Government has introduced the TEF as a way of:
  - Better informing students' choices about what and where to study
  - Raising esteem for teaching
  - Recognising and rewarding excellent teaching
  - Better meeting the needs of employers, business, industry and the professions

## Implementation

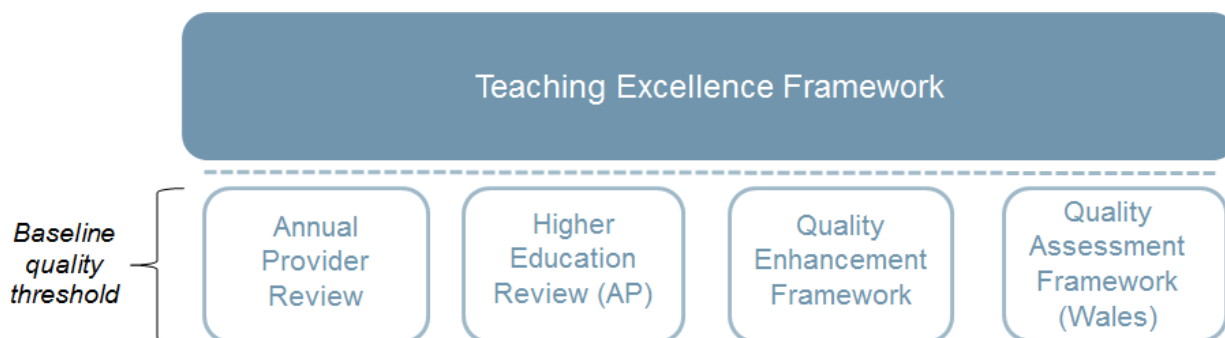
- 1.4 The Department for Education (DfE) is responsible for determining the framework and specification for the TEF assessment, and for deciding the fee and loan uplifts associated with TEF outcomes in England. The Scottish Government, Welsh Government and the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland are responsible for regulating fees in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland respectively.
- 1.5 The Department for Education (DfE) has asked the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) to implement the TEF; this responsibility will transfer to the Office for Students (OfS). HEFCE is responsible for implementing the TEF, in accordance with the DfE specification. The current TEF team in HEFCE will move into the OfS in due course. The HEFCE chief executive will be responsible for key operational decisions, for example with regard to providers' eligibility for TEF awards and the appointment of panellists and assessors.
- 1.6 The Government intends to commence clause 25 of the Higher Education and Research Act (HERA) on 1 January 2018, in line with the creation of the Office for Students (OfS). Between January and March 2018, HEFCE will take forward the implementation on behalf of the OfS; from April 2018 onwards the OfS will be fully responsible for the implementation of the TEF in line with this specification. From a provider perspective, this will not impact on the operation of the TEF application and assessment process as set out in this document.
- 1.7 All references to HEFCE in this document should therefore be read as 'HEFCE or, from April 2018 onwards, the OfS'.

- 1.8 The TEF Panel is responsible for deciding the outcomes of the assessment, guided by advice and recommendations from the panellists and assessors. (For more information on their roles see paragraphs 8.24-8.27 and Table 11)
- 1.9 In parallel to the delivery of provider level TEF from October 2017, TEF will be piloted at subject level. The DfE published the specification for the pilots on 20 July 2017 and HEFCE is implementing the pilots with up to 40 providers. Any providers taking part in both TEF at provider level and the subject level pilots will do so as two separate exercises; the outcomes from one will have no bearing on the outcomes from the other.
- 1.10 HEFCE will publish timetables and procedural guidance for applications for each year of TEF in autumn, and the publication of outcomes will take place the following spring, in time to inform the decisions of students applying in the next academic year. Subsequent years will be scheduled as required.
- 1.11 This specification will apply to all assessment rounds until a new specification is published. HEFCE will publish procedural guidance each year setting out the dates for application windows and other relevant timetable information for that year.

## **Funding applications**

- 1.12 No provider will be required to pay a fee to enter the TEF.

Figure 1: Relationship between quality assessment and the TEF



- 1.13 Quality assessment and the TEF form a coherent system but play distinctive roles. Quality assessment provides a foundation that ensures providers offer a high- quality student academic experience, deliver good student outcomes, and protect the interests of their students. It also delivers assurances about the integrity of degree standards to ensure that the value and reputation of UK degrees is safeguarded.
- 1.14 The TEF will incentivise excellent teaching and provide better information for students to support them in making informed choices. Quality assessment and the TEF will therefore work together to promote, support and reward continuous improvement and better student outcomes (see figure 1 for a simplified diagram).
- 1.15 There is currently a common understanding across the UK of the baseline quality required of higher education provision, defined by the Expectations of the UK Quality Code for Higher Education and the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications<sup>1</sup>. However, the approach to quality assessment varies in different parts of the UK. In England and Northern Ireland, Annual Provider Review (APR) is the primary mechanism for assuring quality for higher education institutions and further education colleges that receive direct and indirect funding from HEFCE or Department for the Economy, Northern Ireland (DfE –NI).
- 1.16 Alternative providers in England, who do not receive funding directly from a funding council are reviewed by the QAA and are currently transitioning to Higher Education Review (HER APs)<sup>2</sup>.
- 1.17 In Scotland, providers take part in Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR), which forms part of an overarching Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF). ELIR includes an emphasis on enhancement alongside assurance – it includes a review visit where peers engage directly with the institution being reviewed<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> For more information on the Quality Code including the Frameworks for Higher Education Qualifications, see the [UK Quality Code for Higher Education](#)

<sup>2</sup> For more information on HER (AP), see the [Education Oversight Reviews documentation](#).

<sup>3</sup> For more information on ELIR and the Quality Enhancement Framework, see the Enhancement Themes webpage.



- 1.18 Wales has a quality assurance framework that aligns with England and Northern Ireland.
- 1.19 In all cases, quality assessment provides a pre-requisite for the TEF. Quality assessment reviews (whether in the form of APR, ELIR, HER AP or an earlier form of review) typically look at a broader range of areas than solely teaching quality. While they can, and do, recognise achievement above the baseline, they are primarily aimed at ensuring quality and standards meet common thresholds.
- 1.20 The TEF will build on this, providing an additional judgement on performance above the baseline, in the area of teaching and learning quality. Teaching excellence is defined broadly to include teaching quality, the learning environment, and student outcomes and learning gain.
- 1.21 For providers in England undergoing APR, some of the same data that will be used to monitor quality as part of the APR process will be used to assess performance in the TEF. As these data sets are collected centrally, providers taking part in the TEF will not need to complete additional returns, thus reducing the administrative burden on providers.
- 1.22 TEF panellists and assessors will not retest providers against baseline quality and standards. Rather, they will focus on performance above the baseline. A concern or risk to quality and standards identified through quality assessment has the potential to impact on a provider's TEF award. Should a concern be substantiated, a provider may lose its award (see Outcomes section).
- 1.23 In England, quality assessment and TEF outcomes will feature on the Register of HE Providers and in official sources of information for students.

## **Feedback from TEF to baseline quality assurance**

- 1.24 Following the conclusion of the TEF assessment process, if the TEF Chair has any concerns that some providers in England that have been assessed may be below the quality baseline, the Chair will write to the Chief Executive of HEFCE, naming the providers in question and stating briefly the factors which gave rise to this concern. No broader public statement will be made.
- 1.25 HEFCE will take account of this letter and consider carefully whether or not further action should be taken under baseline quality assessment to investigate whether these providers continue to meet baseline quality requirements. Should a subsequent investigation determine that a provider is not meeting baseline quality requirements, a provider may lose its award (see Outcomes section).
- 1.26 Any providers who are referred to HEFCE in this way will be informed of the fact that they have been referred, the reason for that decision and whether or not HEFCE is taking any further action as a result of that referral.
- 1.27 If such a concern relates to a provider in one of the devolved administrations, the TEF Chair will instead write privately to the head of the relevant funding authority in that nation. It will be entirely at the discretion of the relevant funding authority as to whether any further action is taken.
- 1.28 Any providers who are referred to a devolved funding authority in this way will

be informed of the fact that they have been referred and the reason for that decision. It will be for the relevant funding authority as to whether any further communication occurs with that provider as to its actions.

## 2 Scope

### Level of provision and mode of study

- 2.1 The TEF will cover undergraduate provision leading to qualifications at levels 4, 5 and/or 6<sup>4</sup> for provision in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and at levels 7, 8, 9 and 10 in Scotland. For clarity, the following are in scope:
- higher and degree apprenticeships, if they include a qualification within the UK Framework for HE Qualifications
  - primary qualifications (or first degrees) in medicine, dentistry and veterinary science
  - integrated masters degrees
  - Higher National Certificates and Higher National Diplomas at levels 4 and 5.
- 2.2 All modes of delivery, including full and part-time and distance, work-based and blended learning are in scope for the TEF.

### The Devolved Administrations

- 2.3 The Devolved Administrations have confirmed they are content for providers in Northern Ireland and Scotland to take part in TEF for the assessment round taking place in academic year 2017/18, should they wish to do so. In Wales it is also a matter for individual providers whether or not they wish to participate in TEF.
- 2.4 We have made a number of provisions to ensure that providers in these nations can be assessed fairly and on a level playing field with providers in England. These variations are summarised below and reflected in relevant parts of the document.
- 2.5 First, guidance and support for the panellists and assessors, both of which will include representation from the devolved nations, will include:
- briefing on the operating context of higher education in each nation, including Welsh medium provision in Wales; and
  - a brief statement setting out the national context for panellists and assessors to review (produced by the respective funding bodies for England, Wales and Scotland or the Northern Ireland Executive, in consultation with their sector bodies).
- 2.6 This will allow panellists and assessors to understand the operating context for

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<sup>4</sup> [The Framework for HE Qualifications of UK Degree Awarding Bodies.](#)

higher education as they assess TEF applications from each nation.

2.7 Second, we have adapted the TEF eligibility requirements to recognise different approaches to quality assessment and access and participation across the UK:

- the TEF will recognise Fee and Access Plans in Wales, Widening Access and Participation Plans in Northern Ireland, and Outcome Agreements in Scotland as equivalent to Access Agreements in England for TEF purposes;
- all higher education providers will be able to use excerpts from their quality assessment review findings within the TEF provider submission, to support their case for teaching excellence (if they feel it is appropriate to do so), thereby minimising any additional burden. Any findings included in the TEF provider submission should be timely, demonstrate performance above the baseline and be clearly related to the TEF assessment criteria;
- when assessing institutional performance for specific student groups, particularly disadvantaged students, we will split TEF core metrics by the different Indices of Multiple Deprivation used in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland;
- guidance to Panel members and assessors in this document explicitly sets out that, where providers in Wales are delivering Welsh-medium provision, this may be considered as positive evidence towards the TEF assessment criterion concerned with students' academic experiences (LE3)<sup>5</sup>; and
- guidance will also explicitly recognise that providers in Scotland typically have slightly lower retention rates, due to different structure, and that this should be taken into account by panellists and assessors in judging performance against the core and split metrics.

## Franchised provision

2.8 For the purpose of TEF, the quality of provision will be assessed at the provider that delivers the teaching. This may not be the provider that awards the qualification or registers the student. Franchised provision is defined as an agreement between a lead HE provider (the registering provider) and another higher education provider (usually a further education college or an alternative provider) to teach all or part of a programme on behalf of the lead provider. Franchised students will contribute only to the metrics of the provider where the students are taught, and will be included in the teaching provider's TEF assessment. Franchised students will not contribute to the metrics of the registering provider, and will not be included in the registering provider's TEF assessment, because we want to assess teaching where it takes place.

2.9 A provider offering franchised provision on behalf of a lead provider will be in

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<sup>5</sup> See the **Assessment Criteria** section for further detail

scope for the TEF provided it is quality-assured in its own right and meets the additional eligibility requirements set out in the next section. Each eligible provider in a franchise arrangement should make its own decision about participation in the TEF.

- 2.10 While the relationship between the registering and the teaching provider may often be related to validation relationships, validation relationships between providers do not in themselves affect a provider's eligibility or the way that students are included in providers' TEF metrics.
- 2.11 TEF awards are made in respect of the quality of provision at the provider that delivers the teaching. For franchised provision, however, the registering provider determines and ordinarily collects the student fee. It is, therefore, the TEF outcome of a registering provider in England that will determine fee and loan caps for franchised students taught at another provider.

## **Transnational education**

- 2.12 The teaching of overseas students studying in the UK is within the scope of the TEF. They are included in the NSS-based metrics, but not the continuation or employment or further study metrics or the supplementary LEO metrics for technical reasons. Providers should take this into account within their provider submission, where relevant.
- 2.13 Delivery of UK awards by overseas HE providers, or by overseas campuses of UK providers are outside the scope of the TEF. The quality of transnational education is assured through the quality assessment system.

### 3 Eligibility, pre-requisites and provisional TEF awards

- 3.1 Providers that have not yet taken part in the TEF, or that have a TEF award (regardless of how long those awards are valid for) can choose to participate in any year of the TEF. They will need to meet the eligibility requirements set out in this section in order to receive a TEF award.
- 3.2 Where a provider that holds a valid TEF award takes part in a subsequent TEF year, the new TEF award, once published, will replace the previous award; in this case the previous award will no longer be valid.
- 3.3 Providers holding TEF awards lasting more than one year that do not take part in the subsequent TEF years will continue to hold their awards, so long as they continue to meet the eligibility requirements set out below.
- 3.4 Providers cannot withdraw from TEF after they have made an application for an award.
- 3.5 Eligibility and pre-requisite requirements set out below reflect our ambition to integrate a commitment to widening access and participation, and that the TEF should build on quality and standards assured through broader arrangements.

#### Eligibility and pre-requisites

- 3.6 To be eligible for a TEF award, a provider must meet the following eligibility requirements set out in the chapter. A provider must also offer provision that meets the definition described above for the **Level of provision and modes of study in scope** for TEF.

#### Designation for student support

- 3.7 To receive a TEF rating a provider must deliver eligible HE provision that is designated for student support purposes. This includes:
  - A) Courses that are designated by the student support regulations<sup>6</sup> of the relevant administration, including those that are wholly provided by authority funded institutions.<sup>7, 8</sup>

OR

  - B) Providers that are defined as a 'fundable body' by the Further and Higher Education (Scotland) Act 2005 (as amended)

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<sup>10</sup> Education (Student Support) Regulations 2011 (as amended); Education (Student Support) (no. 2) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2009, Education (Student Support) (Wales) Regulations 2015 (as amended).

<sup>11</sup> Authority-funded' means: (a) in relation to educational institutions in England, maintained or assisted by recurrent grants from the Higher Education Funding Council for England; (b) in relation to educational institutions in Wales, maintained or assisted by recurrent grants from the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales; and (c) in relation to educational institutions in Northern Ireland, maintained or assisted by recurrent grants from the Department for the Economy or the Department of Agriculture, the Environment and Rural Affairs in Northern Ireland.

<sup>8</sup> Further Education Colleges who are automatically designated as part of a franchise arrangement will be considered as eligible. We have made an exception for this particular group of providers because they already undergo additional financial monitoring checks

OR

c) Courses that are specifically designated, that is:

- developed and delivered by an alternative provider (the teaching organisation) often in partnership/collaboration with another provider. These courses must be specifically designated for the relevant period by the Secretary of State (or designated by the relevant devolved administration) and registered on the Student Loans Company HEI course database in the name of the teaching organisation.

3.8 Providers in Wales should note that the Welsh Government has put in place separate requirements for both automatic and specific course designation for the purposes of student support funding for students who are resident in Wales. Therefore, these providers should make themselves aware of these requirements to ensure that students attending such courses are eligible to apply for this funding.

## Widening access and participation

3.9 Reflecting the Government's commitment to widening access and participation, all providers wishing to take part in the TEF must have either an approved Access Agreement (or equivalent in Wales, Northern Ireland or Scotland – see below) or, for English providers, publish a short statement setting out their commitment to widening participation and fair access (referred to here as an Access and Participation Statement).

3.10 In the case of providers with an Access Agreement, the current Agreement will be used to determine eligibility for the TEF. Providers required to publish an Access and Participation Statement will need to do so by the deadline for TEF applications.

3.11 English providers must publish an Access and Participation Statement, if they do not have an approved Access Agreement, if they wish to be eligible to participate in the TEF. The content of this Statement will be at the provider's discretion; however we anticipate that it would comprise a brief statement stating what the provider is doing to widen participation. We anticipate the statements will vary between providers, and should be informed by the circumstances of the provider and the characteristics and needs of its students. Providers will want to focus their activity in order to achieve the greatest impact.

3.12 These statements will not need to be approved by the Director of Fair Access to Higher Education or by any other authority. They will however be a visible outward statement and will need to be published and available in the public domain by the time the application window for TEF closes. This ensures that all providers taking part in the TEF clearly demonstrate their commitment to widening access and participation. HEFCE will publish further guidance on how to submit these statements and DfE will work with HEFCE for future TEF years as we continue to develop Access and Participation Statements.

3.13 We will recognise the following as equivalent to Access Agreements for TEF purposes:

- Fee and Access Plans for providers in Wales
- Widening Access and Participation Plans for providers in Northern Ireland
- Outcome Agreements for providers in Scotland.

## Assessment by the Director for Fair Access

- 3.14 Throughout this section, ‘the Director for Fair Access’ (DFA) should be read as ‘the Director for Fair Access or, from April 2018, the Director for Fair Access and Participation.’
- 3.15 The DFA will consider whether a participating English provider has reduced the number or proportion of students from disadvantaged, under-represented or BME groups with the principal or major objective of improving its performance in the TEF.
- 3.16 The DFA will use the three year student profile data included within each participating provider’s TEF contextual data, alongside other publically available data and any other information relevant to the case, which could include evidence from one or more whistleblowers, in order to consider whether:
- 3.16.1 there has been a substantial reduction in the number or proportion of students from disadvantaged, under-represented or BME groups since the introduction of TEF in 2016-17 AND there has been a positive effect on the provider’s TEF metrics which it appears likely has been due in whole or in part to the reduction.
  - 3.16.2 there is strong evidence that this reduction occurred with the principal or major objective of improving performance in the TEF.
- 3.17 The DFA will only consider changes in a provider’s student profile over the last three years, not the absolute number or proportion of disadvantaged, under-represented or BME groups.
- 3.18 If the DFA determines that the requirement in 3.3.1 has been met, regardless of whether the requirement in 3.3.2 has also been met, the DFA will seek an explanation for the reduction from the provider.
- 3.19 The DFA will consider the provider’s explanation alongside the data originally considered and any other information relevant to the case.
- 3.20 The Director will determine one of three outcomes from this consideration:
- Outcome 1: that the requirement in 3.16.1 has been met but not the requirement in 3.16.2. The DFA is wholly satisfied with the explanation offered and the DFA will take no further action.
- Outcome 2: that the requirement in 3.16.1 has been met but not the requirement in 3.16.2. However, the DFA is not wholly satisfied with the explanation offered regarding the requirement in 3.16.2. This will be used as evidence within their consideration of the provider’s next Access and Participation Plan, as well as in the OfS’s ongoing regulation of that provider with regard to Access and Participation issues.
- Outcome 3: that both the requirements in 3.16.1 and 3.16.2 have been met. In this case, the DFA will declare the provider to be ineligible for a TEF award in that year. Any existing TEF rating will also be withdrawn.
- 3.21 The provider will be notified of the outcome and, where appropriate, a change made to any public records.
- 3.22 A provider may appeal Outcome 3 as set out in sections 8.21 to 8.23.



## Suitable metrics

- 3.23 Given the key role of metrics in informing TEF assessment, providers must have a minimum set of reportable metrics in order to apply for a TEF assessment. This is one year of reportable, benchmarked data for each of the six core metrics, for either full or part-time students, whichever forms the majority taught at the provider (for further detail see **Contextual data and metrics section**). Providers that have relatively recently started to return student data that underpins TEF metrics should note that the continuation metric requires at least two consecutive years of student data returns, as it measures whether students remain in higher education following their year of entry (for full-time students). Providers that have returned only one year of student data could not therefore have suitable metrics, as they do not have a continuation metric.
- 3.24 A TEF award will be valid for the maximum duration of three years if a provider has three years of reportable, benchmarked data for each of the six core metrics, for either full or part-time provision, whichever forms the majority. For a provider that has only one or two years of data for any of the core metrics, the duration of the TEF award will be reduced to reflect the number of years of data (i.e. if the provider only has one year of data, it will receive an award that is valid for one year and if it has two years of data, it will receive an award that is valid for two years – see **Outcomes section**).
- 3.25 A provider that does not have or is unable to provide supplementary metrics may still apply for a TEF assessment. The availability or otherwise of supplementary metrics does not affect the duration of the TEF award.
- 3.26 A provider that does not possess suitable metrics can opt to receive a **provisional TEF award** (see below).

## Lack of metrics due to NSS boycott

- 3.27 If a provider does not have reportable metrics for the National Student Survey and there is evidence of an NUS-sanctioned boycott of the NSS by students at that provider, the provider shall be treated as if it had reportable metrics for that year for the purposes of eligibility and award duration.
- 3.28 Further information on how assessment should be conducted for providers in such circumstances is set out in the relevant sections below.

## Quality requirement

- 3.29 To receive a TEF rating, providers must meet the requirements of the quality assessment system in their home nation.
- 3.30 For providers in England and Northern Ireland, reference will be made to the arrangements for quality assessment put in place by HEFCE and DfE-NI.
- 3.31 An outcome in the Annual Provider Review (APR) of 'Meets requirements', 'Meets requirements with conditions' or 'Pending' will satisfy the quality requirement for the TEF<sup>9</sup>. Although providers with an APR outcome of 'Pending' will meet the quality requirement, their ability to retain a TEF award will be subject to resolving the 'Pending' APR outcome. If further investigation leads to an outcome of 'Does not meet requirements' the TEF award will be withdrawn. A provider with any APR outcome that is subsequently

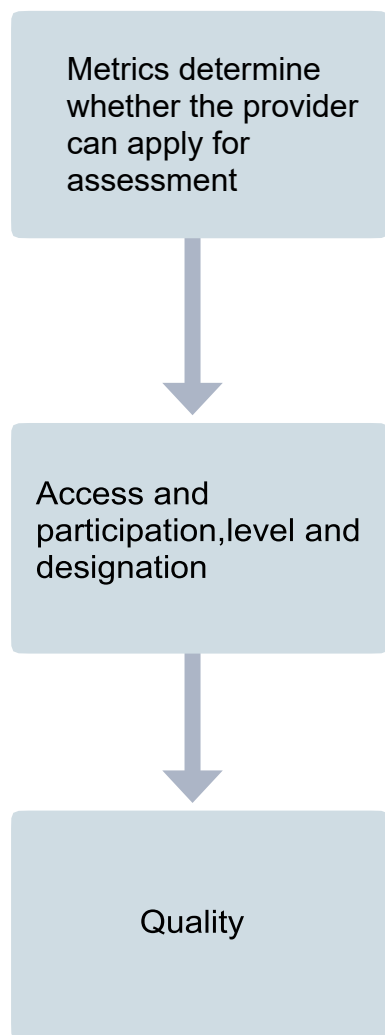
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<sup>9</sup> More detail on the outcomes of APR can be found at [www.hefce.ac.uk/reg/QualityAssessment/Whatdo](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/reg/QualityAssessment/Whatdo)

investigated under the Unsatisfactory Quality Scheme and judged as having “serious issues found”, will lose its TEF award (see **Withdrawal of a TEF award** section for further detail).

- 3.32 For alternative providers in England and for providers in England and Northern Ireland who do not have an APR outcome, we will continue to use the most recent QAA review as the quality requirement for the TEF, as defined in in HEFCE’s procedural guidance.
- 3.33 For providers in Wales, which will not yet have transitioned to new arrangements, we will continue to use the most recent QAA review as the quality requirement for the TEF, as defined in in HEFCE’s procedural guidance.
- 3.34 For providers in Scotland, we will continue to use the most recent QAA review as the quality requirement for the TEF, as defined in in HEFCE’s procedural guidance.
- 3.35 In all cases, the provider must meet the relevant quality requirements in its own right.
- 3.36 Any updates to these requirements as a result of the new regulatory framework due to come into effect in England will be published in due course.
- 3.37 A summary of eligibility requirements and pre-requisites is depicted diagrammatically in **figure 2**.

Figure 2: TEF Eligibility and pre-requisites



- If the provider has **suitable metrics**, it can **apply** for an assessment. The number of years of metrics will determine the duration of the award.
- If the provider does not have **suitable metrics**, it can **opt-in** for a provisional award (or, exceptionally, make the case for data amendment if that would result in a suitable set of metrics).
- The eligibility and pre-requisite requirements below apply to providers that apply for assessment **and** those opting-in for a provisional TEF award.
- **Access and Participation:** The provider must have an approved Access Agreement or equivalent.
- **Level:** The provider must have undergraduate level students that are in scope for the TEF being taught at that provider.
- **Designation:** The provider must deliver HE that is either automatically designated for student support or has specific designation for undergraduate level student support.
- **For providers in England and Northern Ireland subject to APR:** The provider must receive an outcome of 'Meets requirements', 'Meets requirements with conditions' or 'Pending' to receive a TEF rating.
- **For providers in England not subject to APR:** the most recent QAA review will be used (see HEFCE's procedural guidance).
- **For providers in Scotland and Wales:** the most recent QAA review will be used (see HEFCE's procedural guidance).

## Provisional TEF awards

- 3.38 Higher education providers that do not have suitable metrics to inform the assessment and which are therefore prevented from achieving a rating above the first level on procedural grounds can opt to receive a provisional TEF award.
- 3.39 In order to apply for a TEF assessment, the provider must have a suitable set of metrics, which means all six core metrics are reportable for at least one year in the mode of study that forms the majority taught at the provider.. The continuation metric requires at least two consecutive years of student data returns, as it measures whether students remain in higher education following their year of entry (for full time students). Providers that have returned only one year of student data do not have suitable metrics, as they do not have a continuation metric. Providers that meet the other TEF eligibility criteria will be eligible to opt-in for a provisional award.
- 3.40 The provisional TEF award will make clear that the provider has met the baseline quality expectations required for TEF eligibility, but is unable to apply for TEF assessment (and therefore the higher ratings) on procedural grounds. Provisional TEF awards are not available to providers that have suitable metrics.
- 3.41 Provisional awards will be referred to and presented as 'Provisional'. This reflects that the provider has not been assessed in TEF and has not been given a rating.
- 3.42 A provider wishing to receive a provisional TEF award does not need to prepare a submission but must meet the Access and Participation and other eligibility requirements for TEF and must opt in to HEFCE by the TEF application deadline. Provisional TEF awards will last for one year.
- 3.43 For 2018-19 students, the fee and loan cap link to TEF outcomes will be the same for all TEF ratings (Gold, Silver or Bronze) and provisional awards.

## Mergers and divisions

- 3.44 Providers who are merging or de-merging can still apply for TEF. A merged provider will receive a single TEF award, where deemed eligible. De-merged providers will receive separate awards, where each is deemed eligible.
- 3.45 Mergers or de-mergers can take place at different points in the TEF process. In each case, HEFCE will determine whether the legal entity(ies) after the merger or de-merger meet the eligibility requirements. The TEF ratings for the legal entity(ies) will take account of the metrics and submission(s) of the former provider(s) and the relative student numbers reflected in each.
- 3.46 Where a provider has merged before the start of the application window, HEFCE will issue a merged set of metrics, and the provider must make a single submission. Where the merger takes place during the application window, each provider will receive separate metrics from HEFCE but the lead provider should if possible make a single submission covering all HE provision of the merged providers. Where the merger takes place after the application deadline but before the assessment process is complete, the TEF Panel will take account of the separate metrics and submissions to determine a single rating for the lead provider. In any event the lead provider will need to meet the eligibility criteria set out above and in HEFCE's procedural guidance.
- 3.47 Where providers have de-merged before the start of the application window and the

teaching arrangements for individual students can be differentiated between the providers involved, HEFCE will issue separate metrics for each provider, and the providers must make separate submissions. Where the de-merger takes place during the application window, HEFCE will if possible re-issue separate metrics and each provider should if possible make separate submissions. Where the providers de-merge after the application deadline but before the assessment process is complete, the TEF Panel will determine a single rating; HEFCE will determine whether this rating should be conferred to each of the de-merged providers, and if so, the duration of these awards.

## 4 The assessment framework

- 4.1 The assessment framework has been designed to enable **diverse forms of teaching and learning excellence** to be identified. Assessment will be made against a set of common criteria, covering different aspects of teaching and learning. Assessment will be an holistic academic judgement, based on core and split metrics, additional evidence in the provider submission and supplementary metrics. It will be carried out by peers comprised of experts in teaching and learning as well as student representatives and employment and widening participation experts.
- 4.2 **Table 1** provides a model of the assessment framework.

**Table 1: Assessment framework**

Aspect of Quality Areas of teaching and learning quality	Teaching Quality (TQ)	Learning Environment (LE)	Student Outcomes and Learning Gain (SO)
<b>Criteria</b> Statements against which panellists and assessors will make assessments	Teaching Quality criteria	Learning Environment criteria	Student Outcomes and Learning Gain criteria
Evidence	Core metrics		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Teaching on my course (NSS scale 1)</li> <li>Assessment and feedback (NSS scale 2)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Academic support (NSS scale 3)</li> <li>Continuation (HESA)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Employment/ further study (DLHE)</li> <li>Highly-skilled employment/ further study (DLHE)</li> </ul>
	Split metrics		
	Additional evidence (provider submission) and supplementary metrics		
Statement of findings Why a particular rating was awarded	Brief description of why a particular rating was awarded including particular strengths		
Overall outcome TEF rating	The level awarded		

## Aspects of quality

- 4.3 Teaching quality is **best considered in the context of students' learning**. The outcomes of students' learning are determined by the quality of teaching they experience, the additional support for learning that is available and what the students themselves put into their studies, supported and facilitated by the provider.
- 4.4 The assessment framework therefore considers teaching excellence across three main aspects: **Teaching Quality (TQ)**, **Learning Environment (LE)**, and **Student Outcomes and Learning Gain (SO)**. An explanation of each aspect of quality is set out below. Together the three aspects make up a balanced view of learning and teaching quality.
- 4.5 **Teaching Quality** includes different forms of structured learning that can involve teachers and academic or specialist support staff. This includes seminars, tutorials, project supervision, laboratory sessions, studio time, placements, supervised on-line learning, workshops, fieldwork and site visits. The emphasis is on teaching that provides an appropriate level of contact, stimulation and challenge, and which encourages student engagement and effort. The effectiveness of course design, and assessment and feedback, in developing students' knowledge, skills and understanding are also considered. The extent to which a provider recognises, encourages and rewards excellent teaching is also included within this aspect.
- 4.6 **Learning Environment** includes the effectiveness of resources such as libraries, laboratories and design studios, work experience, opportunities for peer-to-peer interaction and extra-curricular activities in supporting students' learning and the development of independent study and research skills. The emphasis is on a personalised academic experience which maximises retention, progression and attainment. The extent to which beneficial linkages are made for students between teaching and learning, and scholarship, research or professional practice (one or more of these) is also considered.
- 4.7 **Student Outcomes and Learning Gain** is focused on the achievement of positive outcomes. Positive outcomes are taken to include:
- acquisition of attributes such as lifelong learning skills and others that allow a graduate to make a strong contribution to society, economy and the environment,
  - progression to further study, acquisition of knowledge, skills and attributes necessary to compete for a graduate level job that requires the high level of skills arising from higher education
- 4.8 The extent to which positive outcomes are achieved for all students, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, is a key feature. The distance travelled by students ('learning gain') is included (see below).
- 4.9 Work across the sector to develop new measures of **learning gain** is in progress<sup>10</sup>. Until new measures become available and are robust and applicable for all types of providers and students, we anticipate providers will refer to their own approaches to identifying and assessing students' learning gain – this aspect is not prescriptive about what those measures might be.

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<sup>10</sup> For further information on HEFCE learning gain pilots, see HEFCE's [learning gain site](#).

## Assessment criteria

4.10 The **assessment criteria** are set out in **table 2**. Panellists and assessors will use evidence from the core and split metrics, supplemented by additional evidence and supplementary metrics, to assess performance against the criteria to determine a provider's TEF rating. The criteria have been **designed to allow recognition of diverse forms of excellence** and to avoid constraining innovation.

**Table 2: TEF assessment criteria**

Aspect of Quality Areas of teaching and learning quality	Reference	Criterion
Teaching Quality	Student Engagement (TQ1)	Teaching provides effective stimulation, challenge and contact time that encourages students to engage and actively commit to their studies
	Valuing Teaching (TQ2)	Institutional culture facilitates, recognises and rewards excellent teaching
	Rigour and Stretch (TQ3)	Course design, development, standards and assessment are effective in stretching students to develop independence, knowledge, understanding and skills that reflect their full potential
	Feedback (TQ4)	Assessment and feedback are used effectively in supporting students' development, progression and attainment
Learning Environment	Resources (LE1)	Physical and digital resources are used effectively to aid students' learning and the development of independent study and research skills
	Scholarship, Research and Professional Practice (LE2)	The learning environment is enriched by student exposure to and involvement in provision at the forefront of scholarship, research and/or professional practice
	Personalised Learning (LE3)	Students' academic experiences are tailored to the individual, maximising rates of retention, attainment and progression
	Employment and Further Study (SO1)	Students achieve their educational and professional goals, in particular progression to further study or highly skilled employment



Student Outcomes and Learning Gain	Employability and Transferable Skills (SO2)	Students acquire knowledge, skills and attributes that are valued by employers and that enhance their personal and/or professional lives
	Positive Outcomes for All (SO3)	Positive outcomes are achieved by its students from all backgrounds, in particular those from disadvantaged backgrounds or those who are at greater risk of not achieving positive outcomes

## Supporting the needs and attainment of all students

4.11 The Government has been clear on the importance it places on **supporting the aspirations and achievement of students from a diversity of backgrounds**. The assessment framework includes a specific criterion on the outcomes achieved by students from disadvantaged backgrounds and we expect that in making the case against the other criteria, a provider will show how the experiences, development, attainment and progression of all students is supported, including identifying and addressing any differences in the outcomes achieved by specific groups.

## TEF ratings

4.12 A provider that applies for the TEF will attain one of three possible ratings: **Bronze, Silver or Gold**.

4.13 Guidance on performance at each level is in the **Outcomes section**.

## 5 Contextual data and metrics

### Contextual data

- 5.1 Panellists and assessors will be supplied with **contextual data** on each provider, which allows them to understand their **nature** and **operating context** (including size, location and student population), as well as aiding the **interpretation of metrics**. Providers will also receive a copy.
- 5.2 Contextual data allows panellists and assessors to take into account the specific context in which the provider is operating – for example, considering employment/destination outcomes in the context of employment statistics for the geographical area or widening participation in the context of the student population studying at the provider.
- 5.3 **Table 3** sets out the contextual data that will be provided. Unless otherwise stated, data will be shown as an average across the three most recently available academic years, and based on student headcount. Where fewer than three years of data exist in this period, the contextual data will be shown as an average across the available years of data instead<sup>11</sup>. Overall totals of full- and part-time students will be shown separately based on the student full-time equivalence (FTE).

**Table 3: Contextual data**

Contextual Data	Category Definition	Sub-groups
Level of study	Level of the programme a student is registered on	First degree, other undergraduate, programmes at the undergraduate/postgraduate boundary <sup>12</sup>
Age	Age at start of study	Under 21, 21 to 30, over 30
POLAR	Applies to UK-domiciled students aged under 21 only. Participation of Local Areas is used as a proxy for social disadvantage in HE.	Quintiles 1,2,3,4,5
National IMD: EIMD	Providers in England only. Applies to students domiciled in England only. The English indices of deprivation 2015 show relative deprivation in small areas in England	Quintiles 1,2,3,4,5

<sup>11</sup> Availability of data in any given year is determined at the overall cohort level, rather than being mode-specific. For example, if a provider has two years of part-time data, and three years of full time data, both sets of contextual data will be shown as the average of the last three years.

<sup>12</sup> Programmes at the undergraduate/postgraduate boundary are those undergraduate qualifications that include a postgraduate component. Examples include: integrated undergraduate/postgraduate taught masters degrees on the enhanced/extended pattern; pre-registration medical degrees regulated by the General Medical Council; pre-registration dentistry degrees regulated by the General Dental Council; and other graduate or postgraduate diplomas, certificates or degrees at levels 5 and 6 where a level 5 or 6 qualification is a pre-requisite for course entry.

Contextual Data	Category Definition	Sub-groups
National IMD: NI IMD	Providers in Northern Ireland only. Applies to students domiciled in Northern Ireland only. The Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM) 2010 identifies small area concentrations of multiple deprivation across Northern Ireland.	Quintiles 1,2,3,4,5
National IMD: SIMD	Providers in Scotland only. Applies to students domiciled in Scotland only. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2016 identifies small area concentrations of multiple deprivation across all of Scotland in a consistent way.	Quintiles 1,2,3,4,5
National IMD: WIMD	Providers in Wales only. Applies to students domiciled in Wales only. The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2014 is the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in Wales. It is designed to identify those small areas where there are the highest concentrations of several different types of deprivation.	Quintiles 1,2,3,4,5
Communities First	Providers in Wales only. Applies to students domiciled in Wales only. Communities First is the Welsh Government's Community Focussed Tackling Poverty Programme.	Communities First Not Communities First
Welsh medium	Providers in Wales only. This measure identifies students who have accessed all or some of their provision delivered through the medium of Welsh.	More than 40 credits through the medium of Welsh for the relevant year 5-40 credits taught through the medium of Welsh Less than 5 credits through the medium of Welsh
Ethnicity	Ethnicity as self-declared on	White, Black, Asian, Other and Unknown

Contextual Data	Category Definition	Sub-groups
	HESA <sup>13</sup> or ILR student records.	
Sex	Sex as self-declared on HESA or ILR student records.	Male, female, neither male or female
Disability	Disability as self-declared on HESA or ILR student records.	Disabled and not disabled
Entry Qualifications	Detailed qualifications on entry from HESA or ILR student records, and for students at FECs, records from the Linked National Pupil Database	HE-level High (Over 390), medium (280 to 390) or low tariff (Under 280) Non-tariff Non-UK
Subject of Study	Based on subjects mapped to Level 2 of the Common Aggregation Hierarchy <sup>14</sup>	35 subject groups
Domicile	Domicile as self-declared on HESA or ILR student records.	UK, Other EU, non-EU
Local students	Students whose home address is within the same Travel to Work Area (TTWA) <sup>15</sup> as their location of study.	Local and distance learning Not local

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<sup>13</sup> All references to HESA student records throughout this document should be read as inclusive of HESA AP student records, returned by alternative providers in England.

<sup>14</sup> Further information on the development of the new Higher Education Classification of Subjects, and the Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH) that can be applied to both HECoS and JACS subjects to allow consistent analysis across both coding frames, see <https://www.hesa.ac.uk/innovation/hecos>

<sup>15</sup> Further information on the Travel to Work Areas defined by the Office for National Statistics is available at <http://ons.maps.arcgis.com/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=397ccae5d5c7472e87cf0ca766386cc2>

Contextual Data	Category Definition	Sub-groups
HMRC-matched students	Students who qualified in 2010-11 and who have been matched to HMRC tax records or DWP benefits records	Matched Not matched
Self-assessment tax returns	Students who qualified in 2010-11 and who have been matched to an HMRC tax record which includes a self-assessment tax return	Self-assessed Not self-assessed

- 5.4 There will also be four maps to support the interpretation of employment/destination measures (see examples in in HEFCE's procedural guidance):
- a. For each provider – where students who study at the provider were based before study
  - b. For each provider – where students who study at the provider found employment (using DLHE responses).
  - c. Common to all providers – The proportion of employed graduates in highly skilled employment (using DLHE responses).
  - d. Common to all providers – the population unemployment rate (using official labour market statistics).
- 5.5 HEFCE will make the contextual data available to providers, along with their metrics, at the beginning of the application period. Providers will be free to include additional contextual information in their submissions, such as details about their mission. See the **Provider submission section** for further details.
- 5.6 In addition to contextual data that is specific to an individual provider, panellists and assessors will also be provided with national level contextual information that sets out the broader operating context for higher education in each of the four UK nations. These will allow panellists and assessors to understand fully any differences and for providers to feel assured that their national operating context is understood. This information will be drafted by the four UK funding bodies, in collaboration with representatives of the sector.
- 5.7 Contextual data is used to support interpretation of performance but does not itself form the basis of any judgement.

## Metrics

- 5.8 The TEF will draw on currently available, nationally collected data, to provide panellists and assessors with a common set of metrics that relate to each of the aspects of teaching excellence. These metrics will be considered by panellists and assessors alongside the evidence contained in a provider submission to inform their judgements. There are two core metrics aligned to each of the three aspects of the TEF (table 4). As far as possible, the metrics for Year Two are modelled on measures that will be familiar to large parts of the sector. Providers are encouraged to supplement the core and split metrics with further

data in their provider submission.

5.9 The types of metrics used in TEF are:

- Core And Split metrics, together form part of the eligibility requirements for a TEF assessment. During assessment, they are first considered during Step 1, the generation of the initial hypothesis.
- Supplementary metrics do not form part of the eligibility requirements for a TEF assessment, though are always displayed if the provider has them. During assessment, they are first considered during Step 2 alongside the additional evidence (provider submission).

**Table 4: TEF metrics aligned with aspects of quality**

Aspect	Metric	Source
<b>Core Metrics</b>		
Teaching Quality	Teaching on my course	NSS Q1-4
Teaching Quality	Assessment and feedback	2015 NSS and 2016 NSS Q5-9, subsequent NSS Q8-11
Learning Environment	Academic support	2015 NSS and 2016 NSS Q10-12, subsequent NSS Q12-14
Learning Environment	Continuation	HESA and ILR data
Student Outcomes and Learning Gain	Employment or further study	DLHE declared activity 6 months after qualification
Student Outcomes and Learning Gain	Highly skilled employment or further study	DLHE declared activity 6 months after qualification
<b>Supplementary Metrics</b>		
Teaching Quality	Grade inflation	Mandatory provider declaration for providers with degree awarding powers
Student Outcomes and Learning Gain	Sustained employment or further study	LEO 3 years after qualification
Student Outcomes and Learning Gain	Above median earnings threshold or further study	LEO 3 years after qualification

5.10 During the calculation of the initial hypothesis in Step 1a, the metrics derived from the NSS are given half as much weight as the other three core metrics.

5.11 A full technical description of each metric will be published in HEFCE's procedural guidance

## Metric Definitions

### Student satisfaction

- 5.12 These metrics are based on student responses to questions from the National Student Survey (NSS). The NSS runs in the spring of each academic year and is targeted at all final year undergraduates in participating providers who were completing courses of more than 1 years duration when studied full-time. Students indicate their level of agreement to a range of statements. For the TEF, the questions from three areas, or scales, are aggregated to form an agreement score for each student. These scores are then averaged to give the provider's score.

### Continuation

- 5.13 This metric is the proportion of entrants who continue their studies. Full-time students are counted between their first and second year of study (see HEFCE's procedural guidance for the part time definition). Students who continue studying at HE level at the same or at another provider, or who completed their qualification in the period considered, are deemed to have continued. All other students are deemed non-continuers.

### Employment/destinations including highly skilled employment

- 5.14 These metrics are based on the Destination of Leavers Survey from Higher Education (DLHE) which asks leavers to indicate their activity six months after gaining their qualification. The survey collects detailed data about employment and further study. Job titles and descriptions of duties are coded into the Standard Occupational Classification (SOC).
- 5.15 The employment or further study metric is the proportion of leavers (responding to the DLHE) who report that they are in employment or further study. The Highly skilled employment or further study metric is the proportion of leavers (responding to the DLHE) who report that they are in highly skilled employment or further study, where highly skilled employment is those jobs matched to SOC groups 1-3 (managerial and professional).

## Supplementary Metrics

### Grade inflation

- 5.16 The grade inflation metric consists of data that shows the proportion of Level 6+ undergraduate degrees classified as firsts, 2:1s and other grades for the time periods 1, 2, 3 and 10 years ago.
- 5.17 Providers with degree awarding powers will need to self-declare the number and proportion of Level 6+ undergraduate degrees classified as firsts, 2:1s and other grades for the time periods 1, 2, 3 and 10 years ago. A table similar to that shown as **Table 5** will be issued to providers, along with guidance from HEFCE as to its completion.

**Table 5: Grade inflation data declaration template**

Degree classification awarded	10 years ago		3 years ago		2 years ago		1 year ago	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
First class honours (1st)								
Upper Second class honours (2:1)								
An honours degree classification of Lower Second (2:2), Undivided Second, Third, Fourth, or Pass								
An unclassified honours degree; a general or ordinary degree (resulting from a non-honours course); or an aegrotat degree (to honours or pass)								
Of which:								
An enhanced degree with Distinction								
An enhanced degree with Merit								
An enhanced degree with Pass								
A general degree								
An ordinary degree								
Any other unclassified degree award								
Total number of Level 6 undergraduate degree qualifications awarded								

5.18 The scope of this metric includes all Level 6+ undergraduate degree awards made by a provider with degree awarding powers to the students it has taught. Awards made by the provider to students taught elsewhere, under franchising or validation arrangements, are not in scope for this metric. Providers that do not hold degree awarding powers, and that



do not offer any Level 6+ undergraduate degrees are not required to declare this data but can include other evidence of rigour and stretch within their provider submission.

- 5.19 If information is unavailable for any year because the provider did not award any Level 6+ undergraduate degrees to students it has taught, information must only be provided for the years it is available. If information is unavailable for 10 years ago but is available for a year between 3 and 10 years ago, data must instead be provided for the year that is nearest to 10 years ago. Providers will be asked to briefly describe the reason for any year of missing data within the declaration. HEFCE will verify the data declared by providers, including through comparison with publicly available sources. If required information is found to be available but not declared the provider may be disqualified from TEF. HEFCE may also alert the TEF Panel to significant inaccuracies in the data. Grade inflation data will not be benchmarked, flagged or split.
- 5.20 In future rounds of TEF assessment, it is intended that this information will be derived centrally, from nationally collected HESA and ILR student records.

### **LEO: Sustained employment and above median earnings threshold**

- 5.21 These metrics are based on the Longitudinal Education Outcomes dataset (LEO), which links higher education and tax data together to chart the transition of graduates from higher education into the workplace. The LEO dataset links information about students, including their personal characteristics, their education (including schools, colleges and higher education providers attended as well as courses taken and qualifications achieved), their employment and income, and any benefits claimed.
- 5.22 The supplementary LEO metrics will provide evidence against all three of the criteria under Student Outcomes and Learning Gain: Employment and Further Study (SO1), Employability and Transferrable Skills (SO2), and Positive Outcomes for All (SO3). LEO metrics will be benchmarked, flagged and split in the same way as core metrics.
- 5.23 The two metrics consider:
- The proportion of qualifiers in sustained employment or further study three years after graduation.
  - The proportion of qualifiers in sustained employment that are earning over the median salary for 25-29 year olds<sup>16</sup> or in further study.
- 5.24 The median salary for 25-29 year olds is currently £21,000. The figure is drawn from the ONS/HMRC publication, Personal Incomes Statistics 2014-15 which is a survey of income data from HMRC and DWP and will be updated annually. This figure is below the starting salary for most modestly paying but socially valuable graduate jobs such as nursing, teaching or midwifery and the metric therefore records such outcomes as being equally valuable as higher paying professions such as banking or law.
- 5.25 Panellists and assessors will bear in mind that that the LEO data is currently experimental and, in particular, does not yet include data from self-assessment tax records. The proportion of graduates with self-assessment records will be included as contextual information.

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<sup>16</sup> Rounded to the nearest £500.

## Calculation and presentation of metrics

- 5.26 Each core and split metric will be calculated using the latest three years of available student data. No weighting is used when aggregating the data across years.
- 5.27 The supplementary LEO metrics will be calculated for the years in which all of the requisite data is available (up to a maximum of three).
- 5.28 HEFCE will issue providers with their TEF metrics workbooks. The workbook will include clear information about which is the provider's majority mode; whether they are determined to have a similar number of students in both delivery modes; whether they have suitable metrics; and if so, for how many years. The TEF metrics workbook will also make clear the core, split and supplementary LEO metrics which are and are not reportable (see also **Presentation of metrics data section**).
- 5.29 The majority mode will be calculated on the basis of the full-time and part-time student headcounts, averaged over the same period and number of years used for the provider's contextual data. If more than 50 per cent of students by average headcount studied full-time, the majority mode will be identified as full-time, and the minority mode as part-time. Otherwise, the majority mode will be part-time (and the minority mode is full-time).
- 5.30 A provider that has more than 35 per cent of students by headcount in its minority mode will be determined as having a similar number of student in both delivery modes (see 7.33-7.35). If this similarity exists for a provider, it will be clearly indicated on the metrics work book.
- 5.31 An expanded definition of the majority mode of provision will be provided in the HEFCE procedural guidance.

## Reportable metrics

- 5.32 Reportable core and split metrics must refer to at least ten students, have sufficient data to form the benchmarks<sup>17</sup> and in the case of survey data, have met the response rate threshold<sup>18</sup>.
- 5.33 Reportable supplementary metrics derived from the LEO dataset must refer to at least ten students, have a numerator that differs from the denominator by at least three students and have sufficient data to form the benchmarks<sup>19</sup>. In addition, the LEO-based above median earnings threshold or further study metric must refer to at least 50% of those in employment or further study having known salary data or being in further study.

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<sup>17</sup> Sufficient benchmarking data would be at least 50% coverage for each factor (for example where entry qualifications are used as a benchmarking factor, at least 50% of the provider's students included in the core or split metric must have appropriately recorded entry qualifications.)

<sup>18</sup> For the NSS, this is 50%. For the DLHE, this is 85% of the target which is equivalent to 68% for full time students and 59.5% for part time students. Response rates are first tested at the core metric level for each mode: those that do not meet the thresholds described here result in a global suppression of all of the core and split metrics data for the metric in the mode in question. Response rates are then tested for each split of the core metric individually (again, in each mode), with any necessary suppressions applied only to the split (and mode) in question.

<sup>19</sup> To prevent the disclosure of personal data, splits of the supplementary metrics which describe protected characteristics and are derived from the LEO dataset are subject to additional suppression thresholds. In the case of the above median earnings threshold LEO metric, more than half of the students referred to by the metric are also required to have known salary data or be in further study

## Suitable metrics and number of years

- 5.34 The TEF metrics are suitable if each of the six core metrics in majority mode is reportable and benchmarked, either when aggregating all years of available data, or for at least one year. Otherwise, the metrics are not suitable and the number of years of suitable metrics is zero. Not all providers will have suitable TEF metrics. Providers that do not have suitable metrics may opt-in for a provisional TEF award (see **Eligibility, pre-requisites and provisional TEF awards section**).
- 5.35 The availability (or otherwise) of reportable supplementary metrics plays no role in determining whether or not a provider has suitable metrics. These calculations are based only on the core metrics in a provider's majority mode.
- 5.36 If the metrics are suitable, the number of years of suitable metrics is calculated. The number of years is first calculated for each of the six core metrics in majority mode individually, and as follows:
- Where a metric is reportable and benchmarked when aggregating all years of available data, it is the number of years in which there are students contributing to that metric (this will be one, two or three).
  - Where a metric is not reportable and benchmarked when aggregating all years of available data, it is the number of individual years that are reportable and benchmarked (this will be either one or two).
- 5.37 The number of years of suitable metrics is established by taking the lowest number of years from across the six metrics.
- 5.38 A TEF award will be valid for the maximum duration of three years if a provider has three years of suitable metrics.

## Lack of metrics due to NSS boycott

- 5.39 Paragraph 3.14 noted that a provider that does not have reportable metrics for the National Student Survey, for which there is evidence of an NUS-sanctioned boycott of the NSS by students at that provider, shall be treated as if it had reportable metrics for that year for the purposes of eligibility and award duration.
- 5.40 The response rate threshold for a reportable metric will remain at 50 per cent. In exceptional cases, where the response rate over all three years falls below 50% for a provider with evidence that a boycott occurred, the NSS survey responses for students at the provider may be disregarded in boycott years for the purposes of calculating TEF metrics. If the response rate over all three years remains above 50% for a provider with recognised evidence that a boycott occurred, the core metric will remain calculated in the same way as for other providers.
- 5.41 HEFCE will initially apply the NSS metric definitions consistently to all providers (for whom boycotts occurred and for whom they did not). Providers will be invited to submit evidence of an NUS-sanctioned boycott to HEFCE during the application window (HEFCE's procedural guidance will provide further guidance on the process for submitting such evidence). If the response rate over the three years is less than 50% and HEFCE accepts the evidence submitted and agrees that a boycott occurred, that provider's NSS-based metrics will be

recalculated.

## Data sources and calculations

- 5.42 For the assessment round taking place in academic year 2017/18, the supplementary metric on grade inflation will be a mandatory declaration of this information by all providers with degree awarding powers. In their application to TEF, a provider with degree awarding powers will need to submit information on Level 6+ undergraduate degrees that they have awarded to students they have taught, declaring the number and proportion classified as firsts, 2:1s and other grades for the time periods 1, 2, 3 and 10 years ago<sup>20</sup>.
- 5.43 HEFCE will provide a table template for grade inflation data that providers with degree awarding powers will be required to complete, along with accompanying guidance and definitions for providers. This will be included in their procedural guidance (published separately). HEFCE will incorporate the grade inflation data table completed by the provider into the provider's TEF metrics workbook, to be shared with panellists and assessors. The **Use of supplementary metrics** section explains the role of this supplementary metrics data within the assessment.
- 5.44 The base data for all other centrally derived metrics is the Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA) student record (for HEIs, APs and some FECs) and the Individual Learner Record (ILR) for FECs. These provide data about the characteristics of students and the courses and providers they are registered with.
- 5.45 Some metrics also use responses to the NSS and the DLHE survey. NSS data is collected by a third party and any data supplied to providers will be at a sufficiently aggregate level to prevent disclosure and protect the anonymity of responses.
- 5.46 The two other supplementary metrics use the LEO dataset, which links higher education data with graduates' tax and benefits data held by HMRC and DWP. To ensure that no provider is able to identify any student's contribution (or lack thereof) to the LEO-based metrics, no student-level data will be supplied to providers on these metrics. To further prevent disclosure, additional suppression thresholds (as described in paragraphs 5.32-5.33) will also be applied before a metric is deemed reportable.
- 5.47 For each centrally derived metric, all providers and students in scope (see **Scope section**) for the TEF and for that metric are selected from the datasets. Where the data source has a wider scope than the TEF (for example the DLHE includes post graduate students), those outside the scope of the TEF are excluded from the metrics.
- 5.48 HEFCE will calculate the centrally derived metrics from this data and create an individual TEF metrics workbook for each provider. An illustration is provided alongside this publication. Providers will have the opportunity to view this data, along with technical documentation at the beginning of the application period. During the application period, HEFCE will consider requests to amend student or DLHE data in exceptional cases, and will reissue metrics to any providers whose requests are approved.
- 5.49 Once the application window is closed, final provider level TEF metrics (including all core, split and supplementary metrics) will be issued to panellists and assessors for

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<sup>20</sup> In future rounds of TEF assessment, it is intended that this information will be derived centrally, from the nationally collected HESA and ILR student records.

consideration. Assessor guidance will include sector level metrics data to contextualise the provider level data.

- 5.50 Unless otherwise stated, calculations are based on student headcount. Where there is a difference, students will be included in the data for the teaching provider rather than the registering provider. Normally, the teaching provider is the provider where the student spends the majority of their first year.

## Presentation of metrics data

- 5.51 For each core and supplementary LEO metric, for each provider, full time and part time students will be reported separately. Further, 'splits' will be produced showing performance within a number of sub groups (e.g. Full time Males or Part Time UK domiciled students). The full list of splits is given in **Table 8**. Splits will also be produced for the supplementary LEO metrics, but not for the supplementary grade inflation metric.
- 5.52 In order to aid the panellists and assessors, core and split metrics will be flagged if they are significantly and materially above or below a weighted sector average (benchmark). The supplementary LEO metrics will also be flagged in this way, but not the supplementary grade inflation metric. The way in which panellists and assessors will use the core and split metrics to make their decisions is set out in the **Assessment: decision-making** section.

## Benchmarking

- 5.53 Benchmarks are used to allow meaningful interpretation of a provider's metrics by taking into account the mix of students and subjects taught at that provider. The TEF benchmarks are calculated using the well-established methodology developed in relation to the UK Performance Indicators (UKPIs) for higher education and also used in the publication of NSS outcomes.
- 5.54 A unique benchmark is calculated for each provider for each core, split and supplementary LEO metric, but not the supplementary grade inflation metric. **The benchmark is a weighted sector average where weightings are based on the characteristics of the students at the provider:** it gives information about the values that might be expected for that provider's indicator if the characteristics included in the weighting are the only ones that are important. Where differences exist between a provider's indicator and benchmark, this may be due to the provider's performance, or it may be due to some other characteristic which is not included in the weighting. This means that the provider is not being compared to a pre-set group of providers. For the purpose of calculating benchmarks, 'the sector' is made up of all providers in scope for the TEF, regardless of whether they have met the eligibility criteria or have chosen to enter the TEF.
- 5.55 The benchmarking methodology seeks to ensure that the student or course characteristics that have the most effect on what we are measuring are appropriately taken account of. Benchmarking factors are therefore selected and combined in a way that seeks to protect the statistical integrity of the benchmarking approach while also aiming to ensure applicability to HE provision delivered across all of the UK by HE providers of all types, and to limit the extent to which a benchmark value can be determined by a single HE provider. Self-benchmarking can occur when a large proportion of the students in the comparison group are from the provider itself.

5.56 A full explanation of the benchmarking methodology is provided on the HESA website. An example is given in HEFCE's procedural guidance.

5.57 The benchmarking factors used for each metric in TEF are covered by **Table 6**.

**Table 6: Benchmarking factors**

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

<sup>21</sup> Except Celtic studies, which has been collapsed into languages because of its size

						(Full-time only)	
Disability	Disabled, Not Disabled (2)	✓			✓		✓
Social disadvantage (measured by POLAR3 for all UK domiciled students, regardless of their age)	POLAR 1 or 2, POLAR 3, 4 or 5 (including unknown) (2)		✓		✓		✓
Level	First degree, other undergraduate, programmes at the undergraduate / postgraduate boundary	✓ (full time only)	✓ (full time only)	✓	✓	✓	✓
Year	Three academic years relevant to the metric definition (3)	✓					
Total distinct benchmarking groups		4,752 for full-time, and 396 for part-time	11,664 for full-time, and 144 for part-time	1,728	25,344	6,336 for full-time, and 396 for part-time	12,672 for full-time, and 25,344 for part-time



## Significance flagging

5.58 Once the core and split metrics are calculated and benchmarked, where the results are materially different from the benchmark and that difference is statistically significant, this will be highlighted. This is referred to as **flagging**. Panelists and assessors will initially use these flags when forming an initial hypothesis about the rating for the provider (see section on **Assessment: Decision-making**). The supplementary LEO metrics will also be flagged in this way, though they will be considered in Step 2 of assessment alongside the additional evidence (provider submission).

## Material differences

- 5.59 Where a provider's indicator is **at least 2 percentage points above or below its benchmark, this is considered materially different**.
- 5.60 Exceptionally, the materiality test will not be applied. Where the benchmark is above 97% and the provider's indicator is above the benchmark, the materiality test will not apply and core and split metrics will only have to meet the significance test (below) in order to be flagged. This is because it would otherwise be impossible for some providers to receive a flag of ++ (see below), as it is not possible to achieve a result of over 100%.

## Statistically significant differences

- 5.61 It is not automatically clear whether a material difference from a benchmark is statistically significant. To identify whether it is significant, we need to establish statistical confidence that the difference is greater than variances that would be expected due to chance alone. TEF metrics have adopted a variation on the UK Performance Indicators (UKPI) method for testing for that difference. The UKPI method is explained in full on the HESA website. The method calculates the standard deviations of the differences between the indicators and their benchmarks<sup>22</sup>. **In TEF metrics the number of standard deviations that the indicator is from the benchmark is given as the Z-score**. Differences from a benchmark with a Z-score  $\pm 1.96$ <sup>23</sup> will be considered statistically significant. This is equivalent to a 95% confidence interval (that is, we can have 95% confidence that the difference is not due to chance).
- 5.62 The Z-score does not on its own provide an indication of performance. It only measures whether the difference between and indicator and the benchmark is statistically significant.
- 5.63 As a test of the likelihood that a difference between a provider's benchmark and

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<sup>22</sup> As a measure of the differences between the indicators and their benchmarks, these are standard deviations of a statistic and so they are more usually called standard errors. More details of the statistical model used can be found in 'Statistical analysis of performance indicators in UK higher education' by D. Draper and M. Gittoes, in JRSS Series A, volume 167, part 3, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> The threshold is 1.96 standard deviations although this is usually rounded to 2 when quoted.

its indicator is due to chance alone, a z-score  $\pm 3.0$  means the likelihood of the difference being due to chance alone has reduced substantially and is negligible. As such, z-score values larger than  $\pm 3$  provide very little additional statistical evidence than a z-score of  $\pm 3.0$  and should, for practical purposes, be considered as equivalent to  $\pm 3.0$ .

## Flags

- 5.64 Flags will be applied where the indicator is at least  $\pm 2$  percentage points from the benchmark AND the Z-score is at least  $\pm 2$  (1.96):
- A difference of +2 percentage points and a Z-score of at least +1.96 will receive a positive flag, labelled '+'. If the benchmark is above 97 per cent the difference of 2 percentage points is not required.
  - A difference of +3 percentage points and a Z-score of at least +3.00 will receive a double positive flag, labelled '++'. If the benchmark is above 97 per cent the difference of 3 percentage points is not required.
  - A difference of -2 percentage points and a Z-score below -1.96 will receive a negative flag, labelled '-'.
  - A difference of -3 percentage points and a Z-score below -3.00 will receive a double negative flag, labelled '--'.

## Very high and low absolute values

- 5.65 Where a core TEF metric or a supplementary LEO metric has an indicator with a very high or low absolute value it will be marked in the metrics workbook. Very high or very low values are defined to be those absolute indicator values that fall within the top or bottom 10 per cent of providers for that metric (in the given mode). Very high values will be marked with a star (\*), and very low values will be marked with an exclamation mark (!).
- 5.66 The top and bottom 10 per cent of providers will be identified (for the metric and mode in question) on the basis of all providers with a reportable metric that refers to more than 100 students. The absolute indicator value of the last provider to be counted within the top or bottom 10 per cent will be taken (at two decimal places) to determine the threshold for a value to be denoted very high or very low. All providers (of any population size) with an absolute value above the identified very high threshold receive a star, and any with an absolute value below the identified very low threshold receive an exclamation mark.

## Splits

- 5.67 Each core metric will be presented for all the provider's students (separately for full time and part time) and then for a series of sub groups (called splits) reflecting widening participation priorities. Panellists and assessors will be particularly interested where the split metric receives a flag but that flag is different from the same core metric. Providers may wish to explicitly address these differences in their submission.
- 5.68 The supplementary LEO metrics will also be split in this way. Metric information will also be shown for individual years that have contributed to the core and supplementary metrics.

5.69 For each split, the benchmark is recalculated to include only students within the split. That is, only mature students are included when calculating the benchmark for split metrics in the mature category of the Age split. Note that this means, for the split metrics specific to providers in the Devolved Administrations, they will only be benchmarked against students in providers within their Administration. The categories and their definitions that will be used for producing the splits are in **table 7**.

**Table 7: Categories and their definitions for metric splits**

Split	Category Definition	Sub-groups
Year	Three individual years that have contributed to the core or supplementary metric in question	Year 1, Year 2, Year 3 <sup>24</sup>
Level of study	Level of the programme a student is registered on.	First degree, other undergraduate, programmes at the undergraduate/postgraduate boundary <sup>25</sup>
Age	Age at start of study.	Young (defined as under 21 for splits of the full-time TEF metrics, and as under 31 for part-time splits) Mature (21 and over for full-time splits, and 31 and over for part-time splits) <sup>26</sup>
Sex	Sex as self-declared on HESA or ILR student records.	Male Female
Participation groups	Providers in England and Wales only. Applies to UK-domiciled students aged under 21 only. Participation of Local Areas is used as a proxy for social disadvantage in HE.	POLAR quintiles 1-2 POLAR quintiles 3-5
Disadvantage based on national IMD: EIMD	Providers in England only. Applies to students domiciled in England only. The English indices of deprivation	EIMD quintiles 1-2 EIMD quintiles 3-5

<sup>24</sup> Year 1 refers to the earliest year of data included in the core metric, while Year 3 refers to the most recent year of data included.

<sup>25</sup> See description of programmes at the undergraduate/postgraduate boundary given at footnote 12.

<sup>26</sup> This is consistent with the way the UK Performance Indicators are reported for non-continuation. In addition, given the distribution of part-time cohorts, this distinction is more likely to produce informative metric splits

Split	Category Definition	Sub-groups
	2015 show relative deprivation in small areas in England	
Disadvantage based on national IMD: NI IMD	Providers in Northern Ireland only. Applies to students domiciled in Northern Ireland only. The Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM) 2010 identifies small area concentrations of multiple deprivation across Northern Ireland.	NI-IMD quintiles 1-2 NI-IMD quintiles 3-5
Disadvantage based on national IMD: SIMD	Providers in Scotland only. Applies to students domiciled in Scotland only. The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation 2016 identifies small area concentrations of multiple deprivation across all of Scotland in a consistent way.	SIMD quintiles 1-2 SIMD quintiles 3-5
Disadvantage based on national IMD: WIMD/ Communities First	Providers in Wales only. Applies to students domiciled in Wales only. The Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation 2014 (WIMD) is the official measure of relative deprivation for small areas in Wales. It is designed to identify those small areas where there are the highest concentrations of several different types of deprivation. Communities First is the Welsh Government's Community Focused Tackling Poverty Programme.	WIMD quintile 1 OR Communities First area WIMD quintiles 2 to 5 (excluding Communities First)
Welsh medium	Providers in Wales only. This split identifies students who have accessed all or some of their provision delivered through the medium of Welsh.	More than 40 credits through the medium of Welsh for the relevant year 5-40 credits taught through the medium of Welsh Less than 5 credits through the medium of Welsh
Disability	Disability as self-declared and recorded on HESA or ILR student records.	Disability No disability

Split	Category Definition	Sub-groups
Ethnicity	Ethnicity as self-declared on HESA or ILR student records.	White background Black or Minority Ethnic (BME) background. Where there are significant differences (i.e. different flags) within the BME group, these will also be reported at the level of Black, Asian and Other
Domicile	Domicile as self-declared on HESA or ILR student records. NSS based metrics only.	UK Other EU Non-EU students

5.70 Appropriate measures of disadvantage have been set by each devolved administration. Where the measures chosen are country-specific, in order to ensure consistent data, the populations need to be restricted in the same way; to do otherwise would risk performance being skewed by the different measures adopted in each nation. Where disadvantage is used in benchmarking POLAR is used consistently as it is the only UK-wide measure.

## Data available to panellists and assessors and in TEF workbooks

5.71 The panellists and assessors will be presented with headline data showing the core metrics and key contextual data (provider size, split between full time and part time students).

5.72 Beyond that worksheets will provide further detail including the full contextual data listed in **Table 4** and maps. For each core and split metric panellists and assessors will see:

- Indicator (as a percentage)
- Benchmark (as a percentage)
- % provider contribution to benchmark
- Numerator and denominator of the indicator
- Difference between benchmark and indicator
- Z-score (the number of standard deviations that the indicator is from the benchmark)
- Flag (either +, ++, - or -- for reportable metrics)

The same information will also be shown for individual years that have contributed to the core metric, as well as for the supplementary LEO metrics.

For core and supplementary LEO metrics only, panellists and assessors will see:

- Indicator as to whether the metric has a very high or low absolute value (either \* or !)

5.73 Any data point that is not reportable for a core, split or supplementary LEO metric will be replaced with a symbol to indicate why, as follows:

- 'N' where there are fewer than 10 students in the population
- 'N/A' where the provider did not report any students in the population, or did not participate in the survey
- 'R' where the provider participated in the survey but has not met the response rate threshold required
- 'SUP' where the provider does not have sufficient data to form the benchmarks.
- 'DP' where the numerator differs from the denominator by fewer than three students (supplementary LEO metrics only).

5.74 For the assessment round taking place in academic year 2017/18, providers with degree awarding powers will be required to complete and submit a table of data showing the profile of grades awarded to the Level 6+ undergraduates they have taught. This table of data will be added as a separate worksheet in final TEF workbooks issued to panellists and assessors for consideration.

5.75 An example of the core, split and supplementary TEF metrics, contextual data and maps is available as a separate annex to this document on [GOV.UK](http://www.gov.uk). The **Assessment: decision-making** section of this document describes how the data will be interpreted by the panellists and assessors.

## Data available to providers

5.76 At the start of the application window, HEFCE will make available to each provider their own metrics and contextual data, in the format indicated in the TEF example workbook. HEFCE will also make available individualised student-level data so providers can understand how the indicators have been derived from the underlying data, and can check their underlying data for accuracy. To ensure that no provider is able to identify any individual student's contribution (or lack thereof) to the LEO-based metrics, HEFCE will be unable to supply student-level data to providers in relation to these metrics.

5.77 During the application window, providers will have an opportunity to request amendments to their underlying data. Unless amendments have already been specifically approved for the purpose of TEF by HEFCE<sup>27</sup>, the TEF metrics and

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<sup>27</sup> For further information regarding the HEFCE data panel and its amendments approvals process, please see the 'HEI Technical guidance 2017-18' document, published as part of the 2017-18 April HEFCE grant announcement at <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/funding/annalocns/1718/institutions/>.

contextual data are formed using the provider's original data returns that have been signed-off at year-end as quality assured by the head of provider or accountable officer. These data returns have already been used in published performance indicators, information for students such as the Unistats data and website, and other published Official and National Statistics. It is essential that data used to inform the TEF metrics remains, as far as possible, consistent with these other published sources of information. Therefore, HEFCE will consider further requests to amend the data used in calculating the TEF metrics only in exceptional circumstances.

- 5.78 A request to amend data for TEF purposes will be granted by HEFCE only if there are widespread errors or omissions in the data affecting a large proportion of the provider's student records, **and** the amended data makes a material difference to the core metrics. HEFCE's procedural guidance will provide further information on the criteria and process for requesting data amendments.

## 6 Provider submissions

### Purpose, format and length

- 6.1 Providers will submit evidence to support their case for excellence that will be used by panellists and assessors alongside performance against the core, split and supplementary metrics. Submissions will be **no longer than 15 pages** each and there will be no minimum length. HEFCE will issue guidance on style, format and coverage, but providers will not be obliged to follow a prescribed template.
- 6.2 The purpose of the provider submission is to enable a provider to:
- add additional context further to the standard contextual data, such as details of its mission (previous chapter)
  - support or **explain its performance against the core and split metrics and supplementary metrics (where available)**, particularly where performance is not strong (this chapter)
  - put forward **evidence against the assessment criteria** which will be used alongside performance against the metrics (this chapter)
  - further explore **performance for specific student groups** based on split metrics (this chapter).
- 6.3 Whilst providers are encouraged to submit a provider submission, it is not a mandatory part of a TEF application. However, where there is no provider submission, or the provider submission contains no substantive additional evidence, panellists and assessors will be required to make a judgement based solely on the metrics. In this case they will apply the rules set out in paragraph 7.65.
- A. Additional context further to the standard contextual data**
- 6.4 This is an opportunity for a provider to add any additional context that explains its mission and characteristics that is not fully captured by the standardised contextual data outlined in the **Contextual data and metrics section**. This could include aspects such as mission, collaborative provision or knowledge exchange activity.
- B. Contextualising performance against the metrics**
- 6.5 Contextual factors can be those that have adversely affected performance against the metrics which are not under the control of a provider. They can also be factors that have affected performance which are under the control of the provider, but which reflect decisions that have been made for good reason. Panellists and assessors will take this information into account when assessing performance.
- C. Evidence against the assessment criteria**
- 6.6 The provider submission should put forward any additional evidence that a provider feels best supports its case for excellence against the assessment criteria. This evidence can be qualitative and/or quantitative. In either case the information should be factual and verifiable, rather than making assertions or statements that are not capable of verification.
- 6.7 Evidence should focus on current and recent performance against the assessment



criteria. This means focusing on teaching activities and outcomes that occurred in the last three years.

- 6.8 While a focus on recent performance is paramount, it is recognised that information about activity in previous years may also be relevant for the provider submission, particularly when explaining performance against the metrics which include data from previous years. A summary of the student cohorts covered by the metrics is in HEFCE's procedural guidance.
- 6.9 A provider is not required to address each criterion or to use them as a checklist. Rather, they may wish to focus on areas of strength related to the criteria, and areas where there are weaknesses in performance against the metrics. Additional evidence should allow panellists and assessors to form a view on how a provider has performed in respect of each of the three aspects of the assessment framework: teaching quality, learning environment, and student outcomes and learning gain. Panellists and assessors will be looking for evidence that relates to all three aspects, from the combination of the metrics and the submission, so additional evidence in the submission is particularly important where the metrics do not provide clear cut indicators of performance against one or more of these aspects.
- 6.10 Panellists and assessors will carry out their assessment with the assurance that the high baseline quality eligibility requirements are met and will instead focus on identifying evidence of excellence above the baseline. As such, while the submission may refer to and build upon evidence explored as part of broader quality assurance arrangements, it should not duplicate it. Any findings from QA review included in the submission should be timely, demonstrate performance above the baseline and be clearly related to the TEF assessment criteria.
- 6.11 The emphasis in the provider submission should be on demonstrating the impact and effectiveness of teaching on the student experience and outcomes they achieve. The submission should therefore avoid focusing on descriptions of strategies or approach but instead should focus on impact. Wherever possible, impact should be demonstrated empirically. Panellists and assessors will base their decisions on only the metrics and provider submission available, taking into account the contextual information they have been provided with. TEF assessor and panel training will stress that no prior knowledge or additional external evidence can be taken into account when reaching a judgement.
- 6.12 Copies of, or links to, primary evidence – for example, strategy documents, policies or committee minutes – should not be included. Panellists and assessors may, by exception, seek clarification or verification of factual information and evidence covered in the submission (through TEF officers) if it is needed to inform the overall judgement, but will not otherwise engage with the provider. HEFCE guidance will reflect our expectation that verification should only be sought to clarify something the provider has included that is unclear or that a panellist or assessor considers may be untrue, and where verification could affect the overall judgement. It should not be used as a way of introducing new evidence into the assessment process. The fact that no request for clarification or verification has been made should not be taken to mean, however, that the submission is found to be persuasive.
- 6.13 Panellists and assessors will be looking for evidence of how far a provider demonstrates teaching and learning excellence across its entire undergraduate provision. The submission should therefore avoid focusing on successful but highly localised practices that affect a relatively small number of students studying on particular courses or in particular departments.

- 6.14 The information should focus on provision that is in scope of the assessment. Information relating to provision that is not in scope (for example, postgraduate provision or transnational education) will be considered relevant only if it helps to explain the context of the submission, or to the extent that it impacts on provision that is in scope (for example, how postgraduate provision impacts on the learning environment for undergraduate students). Evidence of the quality of out-of-scope provision will not in itself be considered relevant to the TEF assessment.
- 6.15 Franchised provision will be assessed in respect of the provider that delivers the teaching, and franchised students will be included in the metrics of the teaching provider. However, the registering provider may wish to include information about its franchise activity, to help explain the context of the submission or to provide evidence of how such activity impacts on its own performance in relation to the assessment criteria.
- 6.16 Indicative guidance on the sorts of evidence a provider may wish to use to support its case is in **table 9**. This is not intended to be a checklist and it is not exhaustive. Providers are not expected to submit all of this evidence. Rather, a provider should make its case using the strongest available evidence, using the examples in the table and/or others.

#### **D. Further explore performance for specific student groups**

- 6.17 A provider may use the provider submission as an opportunity to further explore the contextual factors that adversely affected performance against their split metrics for specific student groups. Providers can also use their provider submission as an opportunity to explore the particularly positive actions they have taken for specific student groups. Panellists and assessors will take this information into account when reaching their assessment of performance, comparing it with their initial assessment of the provider's performance against the split metrics.
- 6.18 **All submissions will be published.** They will therefore be available for providers and stakeholders to learn from each other and freely available for researchers wishing to understand more about the basis of high quality learning and teaching in UK HE.

## **Student engagement**

- 6.19 Recognising the additional insight that direct information from students can provide, **providers are encouraged to involve students in the production of the submission** and to show how they have done so. Additional evidence provided by a provider's students will be given the same weight as the other forms of "additional" evidence referred to in **table 9**.
- 6.20 This could take a variety of forms, including, but not limited to, use of surveys, representative structures, focus groups, student membership of relevant committees, consultation events or online discussion to help inform the submission, or facilitating the Student Union or other representative body to draft a section of the provider submission or include a supporting statement of endorsement. Providers are encouraged to share their TEF metrics with student representatives, to support their engagement with the submission.
- 6.21 Students can only provide input via their provider's submission. Separate student submissions will not be accepted.

- 6.22 Submission content produced by students will be subject to data verification and clarification requests in the same way as other content within the submission. The provider's nominated TEF contact will be responsible for responding to any requests, consulting with other staff or students in the institution as necessary.
- 6.23 No provider will be disadvantaged in the event of non-cooperation by their students or Student Union. As with any particular form of evidence, the absence of information about student involvement in the submission will not be considered in a negative light.
- 6.24 Providers are also encouraged to include evidence in their submissions about student engagement in learning and teaching. Some examples of possible types of evidence of this are included in **table 8**.

**Table 8: Possible examples of evidence for each aspect**

Aspect	Possible examples of evidence
Teaching Quality (TQ)	<p>Impact and effectiveness of involving students in teaching evaluation e.g. collecting and acting on their feedback</p> <p>Impact and effectiveness of schemes focused on monitoring and maximising students’ engagement with their studies such as the UK Engagement Survey (UKES) and others</p> <p>Recognition of courses by professional, statutory and regulatory bodies (PSRBs)</p> <p>How the provider is achieving positive outcomes for students, whilst also successfully identifying, addressing and preventing grade inflation</p> <p>Quantitative information on teaching intensity, such as weighted contact hours<sup>28</sup></p> <p>Impact and effectiveness of external examining</p> <p>Impact and effectiveness of teaching observation schemes</p> <p>Impact and effectiveness of innovative approaches, new technology or educational research</p> <p>Recognition and reward schemes, and their impact and effectiveness, including progression and promotion opportunities for staff based on teaching commitment and performance</p> <p>Quantitative information relating to the qualification, experience and contractual basis of staff who teach</p> <p>Impact and effectiveness of feedback initiatives aimed at supporting students’ development, progression and achievement</p>
Learning Environment (LE)	<p>Impact and effectiveness of initiatives aimed at supporting the transition into and through a higher education course</p> <p>Quantitative information demonstrating proportional investment in teaching and learning infrastructure</p> <p>Use and effectiveness of learner analytics in tracking and monitoring progress and development</p> <p>Extent, nature and impact of employer engagement in course design and/or delivery, including degree apprenticeships</p> <p>Extent and impact of student involvement in or exposure to the latest developments in research, scholarship or professional practice (one or more)</p> <p>(For relevant providers) Evidence of Welsh medium provision contributing to students’ academic experiences</p> <p>Impact and effectiveness of initiatives aimed at understanding, assessing and improving retention and completion</p>
	<p>Learning gain and distance-travelled by all students including those entering higher education part-way through their professional lives</p>

<sup>28</sup> A weighted contact hours measure allows comparison between providers that deliver courses in different ways - for example, those that have high amounts of contact time with large class sizes and those that offer lower contact time and smaller class sizes.

<p>Student Outcomes and Learning Gain (SO)</p>	<p>Career enhancement and progression for mature students  Evidence of longer-term employment outcomes and progression of graduates including into highly-skilled employment  Evidence and impact of initiatives aimed at preparing students for further study and research  Evidence and impact of initiatives aimed at graduate employability  Extent of student involvement in enterprise and entrepreneurship  Number, impact and success of graduate start-ups  Use and effectiveness of initiatives used to help measure and record student progress, such as Grade Point Average (GPA)  Impact of initiatives aimed at closing gaps in development, attainment and progression for students from different backgrounds, in particular those from disadvantaged backgrounds or those who are at greater risk of not achieving positive outcomes.</p>
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6.25 A provider can use its own (that is, internal or non-benchmarked) quantitative and/or qualitative evidence in its submission. The evidence should be capable of verification.

## Additional information from part-time providers

6.26 Providers with a substantial proportion of part-time provision may submit an additional page of quantitative information which will be considered alongside the assessment of the metrics in Step 1b of the assessment process (see **Assessment: Decision Making**, below). Providers who may do this are:

- Providers where the majority mode is part-time.
- Providers where the majority mode is full-time but where part-time accounts for 35% or more of the provider's students by headcount.

6.27 The purpose of the information is to supplement the continuation, employment and further study and highly skilled employment and further study metrics, as it is recognised that these metrics have limitations in measuring the excellence of part-time provision.

6.28 Information must be quantitative and may derive from the provider's own records or from external sources of information. Although the information provided need not follow a standardised format, where possible it should attempt to place the data in the context of national comparitors.

6.29 Information must relate only to the matters set out in **Table 9**. It is not necessary to submit information relating to all of the matters in Table 9, nor will panellists and assessors draw any negative conclusions from information about any matter not being provided.

**Table 9: Relevant additional information for each metric for part time providers**

Relevant metric	Relevant information
Continuation	Module pass rate Continuation rates over longer periods (e.g. 3, 5, 7 years) Surveys of joiners and leavers relating to continuation Proportion of those who leave who return to study
Employment and Further Study Highly Skilled Employment and Further Study	Proportion of graduates working in their chosen field Proportion of graduates who pass professional exams Graduate satisfaction levels Measures of learning gain Proportion of graduates who are employer-sponsored

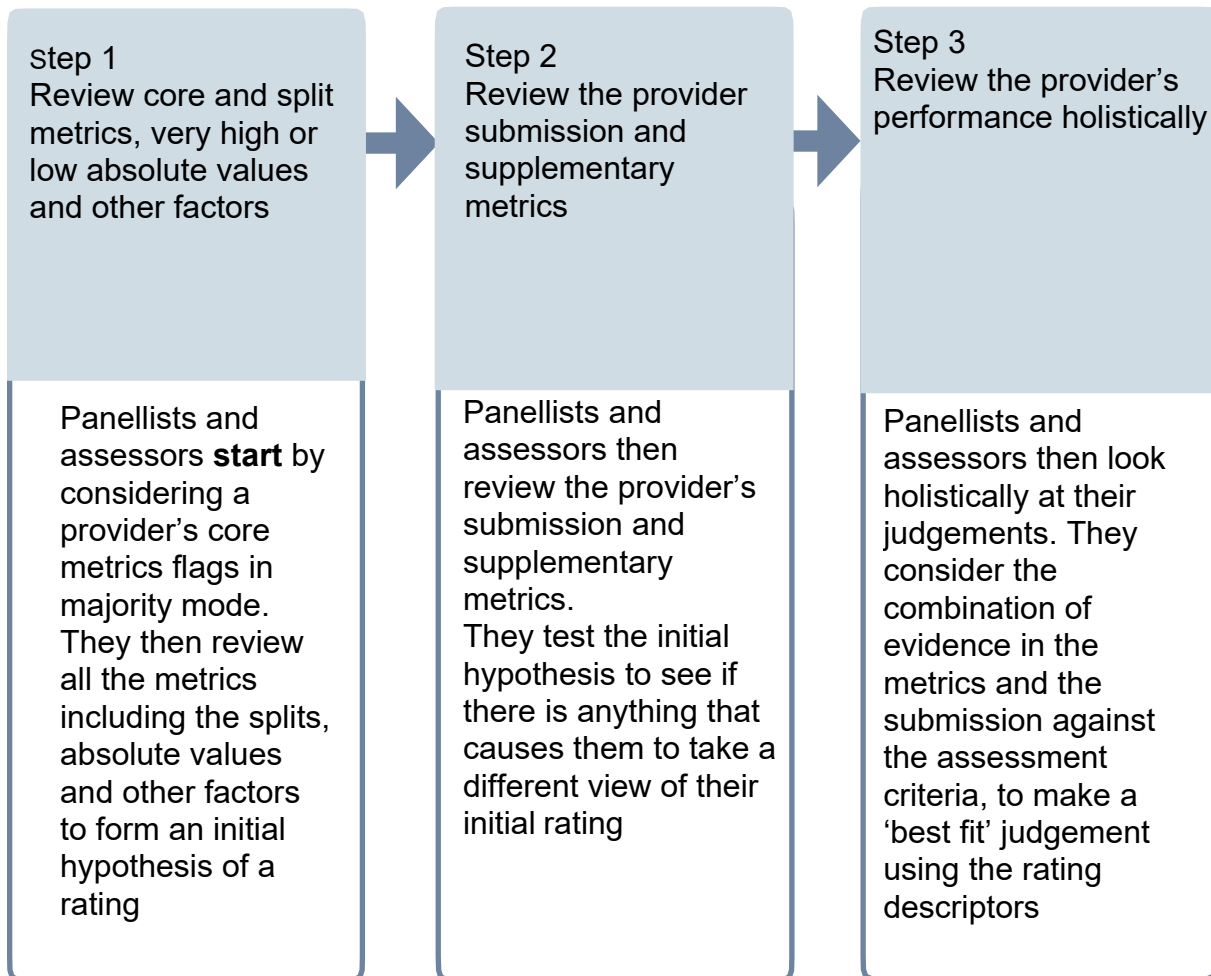
6.30 Information submitted in this way is subject to verification in the same way as the provider submission.

6.31 Submission of this additional page of quantitative information is optional.

## 7 Assessment: decision-making

- 7.1 This section provides a summary of **the approach to assessment**. The design of the TEF is underpinned by metrics and the TEF core and split metrics provide the starting point for assessment. The assessment process is in three steps:
- Step 1a. Review of core metrics flags
  - Step 1b. Review of split metrics, very high or low absolute values and other factors
  - Step 2. Review of the provider submission and supplementary metrics
  - Step 3. Hollistic judgement of teaching quality
- 7.2 Further detail on the processes involved to reach a judgement is dealt with later in the chapter.
- 7.3 Before and, if necessary, during each step, panellists and assessors will use the standard **contextual information** supplied to aid understanding of the provider and its operating context, as well as interpretation of performance against the metrics. Contextual information should not, in itself, be a factor in determining a provider's TEF rating, as size, mission, location or admissions and access profile are not measures of teaching quality. It may, however, provide useful context for panellists and assessors when interpreting the metrics and/or additional evidence.
- 7.4 Panellists and assessors will look at **performance against the core metrics** to form an initial hypothesis on the likely rating. This will be based on distance from benchmarks using the system of significance flagging outlined in the **Contextual data and metrics section**. The initial hypothesis will also **take account of performance based on split metrics, very high or low absolute values and other factors** (see **Contextual data and metrics section**). The number and direction of flags, whether or not there is a mixture of positive and negative flags, whether there are any contrary flags on split metrics and whether there are any very high or low absolute values, will determine not just the position of the initial hypothesis but the degree of confidence in which it is held.
- 7.5 The **provider submission and supplementary metrics** will be used to determine whether the initial hypothesis should remain unchanged, especially in circumstances where the evidence from the core and split metrics is mixed or unclear, before an overall judgement is reached.
- 7.6 For a provider that has fewer than three years of core metrics, for very small providers or for providers where there are conflicting core and split metric flags, panellists and assessors should consider the initial hypothesis to be only lightly held, and may need to rely more heavily on additional evidence in the submission in reaching their final view.
- 7.7 The decision-making process is displayed diagrammatically in **figure 3**.

Figure 3: Summary of approach to decision-making



## Step 1a: Review of core metrics flags

- 7.8 Panellists and assessors will form a starting point for an initial hypothesis about the provider rating based on the core metrics flags. This starting point will be based on the delivery mode in which the provider teaches the most students (i.e. full or part-time). Where there is a similar number of students in both delivery modes, a starting point for the initial hypothesis will be calculated for both modes (see below).
- 7.9 A range of possible scenarios exist, with providers having a mixture of positive or negative flags, no flags at all, or a set of either all positive or all negative flags. The following formula will be used to form the starting point for the initial hypothesis, to be refined by a fuller review of all the metrics data in step 1b.
- 7.10 The three core metrics based on the NSS have a weight of 0.5. The other three core metrics have a weight of 1.0.
- 7.11 When looking at the relevant delivery mode(s):
- A provider with positive flags (either + or ++) in core metrics that have a total value of 2.5 (after accounting for the weighting set out in 7.10) or more and no negative flags (either - or - - ) should be considered initially as **Gold**.
  - A provider with negative flags in core metrics that have a total value of 1.5 or more



(after accounting for the weighting set out in 7.10) should be considered initially as **Bronze**, regardless of the number of positive flags.

- All other providers, including those with no flags at all, should be considered initially as **Silver**.

7.12 Where there are a similar number of students in both delivery modes, a step 1a initial hypothesis will be calculated for both modes. In all cases, the starting point for the initial hypothesis will be subject to greater scrutiny in the next steps, and may change in the light of additional evidence. This is particularly so for providers that have a mix of positive and negative flags or that have a combination of flags that are close to one of the boundaries for the starting point.

7.13 The likelihood of the starting point for the initial hypotheses being maintained after the full set of metrics and the additional evidence in the provider submission are considered will increase commensurately with the number of positive or negative flags on core metrics. That is, **the more clear-cut performance is based on the core metrics flags, the less likely it is that the initial hypothesis will change** in either direction in light of the further review and evidence.

7.14 In the unusual case of a provider having six positive flags, we anticipate it will be highly unlikely that an initial hypothesis of Gold would not be maintained, regardless of the content of the additional evidence. Similarly, in the unusual case of a provider having six negative flags, it would be highly unlikely that an initial hypothesis of Bronze would not be maintained, regardless of the content of the additional evidence.

## Step 1b: Review of core and split metrics and very high or low absolute values

7.15 Throughout this section, panellists and assessors will be making judgements based on a review of the core and split metrics, very high or low absolute values, the minority mode of delivery and other factors, to refine and arrive at an initial hypothesis.

### Very high or low absolute values

7.16 Where an indicator has a very high or low absolute value it will be marked in the metrics workbook with either a star (\*) for very high or an exclamation mark (!) for very low. Very high or very low are defined as being within the top or bottom 10% of providers with sufficient information for that metric (in each mode). Very high and low absolute values will be principally considered at Step 1b; however, panellists and assessors will also be able to use the presence or absence of stars during Steps 2 and 3 to calibrate whether assertions that variation is due to high absolute performance are well founded (see below).

7.17 A very high absolute value suggests that a provider's performance in that metric is so high that, in absolute terms, the experience or outcome for students regarding that metric is outstanding. Therefore, in interpreting a very high absolute value, panellists and assessors should:

- If the metric is positively flagged, a star should reinforce the judgement that the provider is performing exceptionally well in this area.
- If the metric is unflagged, and does not have negative flags in any of its split

metrics, a star should be considered in a similar way to a positive flag in determining the final position of the initial hypothesis.

- If the metric has a negative flag, or has negative flags for any of its split metrics, a star should not be taken into account when calculating the initial hypothesis.

7.18 A very low absolute value suggests that a provider's performance in that metric is so low that, in absolute terms, the experience or outcome for many students regarding that metric is not good. Therefore, in interpreting a very low absolute value, panellists and assessors should:

- If the core or split metric is positively flagged, an exclamation mark should not be taken into account by panellists and assessors when calculating the initial hypothesis.
- If the metric is unflagged, an exclamation mark should be considered in a similar way to a negative flag in determining the final position of the initial hypothesis.
- If the metric has a negative flag, or has negative flags for any of its split metrics, an exclamation mark should reinforce the judgement that the provider is performing poorly in this area.

7.19 Panellists and assessors will continue to be able to consider all evidence, including the presence or absence of very high and low absolute values, holistically and to exercise their academic judgement accordingly in the subsequent steps of assessment.

## Splits

7.20 In refining the initial hypothesis based on the metrics, panellists and assessors should consider **how a provider performs with respect to different student groups**.

7.21 Performance with respect to certain student groups, **particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, must be taken into account in determining a provider's rating**. This is particularly relevant to criterion SO3 (see **Assessment Framework** section). It could lead to an adjustment of the initial hypothesis, and/or to a reduction in the confidence with which the hypothesis is held – which would lead to the panellists and assessors needing to seek further information in the additional evidence. Panellists and assessors may alter their initial hypothesis in the light of evidence from the splits, particularly when considering providers for the highest rating of Gold.

7.22 The performance of the provider in the delivery mode in which the provider does not teach the most students (i.e. full time or part time) – should be considered in a similar way, unless both modes are of a similar size, in which case a separate procedure is followed (see below). The metrics (including the splits, very high or very low absolute values and other factors) in the minority mode of delivery should be taken into account in proportion to the number of students (headcount) in each mode.

7.23 Because of relatively small cohort sizes, split metrics are less likely to result in a flag than core metrics. Therefore, no weight should be assigned to a split metric that does not display a flag. Panellist and assessor training will make clear that **panellists and assessors should not allow splits that do not display flags to affect their hypothesis**.

7.24 Panellists and assessors should focus on those split metrics that do display flags, in particular where these flags differ from the core metric, and split flags for students from

disadvantaged groups which may reflect on performance in relation to criterion SO3 (Positive Outcomes for All). A number of possible variations exist.

- (a) A positive flag in a split metric, where the core metric is neutral or negatively flagged
- (b) A negative flag in a split metric, where the core metric is neutral or positively flagged.

- 7.25 The presence of these combinations should lead panellists and assessors to consider reassessing the provider upwards or downwards from the initial assessment, either to a higher/ lower position within the current category or to a higher/lower category, or to weakening the strength with which they hold their hypothesis. In considering the splits, panellists and assessors should also be alert to patterns affecting particular student groups across all three aspects.
- 7.26 The metrics are also split by Year. The year splits should not be considered as a trajectory, and the presence or absence of a trend should form no part of assessment. Year splits may, however, be considered to provide evidence during Step 2 as to whether or not policies and practices cited in the provider submission are having an impact.
- 7.27 The metrics should be considered as a 'snapshot' of performance aggregated over a given period (one, two or three years depending on the availability of data). The year splits are provided to aid understanding of how many years of reportable data are captured in each core metric. Flags in the year splits should be considered as relevant to the assessment only where:
- The core metric is not reportable when aggregating all years of available data. In these rare cases any flags in the year splits should be regarded as a substitute for the core metric flags when determining the starting point (step 1.a), or
  - The core metric is neutral and there are one or more positive or negative flags in the year splits. In these cases the flags should be considered as an indication of positive or negative performance for part of the period under consideration, but not (in the absence of a core flag) for the whole period; or
  - In step 2, the provider's submission claims that initiatives have had a recent impact; in this case the panellists and assessors may refer to the year splits in the relevant metrics, as a potential source of corroborating these claims in the submission. This could affect the judgement at step 2, rather than step 1.

### **Variant procedure for calculating the initial hypothesis for the part-time mode**

- 7.28 This procedure is to be followed where the majority mode is part-time, or for calculating the initial hypothesis for the part-time mode for a provider with similarly sized modes (see below).
- 7.29 A provider in such a situation has the opportunity to submit an additional side of quantitative information related to continuation and to progression to employment, highly skilled employment and further study. Further details as to this piece of information are set out in 'Additional information for part-time providers', above.
- 7.30 During Step 1b, panellists and assessors should consider this information alongside the continuation; employment and further study; and highly skilled employment and further

study metrics to assess a provider's performance in this area. They should use this to make a judgement as to the final result of the initial hypothesis, as well as how firmly it is held and any areas they wish to probe when looking at the provider submission, before proceeding to Step 2.

- 7.31 The greater the robustness of the information provided, and the more the information is put in the context of national comparators, the more weight should be placed on it.

### **Variant procedure for where there is a similar number of students in both delivery modes**

- 7.32 If there are a similar number of students in both delivery modes, an initial hypothesis should be calculated separately for each mode. 'A similar number of students' is considered to be more than 35% of students in the minority mode and will be clearly indicated on the metrics work book.
- 7.33 Panellists and assessors should formulate the initial hypothesis separately for each mode, following each of the steps and guidance for Steps 1a and 1b. The variant procedure for calculating the initial hypothesis for the part-time mode should be used for the part-time mode.
- 7.34 At the end of Step 1b, panellists and assessors should then combine the two initial hypotheses to produce a single initial hypothesis for the provider, which may be either Gold, Silver or Bronze, or a borderline rating between these.

### **Additional factors in reviewing the metrics**

- 7.35 Panellists and assessors will consider a number of **additional factors** related to the interpretation of the core and split metrics in order to refine the initial hypothesis. These are:
- a. In addition to the number of flags, panellists and assessors will consider how the flags are distributed across the three aspects of quality. If positive or negative flags are concentrated – or absent from – one or more aspect, that may influence the judgement.
  - b. Particularly where the initial hypothesis is close to a borderline rating, and where there are no or very few core metric flags or high/low absolute values, panellists and assessors will need to consider how far the provider's core metrics differ from their benchmarks, and whether these differences are statistically significant. This includes consideration of any 'double flags' (++) or (-), and metrics that are almost 2 percentage points above or below benchmark and are statistically significant. Differences that are not statistically significant should be disregarded.
  - c. Panellists and assessors should account for the fact that providers in Scotland typically have slightly lower retention rates, due to the HE landscape and funding model that prevails in Scotland and that this should be taken into account when judging performance against these metrics. Also, although differing measures of disadvantage are used across the UK, and are reflected in the splits, for all UK providers the continuation and highly skilled employment metrics use the POLAR classification as one of the benchmarking factors. This is to provide a consistent measure for benchmarking. Panellists and assessors should take account of the fact that the higher education participation rate in Scotland is slightly higher than the rest of the UK. Analysis indicates that when taking all Scottish providers together, the benchmark for

Highly skilled employment is less than half a percentage point higher when POLAR is included as a benchmarking factor.

- d. Panellists and assessors should take account of Z-scores, noting that:
- A Z-score of 1.96 means that the difference between the indicator and the benchmark has a 5 per cent likelihood of being due to chance.
  - A Z-score of 3 or above means the likelihood of it being due to chance reduces substantially and is negligible. Therefore, Z-scores of any value of 3 or above should for practical purposes be considered as equivalent.
  - The Z-score does not on its own provide an indication of performance. It only measures whether the difference between an indicator and the benchmark is statistically significant.
- e. Step 1.b. must result in an initial hypothesis of Gold, Silver or Bronze, or a borderline rating between these. Panellists and assessors should also consider how firmly they hold the initial hypothesis and any areas to be considered further in step 2, depending on the strength of evidence available in the metrics.

7.36 After reviewing the metrics and forming an initial hypothesis, panellists and assessors will consider the provider submission before reaching a final view. Panellists and assessors will review the submission in all cases before making a holistic judgement, regardless of what initial hypothesis is reached in step 1b, or the degree of confidence with which the initial hypothesis is held.

## Step 2: Consideration of the provider submission and supplementary metrics

7.37 In looking at the provider submission, panellists and assessors will be looking for evidence of **factors that could have affected performance against the core and split metrics**. These factors might lead panellists and assessors to adjust their initial hypothesis based on performance against the core and split metrics.

7.38 Panellists and assessors will also be looking for **evidence of excellence against the criteria** that core and split metrics alone may not have fully demonstrated.

7.39 The purpose of the provider submission is to enable a provider to:

- A. add additional context further to the standard contextual data, such as details of its mission.
- B. support or explain its performance against the core and split metrics, or supplementary metrics, particularly where performance is not strong.
- C. put forward evidence against the assessment criteria which will be used alongside performance against the metrics.
- D. further explore performance for specific student groups based on split metrics.

7.40 It is possible that:

- a provider with a negative core flag in the majority mode of delivery could have their rating adjusted to Gold if all or most of the other flags were positive. Similarly, a provider with an initial hypothesis of Bronze could have their rating adjusted to Silver, if all or most of the other flags were positive. In both cases, though, panellists and assessors should expect to see further corroborating evidence and a strong and convincing justification for the negative flag(s) in the provider's submission.
- a provider with one or more positive core flags could receive a rating of Bronze if it also had core negative flags.
- in a range of other scenarios, the rating could be adjusted in light of the evidence (or lack of evidence) in a provider submission.

7.41 The core and split metrics are considered to provide evidence of performance against all three aspects of teaching excellence. Furthermore, since all providers taking part in the TEF will already have met the high baseline quality threshold for the sector, assessors should not take the absence of evidence to be 'evidence of absence' in relation to meeting that threshold i.e. a de facto reason to adjust their initial hypothesis in either direction, unless negative performance in the core and split metrics, or very low absolute values, has given them previous cause for concern.

7.42 For additional evidence to alter the initial hypothesis, **panellists and assessors should expect to see clear, significant and well supported evidence of performance above the baseline, directly relevant to the criteria.** In particular, for providers to achieve the highest TEF rating, panellists and assessors should look to see clear evidence, from the core and split metrics, usually in combination with the additional evidence, of outstanding performance against all three aspects of teaching excellence.

7.43 Provider submissions may address elements relating to both full-time and part-time modes of provision, regardless of which is the majority mode. As in Step 1, weight commensurate with the proportion of students in a particular mode should be placed on evidence relating to that mode.

7.44 Panellists and assessors should give no weight to evidence that is not relevant to the criteria.

7.45 Providers can, if they wish, re-use existing excerpts from their quality assessment review (e.g. HER or ELIR) results within their TEF submission. Where these reviews are timely and report excellence **above the baseline** that is directly relevant to the TEF assessment criteria, panellists and assessors will consider these to be strong evidence against the criteria. This may, in some cases, lessen the burden on some providers when they are putting together their provider submissions. However, providers will need to consider strongly the relationship of the excerpt to the TEF criteria and the need to demonstrate performance above the baseline. Where providers in Wales are effectively providing Welsh medium provision this may be considered as positive evidence towards the TEF assessment criterion concerned with students academic experiences (LE3).

7.46 In the case that a submission suggests that any elements of the metrics or the provider's performance can be explained by the fact that a provider has high absolute values, panellists and assessors should only consider such arguments to be valid if the relevant metric has a star. If the relevant metric does not have a star, they should not consider assertions that make reference to high absolute values to be valid.

7.47 The additional evidence is likely to be especially important when a provider:

- a. has a mixture of positive and negative significance flags
- b. has no or very few significance flags or very high or low absolute values
- c. has fewer than three years of core metrics
- d. is very small and its metrics have low z-scores
- e. displays a core metric and split metric with a contrary flag
- f. has a concentration of positive or negative flags in one or more aspects that are not replicated in other aspects.
- g. has a high proportion of local students
- h. a provider's own data dominates its benchmarks.
- i. the minority mode of provision covers a significant proportion of the provider's students, but the core metrics for that mode are not reportable.

## Use of supplementary metrics

- 7.48 Supplementary metrics should be considered alongside the provider submission and should be considered to provide additional evidence as to the provider's performance against the aspects of quality and criteria with which they are associated. In considering supplementary metrics, panellists and assessors should consider the supplementary metric (including significance flags, indications of very high or low absolute values and metric splits for relevant metrics), alongside any information about the supplementary metric that the provider has chosen to include in its provider submission.
- 7.49 Supplementary metrics are not the only source of evidence for the aspects of quality and criteria with which they are associated; in many cases the provider submission will contain evidence relating to other elements of those criteria. In considering the evidence from these different sources, panellists and assessors should use their academic judgement in considering the relative reliability, robustness and relevance of evidence from the supplementary metrics compared to evidence from the provider submission and make decisions accordingly.

## Supplementary grade inflation metric

- 7.50 The supplementary grade inflation metric provides evidence against criterion Rigour and Stretch (TQ3).
- 7.51 Whilst the proportion of firsts and 2:1s will vary slightly from year to year, panelists and assessors should consider any substantial increase in the proportion of firsts and 2:1s awarded over the 10 year period to be potential evidence of grade inflation.
- 7.52 The burden of proof lies with the provider to demonstrate that any such substantial increase is not grade inflation but has instead occurred for legitimate reasons. Panelists and assessors should only accept such arguments where there is clear and robust evidence to support them in the provider submission, supplemented by broader evidence of the levels of rigour and stretch at that provider. Potential legitimate reasons for the increase could include a substantial increase in the prior attainment of students at that provider, or clear and compelling evidence that the absolute standard of assessments at that provider have substantially increased in objective difficulty over that period.

- 7.53 Grade inflation should be considered evidence of reducing rigour and stretch. If grade inflation has not occurred, or has been reversed, this should be considered evidence of maintaining or increasing rigour and stretch. Assessors will be provided with contextual data that shows the average proportion of firsts, 2:1s and other degrees given across the sector 1, 2, 3 and 10 years ago to provide context for how severe the grade inflation at each individual providers is. However, the sector-average level of grade inflation should not be considered to be neutral or be used as a benchmark. Assessors should consider all grade inflation to be negative and an indication of a reduction in rigour and stretch, even if the amount of grade inflation is less than the sector average.
- 7.54 Panelists and assessors should use their judgement to balance evidence from the grade inflation metric against any other evidence on rigour and stretch that may be included in the provider submission to form their overall judgement about the degree of rigour and stretch at that provider.
- 7.55 If a provider's grade inflation metric demonstrates a material decrease in the proportion of firsts and 2:1s awarded over the last three years, and this is supported by evidence from the provider submission of clear institutional policies and practices which led to the change (rather than the reduction being caused by other factors), panelists and assessors should consider this as evidence of reversing grade inflation that could be evidence of increasing rigour and stretch, even if the absolute proportion of firsts and 2:1s awarded remains above that which existed ten years ago. Assessors should only do this if they are satisfied that the decrease is genuinely as a result of targeted measures to address grade inflation and not as a result of a decline in teaching quality at the provider.
- 7.56 Assessors should place no weight upon assertions made in the provider submission about policies and practices to address or reverse grade inflation unless these are supported by the data in the grade inflation metric.
- 7.57 Assessors should be aware that reversing grade inflation may have a negative impact on a provider's NSS metrics and should take that into account when assessing providers that have materially reversed grade inflation.
- 7.58 The purpose of the grade inflation metric is solely to evidence whether or not grade inflation has taken place. Assessors should not consider the proportion of 2:1s and firsts to provide evidence as to the quality of teaching: the proportion of each grade awarded is determined entirely by the provider and can provide no positive evidence as to the excellence of teaching or outcomes at that provider.
- 7.59 The grade inflation metric will not be reported for providers which are are not responsible for awarding their own degrees.

### **Supplementary LEO metrics**

- 7.60 The supplementary LEO metrics provide evidence against all three of the criteria under Student Outcomes and Learning Gain: Employment and Further Study (SO1), Employability and Transferrable Skills (SO2), and Positive Outcomes for All (SO3).
- 7.61 The first supplementary LEO metric shows the proportion of graduates in sustained employment or further study after three years. The second shows the proportion of those graduates in the first metric that are earning above the median earnings for 21-30 year olds or in further study after three years. Taken together, they allow panellists and assessors to assess how graduates are, or are not, progressing into positive employment outcomes.



- 7.62 Panellists and assessors should bear in mind that the earnings threshold is below the starting salary for most modestly paying but socially valuable graduate jobs such as teaching or nursing and midwifery and the metric therefore records such outcomes as being equally valuable as higher paying professions such as banking or law; and, furthermore, that the metric has been benchmarked against a range of factors that can impact earnings (set out in Metrics, above). Panellists and assessors should therefore be careful not to double-adjust for such factors when considering evidence concerning this metric put forward in a provider submission.
- 7.63 Panellists and assessors should remember that the LEO data from which this metric is drawn is currently experimental. In particular, it does not yet include data from self-assessment tax records and therefore less weight should be put on these metrics for providers with higher proportions of graduates with self-assessment records (the proportion of graduates with self-assessment records will be provided to panellists and assessors as contextual information).

## Situation where the provider submission contains no substantive additional evidence

- 7.64 Should a provider include very little additional evidence in its submission, proportionately more weight will be placed on the metrics in making decisions in either mode of delivery or split metrics or supplementary metrics, and panellists and assessors will look for more clear-cut evidence from the metrics. **In the extreme case where a provider submission contains no substantive additional evidence, panellists and assessors will be required to make a judgement based on the metrics alone, according to the following rules:**
- a. Five or six positive flags (regardless of the weighting of those flags being full or half) in the core metrics for the mode of delivery in which it teaches the most students and no negative flags in either mode of delivery or split metrics confers a rating of Gold.
  - b. No flags, one, two, three or four positive flags (regardless of the weighting of those flags being full or half) in either mode of delivery or split metrics or supplementary metrics. And negative flags in either mode of delivery for any any core, split or supplementary metrics the core metrics for the mode of delivery in which it teaches the most students and no negative flags in either mode of delivery or split metrics confers a rating of Silver.
  - c. Any negative flags in either mode of delivery for any core or split metric confers a rating of Bronze.
- 7.65 These rules are more stringent than those set out regarding the formation of the starting point for an initial hypothesis due to the fact that, where evidence of excellence derives solely from metrics, this evidence must be particularly strong and unambiguous for panellists and assessors to have confidence in awarding the higher ratings. The difficulty of achieving a Gold rating on the basis of metrics alone reflects this need for certainty and consistency, which is essential in a sector where many providers have specific strengths. If a provider wishes to avoid the more stringent rules, it should ensure that it includes relevant and substantive evidence against the criteria, within its submission.

## Step 3: Holistic judgement

- 7.66 In reaching their final holistic judgement, panellists and assessors will look at each application against the rating descriptors below to confirm that the rating arrived at **by the process outlined above corresponds with the best fit to the relevant descriptor**. If they conclude it does not, they should revisit the process above to consider whether the rating should be revised.
- 7.67 Providers will not need to meet all components of a descriptor and panellists and assessors should not have to prove that a provider satisfies the requirements of a lower level before proceeding to consider a higher level. Instead, panellists and assessors should make a judgement about best fit based on the combination of evidence contained in the metrics and the submission.
- 7.68 In doing so, there is no set weighting between the metrics and the submission. There are various circumstances in which the metrics may not provide clear-cut or consistent evidence and the submission is likely to be especially important. Conversely, if the submission includes limited evidence, proportionately more weight will need to be placed on the metrics in making an overall judgement.

## TEF descriptors

- 7.69 The descriptors in **figure 4** set out **typical characteristics** of a provider at each level of excellence, related to the criteria. Panellists and assessors will use the descriptors to confirm or adjust their assessment.
- 7.70 In all cases, assessments will be based on the criteria, using as evidence the combination of metrics and the provider submission, to determine a best fit against the criteria using the generic descriptors below.

Figure 4: TEF Descriptors



**Gold:** The Panel will award a provider a rating of Gold if it appears likely, based on the evidence available to the Panel, that provision is consistently outstanding and of the highest quality found in the UK Higher Education sector; that is:

The provider achieves consistently outstanding outcomes for its students from all backgrounds, in particular with regards to retention and progression to graduate level employment and further study. Course design and assessment practices provide scope for outstanding levels of stretch that ensures all students are significantly challenged to achieve their full potential, and acquire knowledge, skills and understanding that are most highly valued by employers. Optimum levels of contact time, including outstanding personalised provision, secures the highest levels of engagement and active commitment to learning and study from students.

Outstanding physical and digital resources are actively and consistently used by students to enhance learning. Students are consistently and frequently engaged with developments from the forefront of research, scholarship or practice, and are consistently and frequently involved in these activities. An institutional culture that facilitates, recognises and rewards excellent teaching is embedded across the provider.



**Silver:** The Panel will award a provider a rating of Silver if it appears likely, based on the evidence available to the Panel, that provision is of high quality, and consistently exceeds the rigorous national quality requirements for UK

Higher Education; that is:

The provider achieves excellent outcomes for its students, in particular with regards to retention and progression to graduate level employment and further study. Course design and assessment practices provide scope for high levels of stretch that ensures all students are significantly challenged, and acquire knowledge, skills and understanding that are highly valued by employers. Appropriate levels of contact time, including personalised provision, secures high levels of engagement and commitment to learning and study from students.

High quality physical and digital resources are used by students to enhance learning. Students are engaged with developments from the forefront of research, scholarship or practice, and are sometimes involved in these activities. An institutional culture that facilitates, recognises and rewards excellent teaching has been implemented at the provider.



**Bronze:** The Panel will award a provider a rating of Bronze if it appears likely, based on the evidence available to the Panel, that provision meets the rigorous national quality requirements for UK Higher Education; that is:

The provider achieves good outcomes for most of its students; however, the provider is likely to be significantly below benchmark in one or more areas, in particular with regards to retention and progression to graduate level employment and further study. Course design and assessment practices provide sufficient stretch that ensures most students make progress, and acquire knowledge, skills and understanding that are valued by employers. Sufficient levels of contact time, including personalised provision secures good engagement and commitment to learning and study from most students.

Physical and digital resources are used by students to further learning. Students are occasionally engaged with developments from the forefront of research, scholarship or practice, and are occasionally involved in these activities. An institutional culture that facilitates, recognises and rewards excellent teaching has been introduced at the provider.

**Provisional:** The provider meets rigorous national quality requirements for UK higher education but is unable to be assessed for a TEF rating of gold, silver or bronze due to insufficient data.

7.71 In addition, providers at all levels will have met baseline quality thresholds for UK higher education providers. This means<sup>29</sup>:

- Degree standards are reliable, meet UK expectations, and are reasonably comparable to those set and maintained across the UK sector
- The quality of the student academic experience meets baseline requirements
- The provider has in place an effective approach to continuously improve the student academic experience and student outcomes.

## Anticipated distribution

7.72 In the Year Two Specification, we indicated a likely distribution based on performance against the core metrics where approximately 20% of participating providers would receive the lowest rating, approximately 20-30% would receive the highest rating and the remaining 50-60% would receive the intermediate rating.

7.73 We consider this to continue to be the likely distribution of TEF ratings across the sector as a whole; however, the TEF ratings awarded in any specific year may vary considerably from this as not all providers will choose to apply for (re)assessment in that year.

7.74 This distribution is **not** a quota. That is, the panel will not be expected to force an allocation of providers to categories based on these proportions. Rather, their assessment will be based on evidence as outlined in the **Assessment process section**. HEFCE will use the indicative distribution as a guide in panellist and assessor training to calibrate individual standards of assessment and will do so against the TEF-eligible population as a whole, not against those that happen to apply in any given year, in order to maintain continuity in standards of assessment.

7.75 The decision of the TEF Panel will be the final determinant of a provider's rating. The Panel will be under no obligation to comply with a quota or guided distribution when determining ratings.

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<sup>29</sup> In the section on quality assessment and the TEF in the Introduction, we outlined the different approaches to quality assessment in different parts of the UK and over time. Some review methods will include different emphases on these three elements and some will include additional elements.

## 8 Assessment process

- 8.1 TEF assessment is a **desk-based process**. TEF assessors working with panellists will make recommendations to the TEF Panel about the rating to be awarded. The TEF Panel will make the final judgements.
- 8.2 The assessment process is in **three stages**, which are outlined in the overview below. The process has been designed to allow a rigorous and fair assessment. It has academic judgement at its heart with appropriate checks and balances built in to ensure transparency and consistency.

### Preparation and training

- 8.3 It is important that students, providers and other stakeholders, in the UK and overseas, can have confidence that the TEF is a robust assessment exercise and have confidence in the outcomes. The process of ensuring assessments are robust begins with a transparent assessment framework. It continues with the selection and appointment of assessors and panellists who are suitably qualified and prepared to carry out the role.
- 8.4 In this section we outline in brief how panellists and assessors will be **prepared and supported**.
- 8.5 HEFCE will re-appoint a number of panellists and assessors that took part in previous years of TEF, and will recruit some additional panellists and assessors with specific types of experience and expertise.
- 8.6 All panellists and assessors will take part in training that includes mock assessment exercises and briefing on all the components of an application (the contextual data, the metrics and the provider submissions); and on the three step approach to making decisions, taking full consideration of all these components in reaching a judgement. The panellists and assessors will also receive training on the operating context of higher education in each of the devolved nations, including on the different quality systems and the role of Welsh medium provision in Wales.
- 8.7 At the start of the assessment, a small selection of applications will be used to allow panellists and assessors to discuss the assessment process, clarifying uncertainties and developing a common understanding of standards to be applied.
- 8.8 Throughout the process HEFCE will train, guide and support the panellists and assessors to conduct their work according to the following principles:
  - a. Adherence to the published criteria and procedures.
  - b. Impartiality and integrity, neither advantaging nor disadvantaging any type of provider or provision.
  - c. Reliance on the evidence supplied formally to them to inform judgements, not prior knowledge or other information.
  - d. Consistency, as far as possible, in the application of the criteria and rating descriptors across all providers.
  - e. Consensus, as far as possible, in deciding the outcomes.

- f. Maintenance of due confidentiality and data security throughout the process.

## Stage one – individual assessment

- 8.9 Stage one involves **individual assessment** of a set of provider applications by assessors and panellists. In allocating applications, care will be taken to ensure there are no conflicts of interest with the provider being assessed. Details about how conflicts of interest will be managed will be made clear in guidance from HEFCE.
- 8.10 The guidance will also set out any additional considerations HEFCE intend to make, for example, around matching of assessor and panellist expertise and experience to the provider being assessed.
- 8.11 Each teaching and learning ('academic') assessor and panellist, and each student assessor and panellist, will be allocated a set of applications. Each application will be looked at by at least two academics and at least one student.
- 8.12 TEF officers will be present to support and facilitate the assessment process, ensure the guidance is followed, and address any requests for **clarification or verification** from the provider.

## Stage two – recommended outcomes

- 8.13 All panellists and assessors will meet together in a single location, to discuss the individuals' assessments and form recommendations to the TEF Panel. Recommendations will be discussed and made by groups of panellists and assessors which each include a range of academic expertise and students. The groups may recommend a rating of Gold, Silver or Bronze, or that the case is very close to a borderline and should be subject to particular scrutiny by the TEF Panel. At the meeting, panellists and assessors will discuss cross-cutting issues that affect judgements and establish consistency in grade boundaries and treatment of borderline cases.
- 8.14 The employment and widening participation expert Panel members will contribute to the discussions and be available to provide specific advice on request.
- 8.15 HEFCE analysts will be available to provide advice or clarification on interpreting the metrics.
- 8.16 TEF officers will support the groups of panellists and assessors and help prepare their recommendations for presentation to the Panel.

## Stage three – decisions on final outcomes

- 8.17 A meeting of the full TEF panel will take place to **decide the outcomes**. The Panel will consider all the recommendations from the groups of panellists and assessors, and will pay particular attention to borderline cases or cases flagged as particularly challenging. Its decisions on the ratings to be awarded will be final.
- 8.18 Decisions will be taken collectively by the Panel, with the expectation that any member who is conflicted with a provider will leave the room while that application is discussed.

- 8.19 In making collective decisions, the Panel will seek to reach a consensus view. If a clear consensus is not reached, the final decision will be taken by majority vote, with the TEF Panel Chair arbitrating.
- 8.20 The statement of findings will include the TEF Panel's summary view on why the rating was awarded, including areas of particular strength. It is intended to provide useful information to students and employers as well as to the provider itself.

## Appeals

- 8.21 A provider will be able to **appeal on the basis of a significant procedural irregularity** in the determinations of its TEF outcome. This might be on the basis that the published process was not followed when reaching a decision. A significant factual inaccuracy in the statement of findings may be taken by the provider to indicate a potential procedural irregularity. To have grounds for appeal, the procedural irregularity needs to be significant, meaning that it was capable of materially affecting one of the following decisions:
- whether to accept a data amendment request
  - a decision of the Chief Executive of HEFCE that a provider is ineligible for a TEF award
  - a decision of the Director for Fair Access that a provider is ineligible for a TEF award
  - the rating awarded to the provider by the TEF Panel.
- 8.22 A provider will not be able to appeal on the basis of:
- a. A challenge to the underpinning principles of the TEF or the criteria or process set out in the TEF specification that is applicable to the decision being challenged.
  - b. A challenge to the accuracy of the data underlying the TEF metrics.
  - c. A challenge to the academic judgement of the panel.
  - d. Comparisons between its rating and those of other providers, and the academic judgements reached by the Panel in respect of those providers.
  - e. Challenges to the inclusion or non-inclusion of specific information in the Statement of Findings not affecting its overall factual accuracy.
  - f. New information that had come to light that was not included in the submission. The panel will only consider the original information relied upon that formed part of the assessment process (including requests for verification or clarification).
- 8.23 HEFCE will publish details of the appeals process, including the timetable and process to be followed. As noted in HEFCE's procedural guidance, TEF results will be published in June to inform student choices in a timely fashion. Appeals will be heard subsequently.

## TEF panellists and assessors

- 8.24 Assessment will be carried out by peers and experts. A pool of appropriately qualified panellists and assessors has been appointed and will be supplemented. The pool includes representatives from all four parts of the UK. Panellists and assessors include experts in teaching and learning ('academics'), students or their representatives, employment experts, and widening participation experts.
- 8.25 **The TEF Panel is chaired by Professor Chris Husbands, Vice-Chancellor of Sheffield Hallam University.** The TEF Chair was appointed by the Secretary of State and HEFCE, after open competition. As well as chairing the TEF Panel, the TEF Chair will advise DfE and HEFCE on the development and conduct of the TEF, and the TEF Chair is also a member of the DfE TEF Delivery Group and the HEFCE TEF Project Board.
- 8.26 The TEF deputy chair, Janice Kay, Provost at the University of Exeter, will chair discussions of the TEF Panel that involve any providers the Chair is conflicted with, and will deputise in the event of any unforeseen absence of the Chair.
- 8.27 The role of panellists, assessors and the TEF Chair is set out in **table 10**. Also included is a description of the role of TEF officers and other support officers who are members of staff from HEFCE and the QAA.

**Table 10: TEF roles**

Actor	Description of role
TEF assessor	TEF assessors are either experts in teaching and learning in a higher education setting, or students. Their role is to assess TEF applications and work with panellists to recommend outcomes.
TEF officer	TEF officers are staff from HEFCE and QAA. Their role is to ensure the process runs smoothly and that procedural guidance is followed correctly but not to take part in actual assessment. Analyst officers provide technical assistance to aid interpretation of the metrics but do not take part in actual assessment.
Employment and WP expert Panel members	Their role is to provide specialist input to the assessment process, further to that which may already be available through existing expertise of panellists, and to contribute to the final decision-making as members of the TEF Panel.
TEF Panel	The TEF Panel is the decision-making body. Its members (referred to as 'panellists') will be made up of experts in teaching and learning and students (who will both work alongside assessors in stages 1 and 2) and employment and WP experts. The role of the TEF Panel is to make the final decisions on TEF ratings guided by the recommendations. The TEF Panel will be chaired by the TEF Chair.

- The membership of the TEF panel and the pool of assessors are listed at [www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/tef/panel/](http://www.hefce.ac.uk/lt/tef/panel/).



## 9 Outcomes

- 9.1 TEF outcomes will include the overall **rating** and a brief **statement of findings** setting out the high level reason for the rating. Both will be published in official sources of information for students as part of the TEF award.

### Award duration

- 9.2 TEF awards will be **valid for three years** (subject to a provider continuing to meet eligibility requirements), unless a provider does not have the requisite three years of core metrics to inform the assessment. For a provider that has only one or two years of core metrics, the award granted will last for one or two years respectively (see Eligibility, pre-requisites and provisional TEF awards section). A provisional TEF award given to a provider that does not have suitable metrics will last for one year (see Eligibility, pre-requisites and provisional TEF awards section).
- 9.3 Where a provider that holds a valid TEF award takes part in a subsequent TEF year, the new TEF award, once published, will replace the previous award; in this case the previous award will no longer be valid.
- 9.4 Providers holding TEF awards lasting more than one year that do not take part in the subsequent TEF years will continue to hold their awards, so long as they continue to meet the eligibility requirements.
- 9.5 If two (or more) providers have merged before the assessment is complete, the lead provider will, if eligible, receive a single TEF award, which takes account of the evidence about the former merged providers.
- 9.6 TEF descriptors were described in the Assessment: decision-making section.

### Communication of TEF outcomes

- 9.7 TEF outcomes will be published by HEFCE, alongside those awards that continue to be valid. They will also be available on the UCAS website and on Unistats (or equivalent).
- 9.8 A copy of a provider's metrics and their submission will be published, linked to from the UCAS and Unistats pages (or equivalent) and hosted by HEFCE.
- 9.9 TEF outcomes for providers in England will also feature on the Register of Higher Education Providers<sup>30</sup>. The Register contains information about how providers of higher education are regulated in England. It is not aimed specifically at prospective students but it is of interest to them and of interest to regulators and Government agencies, in the UK and internationally.
- 9.10 These official sources of information for students will be updated at least

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<sup>30</sup> [HEFCE Register](#).

annually so that they remain up-to-date.

- 9.11 Providers are also encouraged to include TEF outcomes on their own websites, prospectuses and other sources of information for students.

## Withdrawal of a TEF award

9.12 A TEF award will be withdrawn if a provider:

- a. ceases to meet the quality threshold or other eligibility requirement, including for course designation, set out in the **Scope** and **Eligibility sections**.
- b. is discovered post facto to have included substantive factual inaccuracies in their TEF application.

9.13 If a TEF award is withdrawn, HEFCE will notify the provider. The award will not feature in the next officially updated UCAS, Register and Unistats entries and the provider will be obligated to cease advertising or claiming that it has the award. These sanctions will apply to all providers across the UK that have applied for and received a TEF award.

9.14 Any fee uplift associated with the award will cease to apply from the start of the academic year immediately following the date on which the award is withdrawn.

9.15 In some exceptional circumstances, a provider may have its TEF award withdrawn because it ceases to meet the quality threshold or other eligibility requirements and then, through the course of the year succeed in addressing the causal issues and have this judgement overturned. In these instances, the provider will not be able to 'reclaim' the TEF award that had been withdrawn, as we expect those with a TEF award to be offering consistently high quality provision to their students. The provider would need to apply to the subsequent year of the TEF in order to regain a TEF award.

## TEF logo and conditions of usage

9.16 TEF awards will bear a protected logo that comes with conditions of usage. Providers will be expected to adhere to these conditions of usage or face consequences should a breach of conditions be reported or uncovered. Conditions of usage will seek to prevent fraudulent use, for example in the case of a provider that has not attained the advertised rating or which continues to advertise an expired TEF award.

# Annex A: Glossary

## **Access and Participation Statement**

A statement published by a provider that sets out their commitment to widening participation and fair access. Providers in England that do not have an Access Agreement approved by the Director of Fair Access are required to publish an Access and Participation Statement to be eligible for a TEF Year Two rating.

## **Access Agreement**

An Access Agreement (providers in England) sets out how an institution will sustain or improve access and student success, which includes retention, attainment and employability. Access Agreements are approved by the Director for Fair Access.

## **Additional evidence**

Evidence on teaching and learning quality included in the provider submission. Additional evidence can be quantitative or qualitative and should address the criteria.

## **Aspects of quality**

Areas of teaching and learning quality in which criteria are articulated against which providers will be assessed. These are: Teaching Quality, Learning Environment, and Student Outcomes and Learning Gain.

## **Assessment framework**

The assessment framework sets out how judgements about excellence will be made. It refers to the aspects of quality, the criteria, the nature of the evidence and how the evidence will be assessed against the criteria to determine the ratings.

## **Benchmark**

The benchmark is a weighted sector average where weightings are based on the characteristics of the students at the provider. A unique benchmark is calculated for each provider, metric and split: it is calculated solely from the data returns informing the metric derivations.

## **Contextual data**

Data on the nature and operating context of a provider, such as their size, location and student population, which is used by panellists and assessors in interpreting performance against the core metrics and additional evidence but does not itself form the basis of any judgement about excellence.

## **Core metrics**

Measures deriving from national surveys and data returns which have been defined, benchmarked and reported as a key part of the evidence used in TEF assessments. For each provider, there are six core metrics, reported separately for the provider's full-time and part-time students, and averaged over three years.

## **Criteria**

Statements against which panellists and assessors will make judgements.

## **Eligibility**

The requirements that must be met in order for providers to be eligible to receive a TEF rating.

## **Flag**

Metrics include flags when the difference between the indicator and the benchmark is significant and material (see other definitions). Flags denote either a positive or a negative difference.

## **Higher education provider**

A higher education provider (or provider) is an organisation that delivers higher education. A provider can be an awarding body or deliver higher education on behalf of another awarding body. The term encompasses higher education institutions, further education colleges and alternative providers.

## **Indicator**

The provider's value for a particular metric, expressed as a proportion, such as the percentage of students that indicated they were satisfied with teaching and learning.

## **Initial hypothesis**

The TEF rating initially assigned to a provider by TEF panellists and assessors, based on their metrics only. This initial hypothesis may be modified by the additional evidence.

## **Learning Environment**

One of the aspects of quality (see other definition). Learning Environment is described in the main text.

## **Material difference**

In relation to the metrics, a provider's indicator is considered to be materially different from the benchmark if the difference is at least two percentage points.

## **Provider submission**

The provider submission is prepared and submitted by a provider and used by panellists and assessors to inform their TEF judgement. A provider submission can contain information on a provider's mission and characteristics, contextual information that explains performance against the metrics and additional evidence to support the case for excellence. The additional evidence should address the criteria and can be qualitative or quantitative.

## **Provisional TEF award**

A TEF rating given to a provider that opts into the TEF but who does not have suitable

metrics to inform assessment. These providers meet all other eligibility requirements and are prevented from achieving a rating above the first level on procedural grounds.

### **Significant difference**

In relation to the metrics, a provider's indicator is considered to be significantly different from the benchmark if the Z-score (see other definition) is +/-1.96. This is a measure of statistical significance.

### **Splits**

Categories by which core metrics are sub-divided in order to show how a provider performs with respect to different student groups and/or in different years.

### **Statement of findings**

A brief, high level written statement that outlines the reason for the rating awarded to a particular provider. Student Outcomes and Learning Gain

One of the aspects of quality (see other definition). Student Outcomes and Learning Gain is described in the main text.

### **Suitable metrics**

The minimum set of core metrics required to be eligible to make a provider submission and receive a TEF rating of Bronze, Silver or Gold.

### **Supplementary metrics**

These do not form part of the eligibility requirements for a TEF assessment, but are always displayed when a provider has them. During assessment, they are first considered during Step 2.

### **Teaching provider**

The provider where a student spends the majority of their first year. For franchised provision, students are included in the metrics of the teaching provider.

### **Teaching Quality**

One of the aspects of quality (see other definition). Teaching Quality is described in the main text.

### **TEF assessor**

TEF assessors consider the evidence available to them and work with panelists to recommend make a provisional judgement about the TEF rating a provider should receive,. The provisional outcome is recommended to the TEF Panel. Assessors are experts in teaching and learning or students.

### **TEF award**

A TEF award is made up of the TEF rating (see other definition) and a brief statement of findings. TEF Year Two awards are valid for up to three years.

## **TEF Panel**

The TEF Panel is the decision-making body for TEF assessments. It will be responsible for reviewing the recommendations made by TEF panellists and assessors and deciding the final rating a provider will receive.

## **TEF ratings**

A TEF rating is the level of excellence achieved by a provider under the TEF. There are three possible ratings: Bronze, Silver and Gold.

## **Transnational education**

Awards of UK degree-awarding bodies delivered overseas. Transnational education is out-of- scope for the TEF in Year Two.

## **Quality assessment**

Quality assessment is a collective term used to refer to arrangements for ensuring higher education providers meet baseline expectations for academic quality and standards. There are different arrangements in operation in different parts of the UK and, in some parts, for different types of providers but in all cases, expectations are underpinned by the UK Quality Code for Higher Education.

## **Very high and very low absolute values**

Very high or very low values are defined to be those absolute indicator values that fall within the top or bottom 10 per cent of providers for that metric (in the given mode).

## **Z-score**

In relation to the metrics, the Z-score denotes the number of standard deviations that a provider's indicator is from the benchmark and is used as a measure of statistical difference.



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