



Department  
for Education

# **Evaluation of Provider-level TEF 2016-17 (Year 2)**

**Measuring the initial impact of the TEF  
on the Higher Education landscape**

**Research report**

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# 1. Executive Summary

## 1a Background and methodology

- 1.1 The Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) was recently introduced to measure teaching quality and student outcomes across undergraduate Higher Education (HE) in the UK, with a view to over time driving up quality, and supporting applicants in their decision making.
- 1.2 The TEF has four key long-term objectives, to:
  - i. Better inform students' choices about what and where to study.
  - ii. Raise esteem for teaching.
  - iii. Recognise and reward excellent teaching.
  - iv. Better meet the needs of employers, business, industry and the professions.
- 1.3 In June 2017 (TEF Year 2), 295 HE providers received the first TEF awards. These included Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), Further Education Colleges (FECs) and Alternative Providers (APs) across the UK. While the TEF is due to move to a subject level, these first awards were awarded at a provider level only. This research aimed to better understand how the TEF performed during this initial phase; to identify any signs of the emerging impact of TEF against its longer-term aims and to inform DfE and OfS work to continuously improve its delivery.
- 1.4 The research covers two key stakeholder groups: HE providers, and applicants to HE. The focus of the research was on the impact of Provider-level TEF 2016-17 (Year 2) on applicants and providers, as opposed to Provider-level TEF 2017-18 (Year 3) and TEF subject pilots.
  - For HE providers, the study explored the perceived value of the TEF to the HE sector, the extent of engagement across providers, and what impact the awards had for their provider.
  - Among applicants, the study captured awareness levels, and the extent to which they made use of the TEF awards during the decision-making process (most were submitting for the January 2018 UCAS deadline).
- 1.5 Both strands incorporated a quantitative online survey and more discursive telephone interviews:
  - For the provider strand, initial interviews were held with 26 'TEF Contacts' (staff with responsibility for co-ordinating their provider's participation in the TEF) and 19 'Academic Contacts' (senior teaching staff with some awareness of the TEF). These interviews revealed themes and impacts that were subsequently quantified in an online survey with 311 TEF and Academic Contacts, across 195 unique HE providers. Throughout, this report



differentiates between TEF Contact and Academic Contact findings: this enables a clear distinction to be made between the impact of the TEF from the perspective of individuals working very closely to the TEF project, as well as individuals more distant from the TEF, but who might experience the impacts of the TEF more closely.

- For the applicant strand, 2,838 online survey responses were achieved with individuals who had submitted an application for an undergraduate HE course starting in 2018 or 2019. Qualitative interviews were subsequently undertaken with 30 applicant participants to explore specific findings uncovered in the survey.

## 1b Key findings: Providers

### Impact of the TEF for HE providers

- 1.6 The initial qualitative interviews with 45 TEF and Academic Contacts sought to identify the range of impacts that HE providers have experienced as a result of the TEF. In total, 36 potential TEF impacts were identified. The wider quantitative survey then measured the perceived extent of change across all 36 impacts with 311 TEF and Academic contacts, representing 195 HE Providers. Alongside this, the survey also captured more broadly whether the TEF was having a positive impact on teaching quality and/or student outcomes at each provider, and across the HE sector more widely. Across these measures, a large majority considered that the TEF was either having a 'positive' or 'neutral' impact (see Section 3b). A small minority considered that the TEF had impacted their provider or the sector in a negative fashion.
- 1.7 The 36 impacts could be categorised into six groups (the full list of 36 impacts is presented in Section 3c). There are broad patterns by group in terms of the amount of change occurring in the last two years, and the extent to which the TEF contributed to this change. These patterns are summarised below, with key specific impacts explored subsequently, split by each group.
  - **Student Experience** – TEF Contacts reported a high amount of change in the last two years for all items, relative to other categories, and a moderate (average) amount of this was considered to be as a result of the TEF.
  - **Student Employability** – For four items, this followed a similar pattern to student experience, although generally both the amount of change and extent of TEF influence reported was slightly lower. Two items showed low change and low TEF impact.
  - **Teaching Staff** – With one exception, there had been low change in the last two years, and TEF influence was also primarily low.

- **Teaching Practices** – Similar to student employability, with a higher level of change reported overall, and mostly a low amount of this was attributed to the TEF.
- **Prospective Students** – All four items showed low or average levels of change in the last two years; with one exception, TEF influence was also low.
- **Wider impacts** – The extent of change in this category varied from very high to low, and in all instances where change had occurred, a high amount was attributed to the TEF, relative to other categories.

- 1.8 TEF Contacts reported a relatively high amount of change in the last two years relating to the **student experience**, believing much of this was due – at least in part – to the TEF. In particular, **TEF Contacts reported that the TEF had contributed to an increased emphasis on student outcomes in the last two years (37%) and 29% noted that the TEF had contributed to an increased emphasis on teaching quality and the learning environment** (rising to 45% among Academic Contacts). A slightly lower proportion reported that the TEF had contributed to a change in course content (22%), or enhanced interventions for improving student retention (21%). With the exception of teaching quality/learning environment, HE providers which received a Bronze TEF award 2017 (Year 2) were more likely to report that the TEF had contributed to change over the last two years: 71% reported an increased emphasis on student outcomes, 38% noted change in course content, while 51% reported interventions for improving student retention.
- 1.9 TEF Contacts reported a considerable amount of change in **student employability** over the last two years, attributing some of this change to the TEF. **The most common impact attributed (at least in part) to the TEF was an increase in student exposure to employability opportunities (21%)**. A further 17% reported that communications with students about their careers had started sooner (rising to 37% among Academic Contacts), while the same proportion (17%) reported developments in the careers services as a result of the TEF. Only 11% reported that the TEF had enhanced employer partnerships.
- 1.10 The study uncovered some changes for **teaching staff; 28% of TEF contacts reported an increased demand on staff to support students, at least in part as a result of the TEF** (rising to 44% among Academic Contacts). **There was evidence that the TEF had contributed to adjustments in staff recruitment strategies**: 20% reported an increased emphasis in recruiting staff with appropriate skills (32% among Academic Contacts), while 11% reported an increased use of ‘sector experts’ (25% among Academic Contacts).
- 1.11 The TEF had a greater impact in developing skills among existing staff. Within the **teaching practices** category, close to one quarter of TEF Contacts reported that at least partly as a result of the TEF:

- new initiatives were being developed to improve teaching standards (24%)
- there was an increase in teaching qualifications or training schemes (24%)
- staff were provided more support to deliver positive student experiences (23%)
- there was an increase in sharing best practice across departments (21%, rising to 37% among Academic Contacts)

1.12 Once again, across all these impacts, Bronze award providers were more likely to report that the TEF had contributed to changes in their provider.

1.13 A higher proportion of TEF Contacts noted that the TEF had contributed to a decrease in teaching morale (15% of TEF Contacts) than an increase (10%), although the difference was less notable among Academic Contacts (20% and 18% respectively). Overall figures were driven by the award received by the provider: Gold award providers were more likely to report an increase in teaching staff morale due to TEF (29%), while Bronze award providers were more likely to report a decreased morale due to TEF (40%).

1.14 Mirroring findings from qualitative interviews, TEF Contacts generally reported low levels of change relating to **prospective students** as a result of the TEF. While 14% considered that the TEF had contributed to an increase in institutional reputation among potential applicants, 5% felt that it had contributed to a reputational decline. As one might expect, the specific TEF award received correlated strongly to these figures: among Gold providers, 43% stated that the TEF had, at least in part, impacted on an improved institutional reputation among potential applicants, while Bronze award providers were more likely to attribute the TEF in a decline in reputation (25%). There was no difference across other provider subgroups.

1.15 Finally, the survey covered **wider impacts** of the TEF. As was also seen in the qualitative phase, the TEF contributed to an **increased investment in the monitoring of TEF-related metrics: 61% of TEF Contacts reported that the TEF – at least in part – contributed to this increase in metric monitoring** (such as NSS scores, continuation rates and employment data). This rose to 79% among Bronze providers. The qualitative interviews revealed a particular emphasis for some HE providers on monitoring retention rates, in part due to the financial implications of high retention rates.

1.16 Around a quarter (23%) reported that the TEF had contributed to an improved institutional reputation within the HE sector (rising to 56% among Gold providers), while only 4% reported the reputation of their provider had decreased as a result of the TEF (rising to 24% among Bronze providers). HEIs were more likely to report that TEF had contributed to a decrease in their reputation (8% compared with 4% of FECs and 2% of APs), although there was no corresponding difference in the

proportion citing an increased reputation. Some TEF Contacts also reported that the TEF had contributed to increased administration costs and burden on time: 15% reported that the TEF's contribution to this increase had resulted in a deprioritisation of research activities, while 38% reported that it had resulted in a deprioritisation of certain teaching activities.

## **Provider perceptions of the TEF**

- 1.17 Providers were asked in the qualitative interviews what value they felt the TEF would bring to the HE sector, and how it might benefit or hinder individual providers. Despite some negative impacts as noted above, on balance providers were broadly positive towards the TEF. They highlighted that it served as a prompt to consider performance in relation to TEF criteria, and thereby raised the profile of teaching quality and student outcomes among senior management. This is explored further in Section 3d.
- 1.18 For FECs and APs, and – to a lesser extent – post-1992 universities, there was a recognition that the TEF might help to raise their own reputation in comparison to more ‘traditional’ HE providers. Such providers also welcomed the prospect that the TEF would redress the balance between research and teaching in the HE sector. More ‘traditional’ HE providers were typically less forthcoming in stating that there was a need for such a re-balancing, in part because they felt their teaching was already of a very high standard.
- 1.19 There was an appreciation that the TEF could be used to promote their provider to applicants, and therefore support student choice. However this was matched by a perception among some that applicants were still unaware of the TEF, or did not fully understand what it is intended to convey. There was also a belief that other information sources carried more weight with applicants than the TEF.
- 1.20 There was also some concern that while the TEF's objectives were important, its design might – to some extent – prevent these from being realised. A particularly common refrain in the interviews related to application perception of a Bronze award, with providers considering that applicants might consider this to be an indication of poor quality teaching when this is in fact not the case. There was also some debate as to whether NSS measures capturing student satisfaction with teaching, and satisfaction with assessment and feedback were suitable indicators of teaching quality. Others raised concerns that the TEF setup did not sufficiently cater for HE providers offering more niche subjects (such as Creative Arts programmes), or based in lower socio-economic areas. More detail on this is contained within Section 3e.
- 1.21 Nevertheless, while there was some concern about the design of the TEF, a majority of providers felt that TEF will be able to achieve most of its objectives. The

online survey determined that 68% of TEF Contacts thought the TEF would raise esteem for teaching (at least to some extent), while 54% considered it would recognise and reward excellent teaching. A further 57% felt that it would better inform student choice. A slightly lower proportion (40%) believed it would result in enhancement of students' skills and knowledge to help employers' needs. Survey figures for Academic Contacts were very similar here (see Section 3d).

## Levels of engagement with the TEF among providers

- 1.22 The study captured levels of engagement with the TEF across HE providers. Engagement was varied, and was dependent on the size of the provider, the award received, and the personal preferences of the TEF contact. Some TEF Contacts looked to promote awareness of TEF through a variety of channels, to senior management, staff and students; others conceived their role as taking care of the TEF, and that there was little need for others to be involved or understand it. Nine in ten (91%) TEF Contacts communicated directly with the senior management team about the TEF, while 83% communicated with teaching staff. The majority of TEF Contacts (78%) agreed that their provider's senior management team were sufficiently engaged with the TEF, with slightly lower proportions agreeing that heads of faculty (73%), teaching staff (68%) and student TEF representatives (61%) were sufficiently engaged. It was notable however that fewer TEF Contacts communicated directly with employer representatives (22%), schools and colleges (13%) and applicants to the provider (11%), although this responsibility may be held by other staff within a provider.
- 1.23 Most TEF Contacts considered that they were knowledgeable about the TEF. For example, 86% agreed that they had sufficient knowledge of the TEF to enable them to fulfil their role. However, there was some evidence that they may require more support from others in their provider, with only 70% agreeing that they received sufficient support. As one might expect, Academic Contacts typically reported slightly lower levels of knowledge than TEF Contacts, although still a majority considered that their knowledge of the TEF was sufficient to enable them to fulfil their role in relation to the TEF (68% reported sufficient knowledge; 65% received enough support from others).
- 1.24 As section 3g details, the research captures how HE providers promote their TEF award. In the main, Gold and Silver awards are seen as 'promotable' among providers, and, conversely, Bronze is viewed by some as 'tarnished'. This is reflected in the proportions reporting use of the award in marketing material: 66% said they used the TEF award 2017 (Year 2) on external promotional materials, but this deviated considerably by award type, with **93% of those with a Gold award and 92% of those with a Silver award promoting the award externally, and only 12% of those with a Bronze award doing so.**

## 1c Key findings: Applicants

### Awareness of the TEF among applicants to HE

- 1.25 The applicant survey captured levels of awareness of the TEF. At the time of making their application to an undergraduate HE course (most had done so by the UCAS January 2018 deadline), 43% of applicants reported that they were aware of the TEF (they had heard of either the name, or the associated awards). **Around a third (32%) of all applicants reported that they were aware of TEF at the time of application and had some knowledge of the TEF.** While the survey captured awareness levels at the time of application, it is important to note that the survey was conducted in late Spring 2018, at least three months after most submitted their application, and this may have therefore led to respondent recall issues.
- 1.26 The TEF award of applicants' first choice HE provider was closely associated with their awareness and knowledge of the TEF. Applicants whose first choice provider achieved a Gold TEF award were more likely to be aware of the TEF at the time of application and to have some knowledge of the TEF (45%, compared with 30% Silver and 25% Bronze).
- 1.27 There were also notable differences in awareness and knowledge by demographic. A higher proportion (35%) of UK domiciled applicants reported being aware of TEF at the time of application and having some knowledge than EU (26%) and international (17%) applicants. Additionally, younger applicants were more likely to report knowledge of the TEF (39% of applicants aged 18 or under compared with 24% aged 19-21 and 22% aged over 21) as were male applicants (39% compared with 29% of female applicants). See Section 4b for more details.
- 1.28 The above figures reflect self-reported knowledge. Applicants who reported that they were aware of TEF when applying and indicated having some knowledge of the TEF were also presented with a series of 'True/False' statements, to check their understanding of the design of the TEF. Regarding the background and objectives of the TEF, most correctly stated that the TEF is a scheme for recognising excellent teaching and student outcomes (89%), and is designed to help students choose where to study by giving clear information on teaching quality (87%).
- 1.29 The largest misconceptions related to the TEF award being determined following an official inspection (66% said that this false statement was true, with only 2% correctly identifying the statement as false), and that the TEF applies to both undergraduate and postgraduate teaching (64% stated this false statement was true). Regarding the criteria covered by the TEF, the TEF was widely understood to incorporate teaching quality (96% correctly stated this to be true) and the learning environment (87%). Applicants were slightly less likely to link the TEF to student

outcomes (76%), while only 31% correctly identified that the TEF is *not* based upon research reputation, and 50% that it is *not* based upon league table ranking.

- 1.30 The qualitative interviews revealed a slightly cloudier picture. Left unprompted during the interview, applicants tended to relate the TEF to teaching quality only, and its association with learning environment and student outcomes was fairly uncommon. A recurring theme among a small group of applicants was an expectation that the TEF awards were determined by an Ofsted-like inspection, and there was some surprise that the awards covered a variety of different data sources such as the National Student Survey (NSS) and the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE).
- 1.31 Among those who were aware of the TEF at the time of application, only half (50%) recalled the award their first choice HE provider actually received. There was a strong association with the type of award received: this figure increased to 75% among those whose first choice HE provider received a Gold award, but reduced to 40% for Silver, 23% for Bronze, and 14% for No award. Such discrepancy is likely to be a result – at least in part – of the difference in marketing and communications from providers with different TEF awards.
- 1.32 Applicants learnt about the TEF from a range of information sources, but there were three common ones: a university website or prospectus (62% reported they heard about the TEF here), a university or college open day (44%), and the UCAS website (36%). Only 15% reported that they had found out about the TEF from their current school or college.

## Use and impact of the TEF among applicants to HE

- 1.33 **A total of 15% of all applicants made use of the TEF** to help them in their decision-making process during application. **TEF use in decision making rose to 34% among applicants who were aware of TEF at the time of submitting their application.** This indicates potential future levels of use of the TEF in decision making should general awareness levels of TEF increase.
- 1.34 It should be borne in mind that applicants use information to make their choices in different ways, and there is no expectation that all applicants would want to use TEF as part of their decision making process.
- 1.35 Use of the TEF was strongly associated with the TEF award received by the applicant's first choice HE provider. Applicants to first choice providers with a Gold award were far more likely to use TEF when deciding where to study (47% of those aware of TEF at time of application) than those applying to Silver (25%), Bronze (23%) or those with no award (14%).
- 1.36 Applicants were asked whether they made a change to their application as a result of seeing the TEF awards. This is separate to 'use', as applicants may have used

the TEF awards to sense check or reinforce choices they had already made, without going on to amend their options. **Of applicants aware of TEF at the time of application and aware of the TEF award of any of their chosen providers, 27% reported that they made a change to their application as a result of this knowledge**; either submitting choices in a different order, including new HE providers, or discarding others. (This accounts for 11% of all applicants.) There was little subgroup difference of note, although Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) applicants were more likely to have made a change as a result of the TEF (36% compared with 23% of White applicants). See Section 4h for more details.

- 1.37 The qualitative interviews unpicked why applicants who made use of the TEF valued the awards. Typically these applicants considered the awards as a supplement to other 'core' sources of information (such as HE provider websites, open days and league tables), and they welcomed that it provided a more impartial assessment of teaching quality etc. Some applicants also valued the awards' apparent simplicity.
- 1.38 Among those who were aware of the TEF at the time of application, but did not make use of the awards in their decision making, for many this was due to a lack of understanding of what the TEF is and how it is awarded. A handful of applicants in the qualitative interviews also commented on polarised results between TEF and league tables (where a highly ranked university would have a Bronze or Silver TEF award), which reduced its credibility. For others, their choice was based on reputation, league tables or other information items, and thus the TEF did not seem relevant to them, while a further few applicants contended that the small number of award options (i.e. three) limited their ability to effectively differentiate between HE providers (clearly this conflicts with those applicants who welcomed the TEF awards due to their simplicity).
- 1.39 The survey also explored how the TEF affected applicant perceptions of HE providers, and the impact it had on applicant choice. A high proportion (82%) of applicants who thought that their first choice HE provider had received a Gold award reported that this had a positive impact on their perception of the provider. This figure dropped to 65% for those who thought their first choice HE provider had a Silver award, 38% who thought their first choice HE provider had a Bronze award and 8% who thought their first choice HE provider had No award. The qualitative interviews revealed that applicants often treated the Bronze award as an indication that the provider was under-achieving, and that it suggested poor quality teaching practices.
- 1.40 There was no evidence that using the TEF contributed to higher levels of applicant satisfaction with the information available to help make decisions, or the confidence that applicants had in the choices that they made (see Section 4i).



- 1.41 The study compared the use of TEF in decision making with other information items that applicants might consider, such as an HE provider's reputation or entry requirements. All applicants were presented with a list of 16 information items and asked how much they used each of these when deciding where to apply, and, separately, how important each item was. In each case, of the 16 items tested, TEF was the least likely to be used (15% used at least a 'moderate amount') and found to be of the lowest importance (40% said it was of at least 'some importance'). This is not unexpected given it is a new award, and relatively unknown amongst applicants. When looking across all information items only among the subgroup of applicants who were aware of the TEF at the time of application, the TEF was rated as the fifteenth most used and important of the sixteen information items.
- 1.42 This aspect of the research also uncovered, despite low use of the TEF, that the criteria that informs the TEF, i.e. teaching quality, learning environment and student outcomes, were all important factors for applicants when considering where to apply. For example, of the 16 items tested, teaching quality was the most likely to be used (83% used at least a 'moderate amount') and rated the highest importance (95% said it was of at least 'some importance'). This highlights a disconnect between the value that the TEF can bring to applicants in their decision making and its current use.
- 1.43 The interviews – some of which were conducted with applicants who had little engagement with the TEF despite considering the criteria that inform the TEF awards to be of value – ascertained that applicants placed a **considerable emphasis on subjective assessments of both teaching quality and learning environment**. Their assessment was commonly made using personal experiences gained in interactions with lecturers and students during open day visits, and to a lesser extent via online student forums and student-conducted online videos (especially for international students who used these as a 'surrogate experience' for visiting a university). Given the dependence on this more personal form of information when judging a provider's quality of teaching and learning environment, applicants rarely associated these factors with the TEF, which they believed to be comprised of quantitative data sources and/or inspections. Others did not make use of the TEF because they believed it did not provide any *additional information* around key indicators of teaching quality i.e. the personal feedback from individual staff and students. It is worth noting that such reflections are not necessarily representative of the whole applicant population.
- 1.44 **For assessing student outcomes however it was more common for applicants to use numeric data such as employability data and average salaries, rather than using subjective assessments.** Despite the majority (67%) of applicants in the online survey answering that the TEF included information relating to graduate outcomes, in the interviews most applicants were unaware that the TEF is informed by student outcomes criteria (e.g. including DLHE and LEO data).

- 1.45 The study segmented applicants by their use of different information items to gain additional insights into applicant information use with relation to TEF: this segmentation identified 5 distinct types of information user, who used information about HE providers in different ways to make decisions about where to study, though it will not identify all the interests student have and the way they engage with information. Amongst the 5 information users, use of TEF in decision making varied between 2-24% (compared to the average of all applicants at 15%), with the change made to their university or college choice varying between 5-16% (compared to the average of all applicants at 11%).
- 1.46 This gives an indication that some different types of applicants use TEF more than others, and whilst the TEF's overall impact among all applicants is still in its early stages, there are certain types of applicant who are already making good use of it. Further detail is presented in Section 4k.

## 1d Conclusions

- 1.47 This evaluation of the Provider-level TEF 2016-17 (Year 2) provides clear evidence that the TEF has started to impact on the HE sector at this early point in its delivery.
- 1.48 The introduction of the awards has served to raise esteem for teaching in the sector, with FECs, APs and 'non-traditional' HEIs in particular welcoming the increased emphasis on teaching quality.
- 1.49 TEF has encouraged HE providers to promote the delivery of high quality teaching. HE providers recognise the positive impact a Gold or Silver TEF award can have on institutional reputation within the sector and among applicants. This is reflected by HE providers with Gold or Silver awards promoting their award, while those with Bronze awards are more likely not to promote their award.
- 1.50 There is also evidence that the TEF is encouraging HE providers, especially those in receipt of a Bronze award, to develop and invest in initiatives that boost the student experience and student outcomes, suggesting TEF is creating an incentive to enhance teaching quality and student outcomes. These are positive outcomes given TEF's aims and the relatively short time which has elapsed since its introduction.
- 1.51 TEF has had an impact on administration costs and burdens on time which has resulted in a deprioritisation of some research and teaching activities. This will be evaluated as the subject-level TEF is implemented and is part of the remit of the independent TEF review.
- 1.52 While internal changes are still being implemented, the full impact of the TEF is yet to reach all applicants to HE and industry. This appears, for the most part, due to a limited awareness of the TEF outside of the HE sector: a third (32%) of applicants reported that they were aware of the TEF at the time of application, while 15% made use of it during decision making. While not all applicants used TEF, or would be expected to, this early evidence suggests that 11% of applicants changed their HE choices due to TEF. Increasing awareness levels, and improving applicants' understanding of what the TEF is designed to convey, will likely serve to increase the value in which the TEF is held, and its subsequent use.

## 2. Background and methodology

### 2a Background

- 2.1 The Government in England introduced the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) to promote teaching excellence across the Higher Education (HE) sector in the UK<sup>1</sup>.
- 2.2 The TEF has four key objectives, to:
- i. Better inform students' choices about what and where to study.
  - ii. Raise esteem for teaching.
  - iii. Recognise and reward excellent teaching.
  - iv. Better meet the needs of employers, business, industry and the professions.
- 2.3 The TEF is designed to provide clear information to students about where the best Higher Education provision and outcomes can be found and drive up the standard of teaching across the sector.
- 2.4 The TEF is conducted independently from providers of HE in an award-based system. Participating providers receive a Gold, Silver or Bronze award indicative of their performance against three key areas of teaching and learning quality: Teaching Quality (TQ), Learning Environment (LE) and Student Outcomes and Learning Gain (SO). Providers are judged against a series of 'expectations' related to these areas.
- 2.5 Award levels are determined by an independent panel of experts in teaching and learning as well as student representatives, and employment and widening participation experts. The panel make a best-fit judgement of performance across these aspects of quality against the three rating descriptors (Gold, Silver or Bronze) to determine the provider's final award.
- 2.6 Assessment is made on a holistic academic judgement, based on core and split metrics, additional evidence in the provider submission and supplementary metrics. Providers that are eligible to take part in the TEF, but do not yet have one year of reportable, benchmarked data for each of the six core metrics to be fully assessed, receive a Provisional TEF award.
- 2.7 The ultimate award a provider receives denotes absolute performance as well as benchmarked performance, according to the profile of students that attend the provider and the subjects the provider offers. TEF awards, therefore, reflect the

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<sup>1</sup> The specification for how the TEF functions can be found here:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-excellence-and-student-outcomes-framework-specification>

excellence of a provider's teaching, learning environment and student outcomes relative to the composition of their student population.

- 2.8 Currently, participation in the TEF is voluntary for all providers of HE, but will become mandatory in 2019-20 for English providers with more than 500 registered students. In June 2017 (TEF Year 2), 295 participating HE providers received the first TEF awards. This figure remained stable in next round of awards, in June 2018 (Year 3); 296 providers currently hold an award, with the majority (183) maintaining the award they secured in 2017.
- 2.9 The impact of TEF is likely to take many years before it is fully felt, both as it moves from provider to subject level but also because it should help drive a cultural change amongst students and providers. This research was designed to detect any early signs that this change may be occurring; to identify any areas for improvement as TEF implementation continues, and to provide an independent piece of research to feed into the independent TEF review in 2019.
- 2.10 Although the TEF is due to move to subject-level (the new TEF exercise currently being piloted is intended to award provider-level and subject-level awards), this research project constitutes an evaluation of *provider-level* TEF. It aims to understand how the TEF is performing against its objectives, with a view to strengthening and improving how the TEF operates as it enters the subject-level phase.
- 2.11 The project was conducted with applicants to HE as well as HE providers, enabling the Department for Education to obtain a comprehensive understanding of how the TEF is working in practice; how it is viewed by key stakeholders; and its impact on the HE sector more broadly.
- 2.12 In particular, the project sought to address the following research questions:

**A) For Providers of HE**

- How has the TEF impacted teaching standards, approaches to recruitment of staff and widening participation strategy within the HE sector?
- What actions are providers undertaking to maintain and improve their TEF rating?
- What do providers perceive as the value of the TEF to the HE sector?
- What is the extent of HE providers' knowledge of the TEF and TEF ratings?
- How has the HE sector engaged with and coordinated the TEF submission?

**B) For Applicants to HE for 2018/19 Entry**

- Do applicants understand the TEF and TEF ratings?

- How, if at all, has the TEF influenced applicant's perception of teaching within the HE sector?
- How, if at all, do applicants use the TEF in their decision making at the point of applying to HE?
- Are the applicants using TEF in their decision making satisfied with their HE choices?

2.13 A Glossary of terms appears at the end of this report.

## **2b Methodology: Providers of Higher Education**

2.14 In order to meet the breadth of objectives and reflect the need to assess the impact of the TEF on the two main stakeholder groups, the study was split into two distinct strands, one for HE providers, and one for applicants to HE. Both strands involved a qualitative and quantitative element, and these are explored in more detail below, starting with providers.

### **Part one: Qualitative interviews with HE providers**

#### **Sampling**

- 2.15 The target sample consisted of all TEF eligible providers of HE in the UK, including those who had not applied for a TEF award in 2016-17 (Year 2). This approach was utilised to ascertain differences between participating and non-participating providers in relation to knowledge, perceptions and impact of the TEF.
- 2.16 A stratified sampling technique was employed to gather views from a range of providers, dependent on provider type (HEI, FEC and AP) and TEF award 2017 (Year 2) status (Gold, Silver, Bronze, Provisional and no award). Within these broad categories, the sample was randomised to ensure a mix of providers by size, UCAS tariff, region and international student population.
- 2.17 Respondents consisted of representatives from providers, principally those directly involved in coordinating providers' TEF involvement (referred to as 'TEF Contacts' in this research project) or those who may have contributed, but were further removed from the submission process (referred to as 'Academic Contacts' in this research project). These respondents were the focus of the research project in order to understand the impact of the TEF from the perspective of individuals working very closely to the TEF project, as well as individuals more distant from the TEF, but who might experience the impacts of the TEF more closely.
- 2.18 TEF Contact names and contact details were sourced through the Office for Students (OfS), which has been in communication with these individuals during the

TEF submission process. TEF Contacts had been nominated by the Head of Institution or accountable office to be the first point of contact for the OfS in relation to taking part in the TEF process. Typically, TEF Contacts were Vice Principals or Chancellors in smaller providers and Directors of Higher Education or Learning at larger providers.

- 2.19 Academic Contacts were sourced through the TEF Contacts directly. At the start of fieldwork TEF Contacts were asked to nominate “subject leaders, or heads of faculty/department, i.e. senior teaching staff who might have some familiarity with the TEF”.
- 2.20 In all, 26 interviews were conducted with TEF Contacts from a range of HE providers across the UK, and an additional 19 with Academic Contacts. Academic Contacts were only recruited from providers who had received a full award, as non-participating providers were unlikely to engage their academic staff with the TEF. For the most part, each provider returned one TEF Contact interview, and one Academic Contact interview. The profile of respondents can be found in Table A.1 in Appendix A. Fieldwork occurred between 16th April - 11th June 2018.
- 2.21 With the sampling stratification accounting for both TEF Award and provider type, and a mix achieved by size, UCAS tariff, region and international student population, the achieved sample ensures a suitable level of representation across the HE sector such that the findings can be used with a reasonable degree of confidence.

## Topic Guide

- 2.22 The topic guide was principally designed to determine the perceived impact of participating in the TEF, according to staff at providers of HE. This included exploration of how aware staff were of the TEF submission process and expected outcomes, the use of TEF data and the changes involvement in the TEF had prompted within the provider. The guide also aimed to differentiate between the impact of the submission process, the impact of the award itself and the impact of the TEF at a sector level. It was also used to ascertain how providers stay informed about the TEF, how providers communicate their award to staff and applicants and any actions they have taken to improve their TEF award.
- 2.23 There were two versions of the topic guide, designed to explore these themes from the perspective of participating and non-participating providers.

## **Part two: Quantitative survey with HE providers**

### **Sampling**

- 2.24 Using the sample obtained from the qualitative study – supplemented by a sample building exercise whereby all TEF Contacts were contacted and asked to submit contact details of relevant Academic Contacts at the provider– a total of 854 TEF and Academic Contacts were invited to take part in an online survey to quantify some of the themes explored in the qualitative exercise. This was therefore an attempted census of the eligible HE provider population.
- 2.25 The survey was administered online, with an additional telephone exercise to encourage responses. At the end of the survey, TEF Contacts who had not previously provided contact details for Academic Contacts were invited to disseminate an open link to relevant individuals at their provider.
- 2.26 In all, 311 responses were obtained from 157 TEF Contacts and 154 Academic Contacts (some Academic Contacts belonged to the same provider). This translated to 195 unique providers represented in the sample, 41% of the provider population. With a healthy response rate, the achieved sample broadly mirrors the HE provider population. It should be noted however that FECs are slightly under-represented, with HEIs over-represented, while those with no TEF award are also under-represented. The profile of survey respondents can be found in Table A.2 in Appendix A. Fieldwork occurred between 18th July and 22nd August 2018.

### **Questionnaire**

- 2.27 The survey covered the following topic areas: TEF objectives; impact of the TEF on the provider; coordination of the TEF submission; awareness of the TEF; and utilising the TEF award (only TEF Contacts were shown this final section).
- 2.28 As the qualitative element of the research underpinned the quantitative survey, the findings from the interviews were used to inform the design of the survey. For instance, a total of 36 potential institutional impacts were identified through the qualitative interviews (these are listed in Section 3c), and all respondents were asked to consider the extent to which they had seen these changes in their provider, and whether they felt these changes were a direct result of the implementation of the TEF.

### **Data preparation**

- 2.29 As a first step, it was important to treat providers with more than one response from an Academic Contact. In the weighting schema therefore, multiple responses from



Academic Contacts at one HE provider were consolidated to account for 'one' HE provider Academic Contact response.

- 2.30 The report splits out findings between TEF Contacts and Academic Contacts. Therefore the TEF Contacts data were weighted separately to the Academic Contact data.
- 2.31 In the application of weights it was important to ensure the sample was representative of the HE provider population. As Table A.1 in Appendix A shows, survey responses under-represented FECs, and those with no TEF award. As a result, the data were weighted by TEF award. As FECs were less likely to hold a TEF award than HEIs, weighting by award also ensured the sample was more representative by provider type.
- 2.32 A final consideration related to analysis by subgroup. In order to maximise the sample size, it was determined that the TEF Contact and Academic Contact responses should be combined, and consolidated, such that each unique provider had a 'starting' weight of '1' (therefore the total weighted sample added to 195). Once this step had been taken, the data were weighted by TEF award, as discussed above.

## **2c Methodology: Applicants to Higher Education**

- 2.33 This section outlines the methodology used for the applicant strand of the research study.

### **Part one: Quantitative survey with applicants to HE**

#### **Sampling**

- 2.34 The sample consisted of individuals applying to an HE undergraduate course in the UK, for the 2018/19 or 2019/20 academic year (98% were applying to start in the 2018/19 academic year).
- 2.35 The vast majority of applicants (89%) were sourced from an independent panel provider, Youthsight. These were supplemented with applicants who had applied to FECs and APs, taken directly from the UCAS database.
- 2.36 Sample targets were set to ensure robust subgroup analysis was possible by gender, age, domicile and provider type. A total of 2,838 responses were achieved. Table A.3 in Appendix A shows responses by key demographics.
- 2.37 All applicants were invited to participate in the online survey by email. Fieldwork occurred between 23<sup>rd</sup> May and 7<sup>th</sup> June 2018.

## Questionnaire

- 2.38 In this survey, applicants were first asked to confirm the choices that they had made in their UCAS application, with applicants able to provide up to five choices of Higher Education provider. They were also asked to provide the name of their preferred undergraduate course and the type of qualification that they were planning on undertaking.
- 2.39 Applicants were subsequently asked about their decision making process when deciding where to apply for Higher Education study. This included what information items they used, or were important to them when considering where to apply, and their satisfaction with the information they used and confidence in the choices they made.
- 2.40 Everything else in the survey focussed specifically on the TEF. Initially the survey captured levels of awareness and self-reported knowledge. There then followed a series of true or false statements about the TEF in order to test applicant knowledge of the TEF, its aims and its component metrics. Finally the survey explored whether those aware of the TEF had used it in the decision-making process, and if so how.

## Data preparation

- 2.41 The data were weighted to the March 2018 applicant population (i.e. all those who had submitted an undergraduate application by March 2018), by age and gender.

## Part two: Qualitative interviews with applicants to HE

### Sampling

- 2.42 For the follow-up qualitative interviews of the applicant research, applicants that had completed the quantitative survey were invited to take part.
- 2.43 A set of criteria was developed to identify groups of applicants that may have been affected by the TEF in different ways during their decision making. Applicants were invited to participate if, from the survey, they met one of the following criteria:
- Rated teaching quality highly, used the TEF in their decision making, but considered the TEF a relatively unimportant factor (10 interviews);
  - Rated teaching quality highly, were aware of the TEF, but did not use it in their decision making (9 interviews);
  - Used the TEF a lot and thought that it was an important part of their decision making (9 interviews); and
  - Found out about the TEF after submitting their application (2 interviews).

- 2.44 Applicants were also selected to ensure a spread by demographic and institutional profile, as shown in Appendix A.
- 2.45 A total of 30 interviews was achieved, with fieldwork occurring between 26<sup>th</sup> July - 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2018.

## Topic Guide

- 2.46 The qualitative element of the applicant strand was designed to unpick areas of interest from the quantitative study, elaborating on the decision-making process of applicants belonging to the groups noted above. Of particular interest was the interplay between use of the TEF as an information source, and other sources of information relating to the criteria that make up the TEF. Specifically, the qualitative interviews aimed to respond to the following questions:
- 1) Why does the survey reveal teaching quality is the highest rated factor among applicants, and yet TEF is the lowest?
  - 2) Why did applicants say who say teaching quality information was the most useful and important factor not use the TEF, despite being aware of it?
  - 3) Why do applicants with a higher level of use of the TEF find TEF more useful than the mainstream?
  - 4) What influences satisfaction in information sources, and confidence in HE provider choice?
  - 5) How does the level of the TEF award influence perception of teaching quality and overall perception of HE provider?
- 2.47 In relation to the TEF itself, the guide therefore explored how applicants made use of the TEF during the decision-making process, how it compared to other sources of information, and its benefits and limitations. The guide also sought to develop a more rounded understanding of applicants' familiarity with the TEF, exploring their impression of how TEF awards are awarded, and how their perception of an HE provider changes depending on the TEF award they received.
- 2.48 More generally, the guide also covered applicants' use of information sources relating to teaching quality, learning environment and student outcomes during the decision-making process. Those who reported that such factors were important to them, but who made little use of the TEF were asked why they had not made use of the TEF to support their decision making. Finally, the guide captured applicants' overall satisfaction with the process of applying to an HE provider.

## 2d Report structure and conventions

- 2.49 The key findings are covered within two broad chapters. Chapter 3 covers the institutional impact the TEF has had so far, providers' perception of the TEF, and awareness and engagement across the provider. Chapter 4 explores applicants' awareness and knowledge of the TEF, and the impact this had in their decision-making. The final chapter (Conclusions) revisits the key findings from the different strands of the research, exploring these against the four TEF objectives.
- 2.50 Throughout the report, unweighted base figures are shown on tables and charts to give an indication of the statistical reliability of the figures.
- 2.51 As a general convention throughout the report, figures with a base size of fewer than 25 are not reported, although on charts and tables these figures have been retained for indicative purposes.
- 2.52 All differences noted are significant to a 95 per cent confidence level unless otherwise stated. Unless otherwise stated, z-tests were used to determine the level of significance between figures.
- 2.53 In some cases, figures in tables and charts may not always add to 100 percent due to rounding (i.e. 99 percent or 101 percent).
- 2.54 As mentioned in the 'Data Preparation' section above, the provider survey responses are commonly split in three ways. The core findings are based on TEF Contact responses (157), which are then compared to Academic Contact responses (154). Subgroup analyses – illustrating differences by TEF award or provider type, for example – are based on a combination of both (311, weighted to the 195 unique providers).

## **3. Provider views of the TEF**

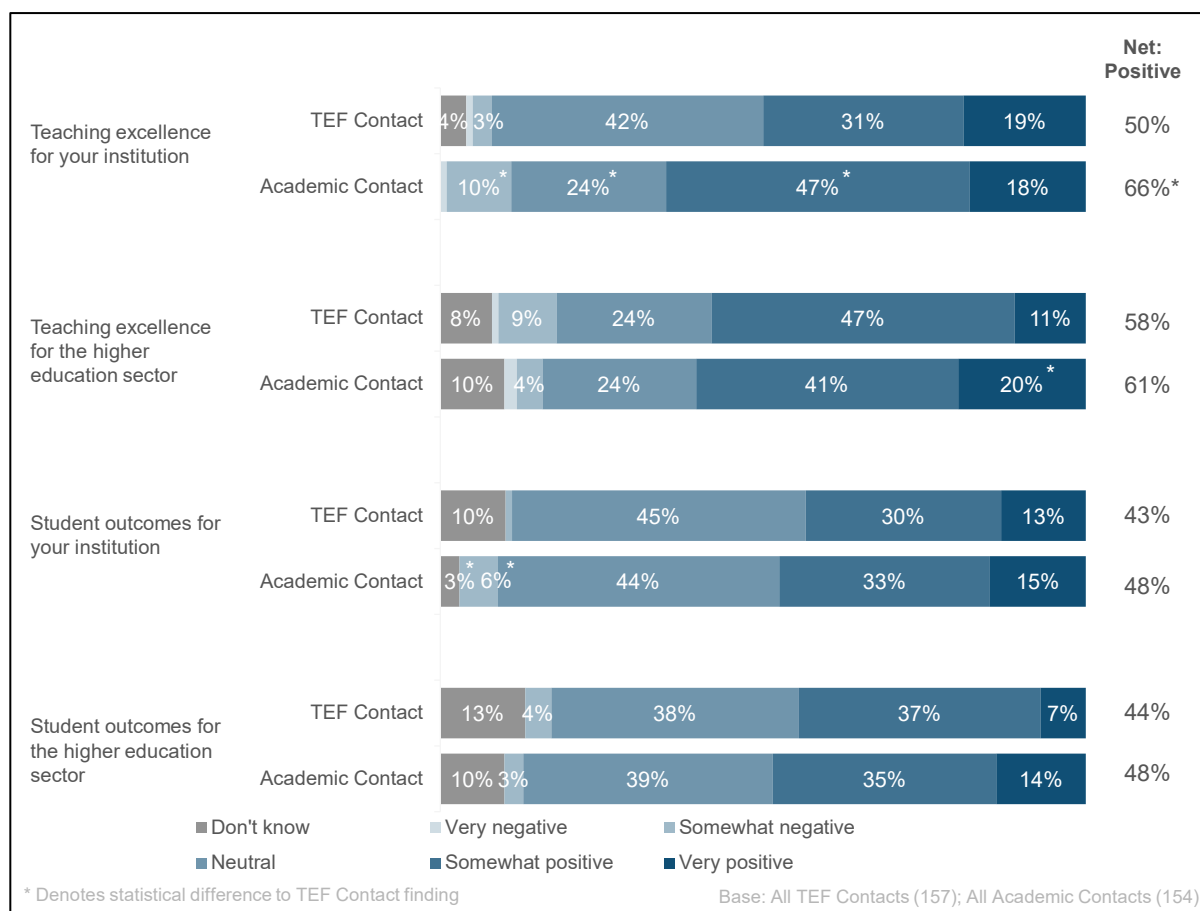
### **3a Introduction**

- 3.1 This chapter explores the perception of representatives of HE providers. It incorporates interviews with 26 TEF Contacts (staff representatives who coordinate the institutional involvement in the TEF) and 19 Academic Contacts (senior teaching staff who are familiar with the TEF, less directly involved, but are likely to experience the impacts of the TEF more closely), as well as an online survey with 311 TEF or Academic Contacts, representing 195 unique HE providers.
- 3.2 The themes that emerged from the qualitative interviews were used to inform the development of the online survey. Fieldwork occurred across Spring and Summer 2018.
- 3.3 Contacts were sourced from a range of HE providers (HEIs, FECs and APs); the majority of these HE providers had received a TEF award in 2017 (Year 2): 74% of TEF Contacts and 88% of Academic Contacts in the survey belonged to a provider that had received a TEF award in 2017.
- 3.4 The chapter covers the institutional changes that the TEF has contributed to so far, the value HE providers ascribe to the TEF, their view on its design, the TEF submission process, institutional awareness and engagement with the TEF, and the ways in which HE providers promote their TEF award.
- 3.5 Quantitative survey findings lead with the TEF Contacts participating in the survey, as well as presenting Academic Contact views separately. This enables a clear distinction to be made between the impact of the TEF from the perspective of individuals working very closely to the TEF project, as well as individuals more distant from the TEF, but who might experience the impacts of the TEF more closely. Provider-based subgroup differences are based on all 311 responses (weighted to 195 providers) to allow for larger sample sizes.
- 3.6 A Glossary of terms appears at the end of this report.

### **3b Broad impacts of the TEF**

- 3.7 This section explores the extent to which the TEF is contributing to broad institutional change. The following section (3c) then explores specific impacts resulting from the TEF.
- 3.8 TEF Contacts and Academic Contacts were asked what impact the TEF is having on teaching excellence and student outcomes. These results are presented in Figure 3.1 below:

**Figure 3.1 Impact of TEF on teaching excellence and student outcomes**



## Teaching Excellence

3.9 TEF Contacts were broadly split into two camps; those who reported that the TEF is having a positive impact on teaching excellence in their provider, and those who reported that the impact has been 'neutral'. Specifically, 50% of TEF Contacts reported the TEF is having a positive impact on teaching excellence in their provider (19% stated it as having a very positive impact). A neutral impact on their provider was reported by 42% of TEF Contacts and 4% reported a negative impact. It is worth noting that Academic Contacts were more likely to consider the TEF was having both a positive (66%) and negative (10%) impact on their provider; far fewer (24%) felt the impact was neutral. Gold providers were also more likely to report positive impacts for their institution (72% compared with 61% Silver, 59% Bronze, 55% Provisional and 45% No award).

3.10 Views on the impact of the TEF on teaching excellence were somewhat more polarised when considering the wider Higher Education sector as opposed to the Contact's individual provider. A greater proportion of TEF Contacts reported that the TEF was having a positive impact on teaching excellence in the Higher Education sector (58%, with 11% very positive). In contrast, 10% felt that the TEF was having a negative impact on the sector. There was little difference in perception among

Academic Contacts, although the proportion reporting a very positive impact on the sector (20%) was higher than TEF Contacts (11%). Those perceiving a more negative impact across the sector were more likely to belong to HEIs (14%), and providers with a higher than average entry tariff (22%). There was no difference by TEF award.

## **Student Outcomes**

- 3.11 Patterns emerging in relation to teaching excellence were similar to those found regarding the impact of the TEF on student outcomes: 43% of TEF contacts reported the TEF was having a positive impact on student outcomes in their provider (13% very positive), and a similar proportion (45%) reported a neutral impact. Only 1% reported a negative impact. A similar proportion (44%) said that TEF is having a positive impact on student outcomes for the sector more widely (15% very positive), with 7% finding it to be a very positive impact. Only 4% reported a negative impact.
- 3.12 Academic Contacts results were similar to TEF Contacts, though slightly more reported a negative impact on student outcomes within their provider (6% compared with 1% of TEF Contacts). There was no difference in perceptions on the wider sector.
- 3.13 By provider type, there was a considerable difference in terms of the average entry tariff: those at High tariff providers were far more likely to consider that the TEF was having a neutral impact on student outcomes in their provider than a positive one (60% compared with 28%). In contrast those at medium and low tariff providers were more likely to report positive impacts (55% and 58% respectively) over neutral (35% and 39%). This difference was not reflected when asked to consider the impact of TEF on student outcomes across the wider sector. There was little difference by TEF award, although HE providers with no award were less likely to report a positive impact on student outcomes at their institution (34%).

## **3c Specific impacts of the TEF**

- 3.14 In addition to investigating the impact of the TEF on the key TEF aspects of teaching excellence and student outcomes, the research also focused on thirty-six specific impacts that occurred as a result of the TEF. These were developed after being identified in the qualitative phase as areas of impacts already felt by providers. The impacts can be categorised into six broad areas, as bulleted below; Table 3.1 presents all 36 impacts.

- Student Experience
- Student Employability

- Teaching Staff
- Teaching Practices
- Prospective Students
- Wider impacts

**Table 3.1 Specific TEF impacts explored**

<b>Student Experience</b>	<b>Student Employability</b>	<b>Teaching Staff</b>
Enhanced interventions for improving student retention	More difficult for students to secure employment	Reduction of research only contracts
Changes in course content, delivery or assessment	More difficulty for the institution attracting local employer partners	Greater difficulty in recruiting teaching staff
An increased emphasis on closing the attainment gap	Enhanced/additional employer partnerships	Increased teaching staff resignations
An increased emphasis on teaching quality/learning environment	Developments in careers services to aid student employability outcomes	Increased use of experts to raise sector knowledge
More focus on improving experience for cohorts with negative flags	Communication with students earlier about career aspirations	Increased emphasis in recruiting staff with appropriate skills
An increased emphasis on student outcomes	Increased student exposure to opportunities for employability	Increased demands on support to students
<b>Teaching Practices</b>	<b>Prospective Students</b>	<b>Wider impacts</b>
Improved teaching staff morale	A decline in institutional reputation amongst potential applicants	Decreased reputation within HE sector
Decreased teaching staff morale	Different types of applicants interested in or applying	Closure of courses/depts due to TEF-related metrics
Increased sharing practice across/within departments	Institution provided more support to applicants in course selection	Increased competition between departments
Enhanced staff training/support for delivery of student experiences	Improved institutional reputation among potential applicants	Less co-operation/more competition with peer institutions
Developing initiatives to improve teaching standards		Deprioritisation of research activities due to increased admin costs/burdens on time
Increase teaching qualification training/schemes		Increased reputation within the HE sector
		Deprioritisation of teaching activities due to increased admin costs/burdens on time
		Greater investment in monitoring of TEF-related metrics

3.15 Respondents were asked two questions relating to each specific impact. They were only asked the second question if they had reported any change in the first question:



- Has this change taken place within your institution in the last two years?<sup>2</sup>
- To what extent has the change been a result of the TEF?<sup>3</sup>

- 3.16 This allowed analysis of where the largest changes had taken place as a result of the TEF. Figure 3.2 is a visual representation of these responses for TEF Contacts, on the two dimensions: amount of change in last 2 years and extent of change occurring as a result of TEF influence. These are categorised into high and low change and high and low TEF influence, being respectively above and below the mean score on each dimension.<sup>4</sup> Specific impacts are represented by coloured dots in the figure, with colours equating to the broader categories identified in the key along the top. (Full results are shown in Table B.1 in Appendix B.)
- 3.17 The figure reveals where TEF contacts reported that the TEF has had the most influence on change i.e. impact items where there has been higher amounts of change and higher amounts of this change is due (in part) to TEF. The top 6 changes resulting from the TEF are identified below the figure.
- 3.18 Note that Academic Contacts have reported some significantly different rates of TEF impacts for some impact categories and impact items. These are drawn out in Section 3c, with all figures displayed in Table B.2 in Appendix B.
- 3.19 It should be borne in mind that where change has occurred in the last two years, the TEF is usually considered to have partially contributed to this change, rather than 'mostly' or 'wholly' contributing to this change (see tables in Appendix B). This is to be expected given the variety of factors that are likely to contribute to institutional change.

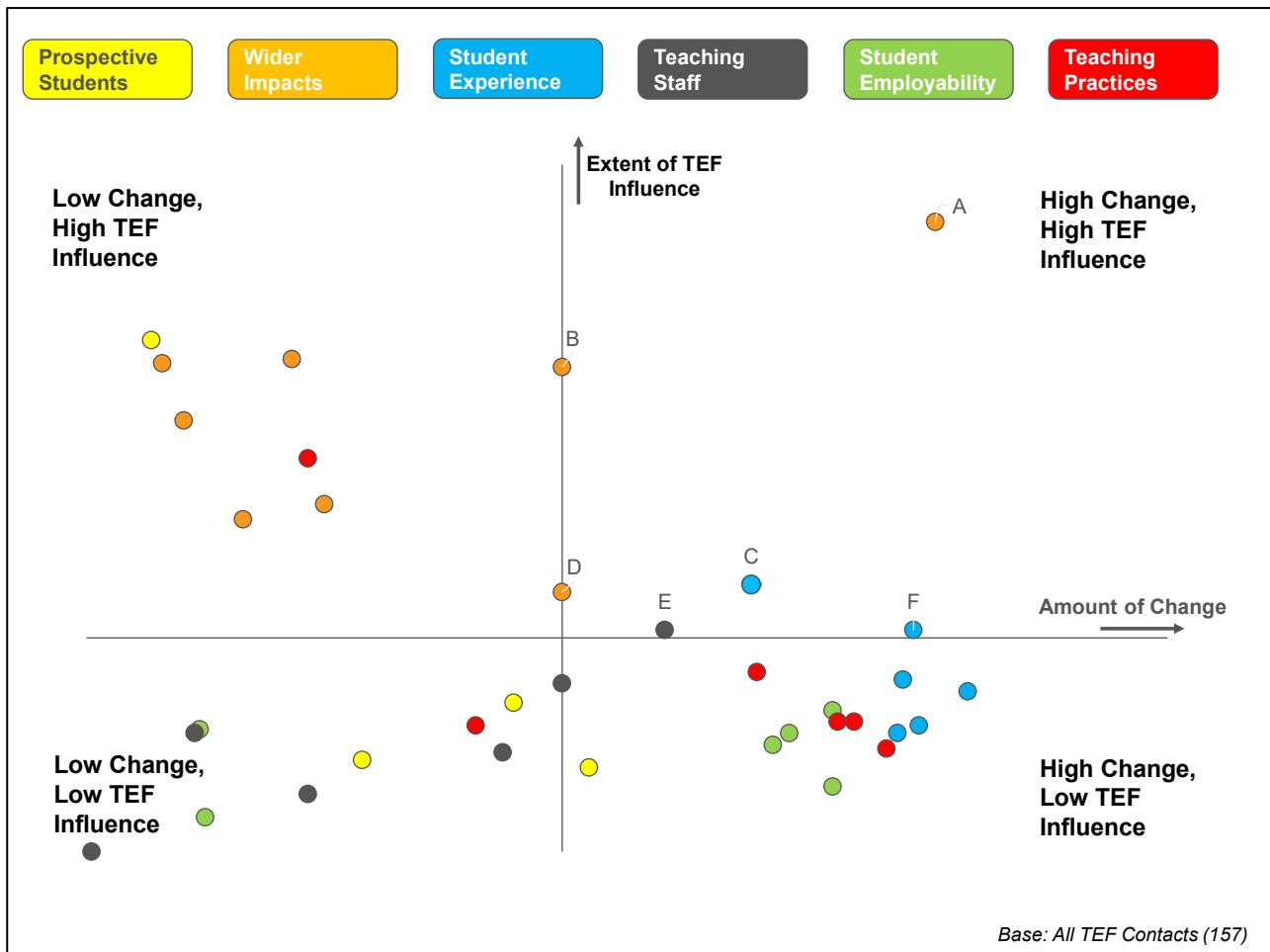
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<sup>2</sup> With response options of: No change / No change yet but some anticipated / Yes - a small change / Yes – a moderate change / Yes – a large change / Don't know.

<sup>3</sup> With response options of: Wholly as a result of TEF / Mostly as a result of TEF / Partially as a result of TEF / Will happen anyway / Don't know.

<sup>4</sup> Each response option for these two questions was assigned a value. For amount of change, values of 0 were assigned to 'No change' and 'No change yet but some anticipated'. Then a value of 1 was assigned to 'Yes - a small change', 2 to 'Yes – a moderate change' and 3 to 'Yes – a large change'. For extent of TEF influence, a value of 0 was assigned to 'Will happen anyway'. Then a value of 1 was assigned to 'Partially as a result of TEF', 2 to 'Mostly as a result of TEF' and 3 to 'Wholly as a result of TEF'. For each measure, the mean average was calculated and then plotted on the graph in Figure 3.2. Don't know answers were excluded from the calculations. The axes represent the mean of means for amount of change and extent of TEF influence.

Figure 3.2 Amount of change and extent of TEF influence



Key: A – Greater investment in monitoring TEF-related metrics

B – Deprioritisation of teaching activities due to more admin cost/burdens on time

C – More focus on improving experience for cohorts with negative flags

D – Increased reputation within the Higher Education sector

E – Increased demands on support to students

F – Increased emphasis on student outcomes

3.20 As Figure 3.2 shows, there are some clear patterns by broad category:

- **Student Experience** – TEF Contacts reported a high amount of change in the last two years for all items, relative to other categories, and a moderate (average) amount of this was considered to be as a result of the TEF.
- **Student Employability** – For four items, this followed a similar pattern to student experience, although generally both the amount of change and extent of TEF influence reported was slightly lower. Two items showed low change and low TEF impact.
- **Teaching Staff** – With one exception, there had been low change in the last two years, and TEF influence was also primarily low.

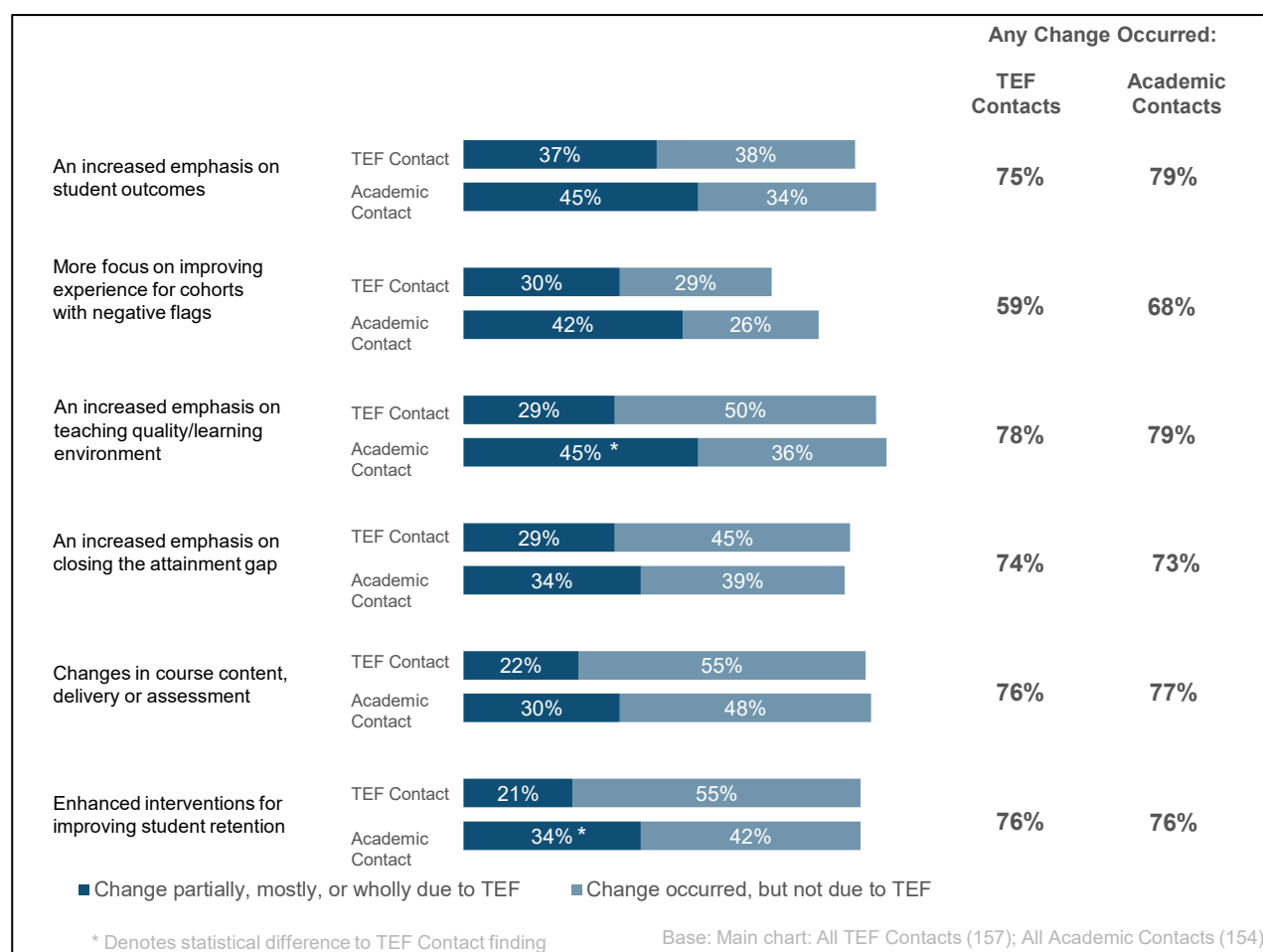
- **Teaching Practices** – Similar to student employability, with a higher level of change reported overall, and mostly a low amount of this was attributed to the TEF.
- **Prospective Students** – All four items showed low or average levels of change in the last two years; with one exception TEF influence was also low.
- **Wider impacts** – The extent of change in this category varied from very high to low, and in all instances where change had occurred, a high amount was attributed to the TEF, relative to other categories.

- 3.21 The focus for the rest of this section is on any change that had occurred in the preceding years, and the proportion attributing this change – at least in part – to the TEF, split by each impact category. In this section, significant differences between TEF Contacts and Academic Contacts on each Figure are shown where these occur on a base of those citing any change, rather than all, to highlight where Academic Contacts consider the influence of the TEF to be different to TEF Contacts, irrespective of the degree of change. This holds importance, as Academic Contacts might experience the impacts of the TEF more closely than TEF Contacts.
- 3.22 Differences by provider type, average tariff, and TEF award are also considered. It is worth highlighting that, in contrast to HEIs and FECs, nearly all APs in the survey either had a Provisional award (46%) or no award at all (49%). Half (52%) of FECs also had no award, although most of the remainder had either a Gold, Silver or Bronze award. By tariff, those HEIs with a low average tariff predominantly held Silver (47%) or Bronze (41%) awards, while high and medium tariff HEIs typically had a roughly equal distribution of Gold, Silver and no award (few held a Bronze or Provisional award).

## Student Experience

- 3.23 As shown in Figure 3.2, TEF Contacts reported a high amount of change in the last two years in relation to student experience, relative to other categories. A moderate (average) amount of this change was considered to be as a result – at least in part – of the TEF.
- 3.24 The following two impacts relating to student experience were among the top six impacts showing the highest amount of change **and** the highest extent of TEF influence, as reported by TEF Contacts, relative to other impacts considered in the research:
- Increased emphasis on student outcomes: TEF influenced a change at 37% of providers.
  - More focus on improving experience for cohorts with negative flags, where TEF contributed to a change in 30% of providers.
- 3.25 Figure 3.3 presents all six impacts relating to student experience.

**Figure 3.3 Impact of TEF on Student Experience**



3.26 As Figure 3.3 illustrates, the TEF had the most considerable level of impact in relation to increasing the emphasis on student outcomes with 75% of TEF Contacts reporting change in this item, and 37% of all TEF Contacts reporting change that was at least partially as result of the TEF (with 5% reporting this change occurred ‘mostly’ as a result of the TEF). Bronze providers in particular were far more likely to report TEF impact here; indeed 71% reported at least partial TEF impact, with a total of 84% reporting any change, illustrating that most Bronze providers that had seen an increased emphasis on student outcomes attributed this – at least in part – to the TEF. Low tariff providers (59%) and HEIs (46%) were also more likely to report that TEF was responsible for an increased emphasis on student outcomes.

3.27 Three in ten (30%) TEF Contacts reported that they had applied more focus to improving experiences for cohorts with negative flags due to the TEF (with 5% stating this to have occurred ‘mostly’ as a result of the TEF); a further 12% said that while their provider had not done so yet, they thought they would do so in future. Once more, Bronze providers were more likely to report TEF impacts here (51%; a further 24% of Bronze providers made changes but not due the TEF).

3.28 A similar proportion as above reported that the TEF contributed to an increased emphasis on teaching quality and the learning environment (29%), and on closing

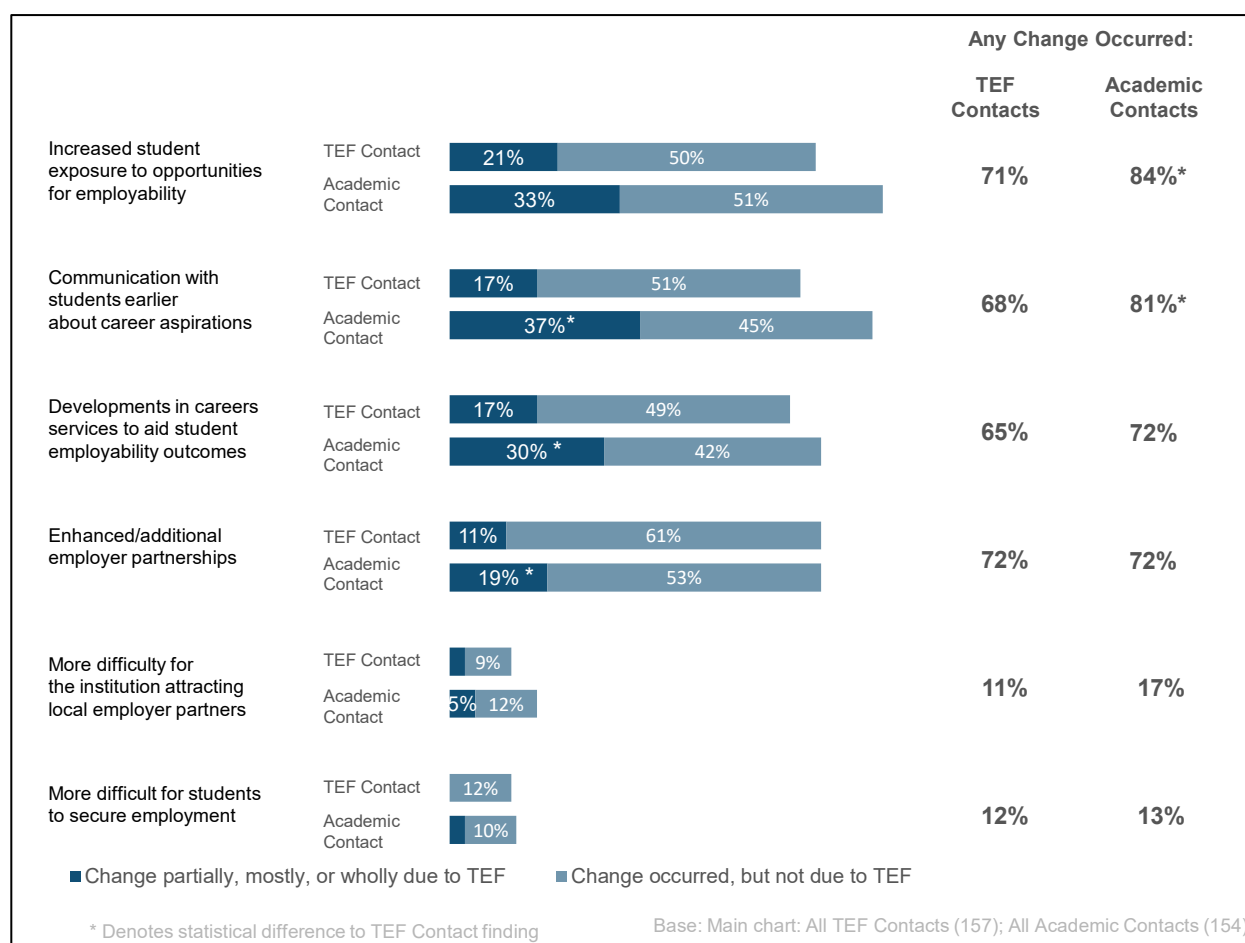
the attainment gap (29%). Whilst Academic Contacts reported a similar amount of overall change in the teaching quality and learning environment to TEF Contacts (79%, 78%), Academic Contacts were far more likely to consider that the TEF contributed to the increased emphasis on teaching quality (45%).

- 3.29 A slightly lower proportion of TEF Contacts reported enhanced interventions for improving student retention as a result of the TEF (21%, rising to 34% among Academic Contacts). Around half (51%) of Bronze providers reported change here as a result of the TEF (with a further 37% of Bronze providers reporting changes not due the TEF).
- 3.30 A similar proportion of TEF Contacts (22%) reported changes in course content, delivery or assessment as a result of the TEF.

## **Student Employability**

- 3.31 As shown in Figure 3.2, TEF Contacts reported a relatively high level of change in student employability over the last two years, although the extent that the TEF was considered to have contributed to this change was lower than average.
- 3.32 There are therefore no top 6 impact items in this impact category. The highest impact item in this category that TEF had contributed to was an increase in student exposure to employability opportunities, reported by 21% of TEF contacts.
- 3.33 Figure 3.4 presents all six impacts relating to student employability.

**Figure 3.4 Impact of TEF on Student Employability**



3.34 The TEF most commonly contributed to an increase in student exposure to employability opportunities (21%). A similar proportion of TEF Contacts also reported that the TEF led to earlier communication with students about career aspirations (17%), and led to development in careers services (17%). As stated above, across both these impacts, Academic Contacts were more likely to suggest that the change had occurred as a result of the TEF (37% and 30% respectively).

3.35 A much lower proportion (11%) of TEF Contacts reported that the TEF had contributed to enhanced employer partnerships in the last two years, with a further 61% reporting change not as a result of the TEF. Academic Contacts were slightly more likely more likely to attribute change in employer partnerships to the TEF (19% with a further 53% reporting change not due to the TEF).

3.36 Relatively few TEF contacts reported the TEF as being responsible for the negative impacts within this category: 3% of TEF Contacts reported the TEF contributed to greater difficulty attracting local employer partners (with a further 9% reporting change not due to the TEF), and less than 1% reported it contributing to greater difficulty for students to secure employment (with a further 12% reporting change not due to the TEF). Those reporting negative impacts were more likely to be providers with a Bronze or no award, with 6% of Bronze providers reporting the TEF

had made it more difficult for students to secure employment (a further 10% reported change not due to the TEF), while 8% with no award reported that the TEF had made it more difficult for them to attract local employer partners (a further 9% reported change not due to the TEF).

- 3.37 There was little difference by provider type, but larger providers were more likely to report that the TEF had led to developments in the careers services (34% compared with 19% each in medium and small providers).

## Teaching Staff

- 3.38 As shown in Figure 3.2, with one exception, there has been relatively little change in teaching staff over the last two years, and – where change had occurred – the level of TEF influence has also been relatively low.

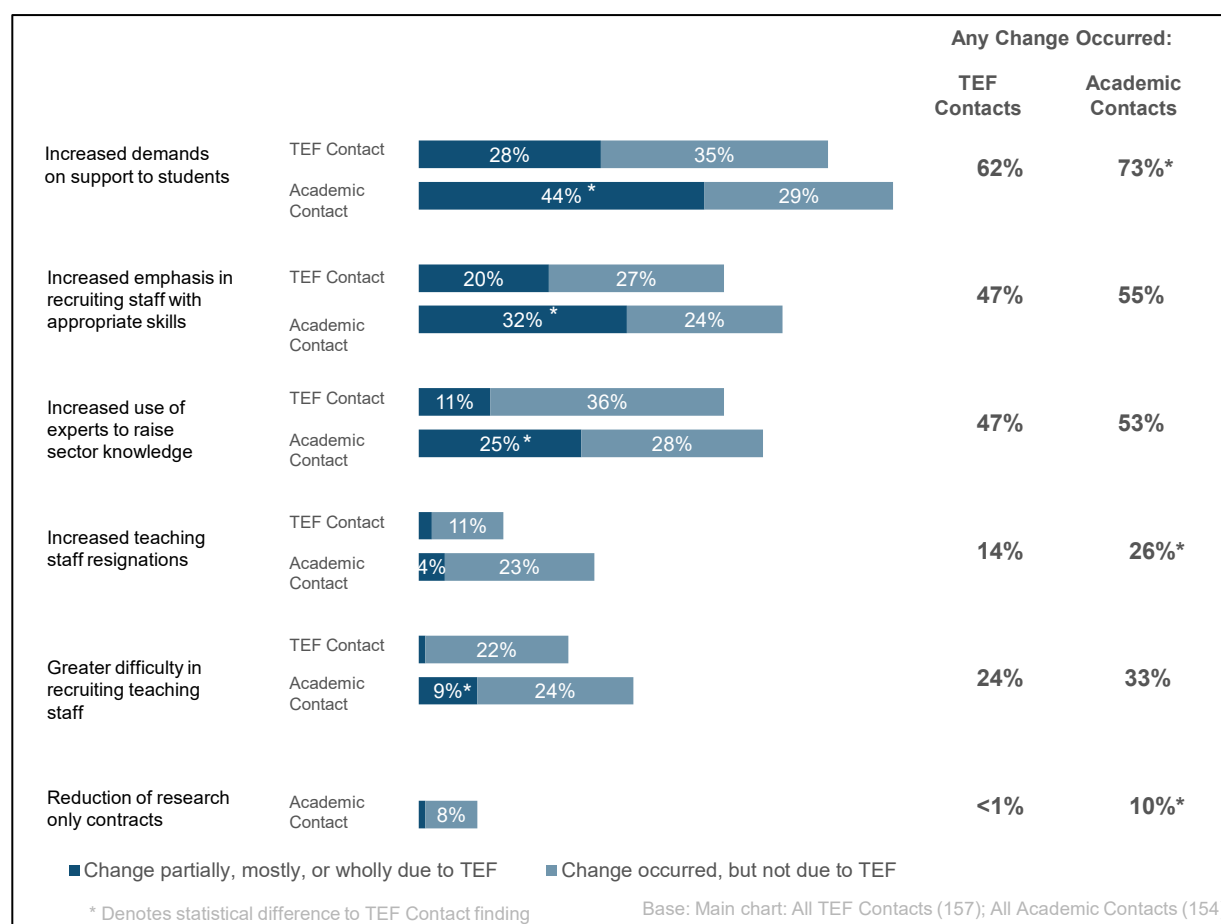
- 3.39 One impact in this category was however among the six impacts showing the highest amount of change **and** the highest extent of TEF influence, as reported by TEF Contacts, relative to other impacts considered in the research, namely an increased demand on support to students<sup>5</sup> (44% of TEF Contacts reported that the TEF contributed to change).

- 3.40 Figure 3.5 presents all six impacts relating to teaching staff.

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<sup>5</sup> The survey did not ask respondents to state what the 'support to students' was,

**Figure 3.5 Impact of TEF on Teaching Staff**



3.41 The most commonly recognised change – increased demands on support to students – was also the change that was seen to be most influenced by the TEF with 28% of all TEF Contacts noting the TEF’s impact here (rising to 44% among Academic Contacts). A handful of TEF and Academic Contacts in the qualitative interviews felt a greater emphasis had been put on teaching staff to be aware of needing to meet the learning needs of all students within the cohort. They felt this had been achieved by changing how they deliver their courses to better support students or by developing a student engagement policy and inclusive curriculum project which could be rolled out across the provider.

3.42 There was also evidence of the impacts of TEF on staff recruitment: 20% of TEF Contacts reported an increased emphasis in recruiting staff with appropriate skills<sup>6</sup> as a result of the TEF, while 11% of TEF Contacts reported an increased use of industry experts. Academic Contacts were, again, more likely to note the influence of TEF across both impacts (32% and 25% respectively).

<sup>6</sup> The survey did not ask respondents to state what they considered ‘appropriate skills’ to be.



3.43 The TEF was reported by TEF contacts as contributing to a 2% increase in staff resignations, and 1% greater difficulty in recruiting teaching staff (rising to 9% among Academic Contacts).

3.44 There was little difference across all impacts by provider type, or TEF award.

## Teaching Practices

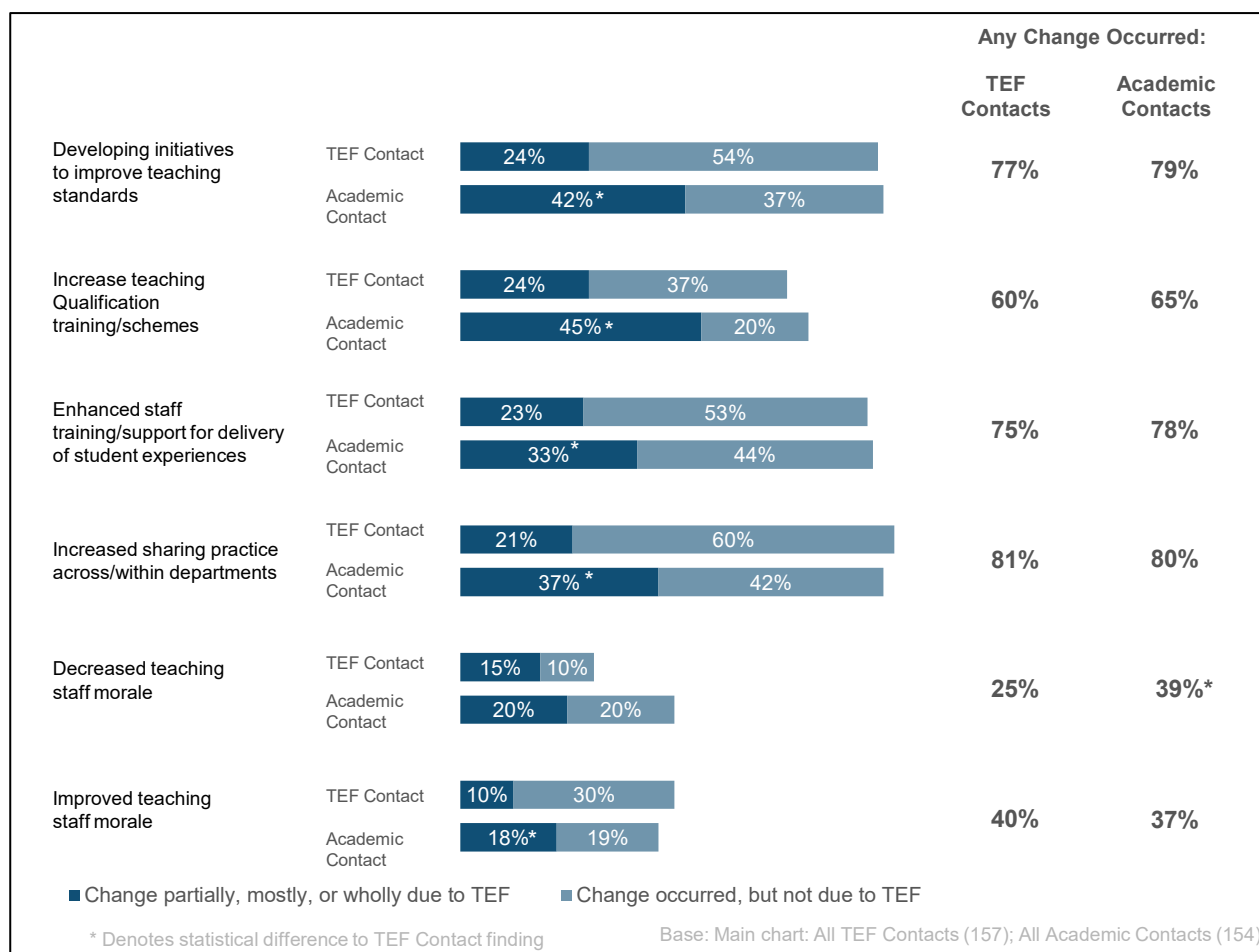
3.45 Changes to teaching practices were relatively prevalent over the last two years, however, as shown in Figure 3.2, the level of TEF influence reported by TEF Contacts was relatively low. No items in this category were in the top 6 impact items. The highest impact item in this category that TEF had contributed to was development of initiatives to improve teaching standards, reported by 24% of TEF Contacts. The same proportion (24%) of TEF Contacts also reported that TEF had contributed to an increase in teaching qualification schemes.

3.46 There was one low change, high TEF impact item in this category; a decrease in teaching staff morale, which was reported by 25% of TEF Contacts. TEF was considered to have contributed to 15% of this while the other 10% was not due to TEF.

3.47 This impact area is where the most differences between Academic and TEF Contacts was seen: across five of the six teaching practices impacts, Academic Contacts were more likely to cite change as a result of the TEF than TEF Contacts.

3.48 Figure 3.6 presents all six impacts relating to teaching practices.

**Figure 3.6 Impact of TEF on Teaching Practices**



- 3.49 As shown in Figure 3.6, a relatively sizeable proportion of TEF Contacts consistently attributed change in relation to enhanced support mechanisms for teachers to the TEF. Around a quarter of TEF Contacts reported the TEF as contributing to the development of initiatives to improve teaching standards (24%), and to an increase in teaching qualification schemes (24%). Furthermore 23% noted the TEF had led to enhanced staff training/support, and 21% stated that the TEF had influenced the increased sharing of best practice within their provider.
- 3.50 Across all four of these items, Academic Contacts were more likely to highlight the influence of the TEF, reflecting that Academic Contacts may see the impacts of the TEF more closely. This was particularly noticeable in relation to the increase in teaching qualification schemes, with 45% of Academic Contacts reporting this occurred – at least in part – as result of the TEF, when only 65% noted any change at all.
- 3.51 Notably, across all these four changes, Bronze providers were more likely to report that the TEF had contributed to changes in their provider (and generally more likely

to report *any* change had occurred as well<sup>7</sup>). There was little difference by provider type, although APs were much less likely to report that the TEF had resulted in an increase in sharing best practice (14%).

- 3.52 While fewer TEF Contacts noted a decrease (25%) in teaching morale over the last two years than an increase (40%), it is interesting to note that they were more likely to report the TEF as an influence on deteriorating morale (15%, with 5% reporting this as 'mostly' due to the TEF) than improved morale (10%). In contrast, Academic Contacts were just as likely to report that the TEF had contributed to a decrease in morale (20%) as an increase (18%). As one might expect, Gold providers were more likely to report an increase in teaching staff morale due to TEF (29%), while Bronze providers were more likely to report a decreased morale due to TEF (40%).

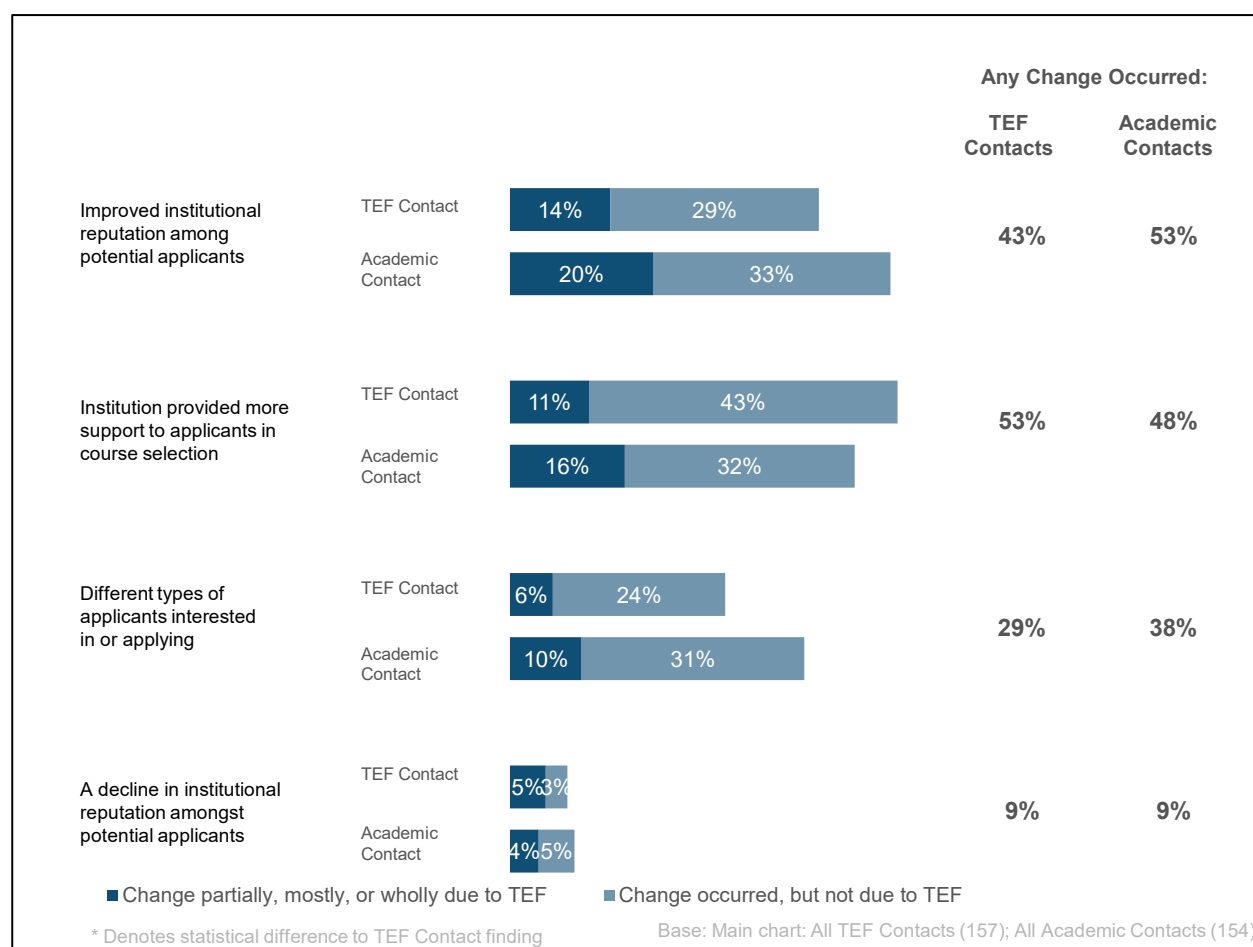
## Prospective Students

- 3.53 As shown in Figure 3.2, TEF Contacts generally reported low levels of change to prospective students, comparable to other categories. With one exception TEF influence was also relatively low. There are therefore no top 6 impact items in this category.
- 3.54 The highest TEF impact item in this category was improved institutional reputation amongst potential applicants reported by 14% of TEF contacts. One impact was however stated to have a low amount of change and high TEF influence: a decline in the reputation of the institution among potential applicants. This was reported by 9% of TEF Contacts. TEF was considered to have contributed to 5% of this while the other 3% was not due to TEF (figures do not add due to rounding error).
- 3.55 Figure 3.7 presents all four impacts relating to prospective students.

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<sup>7</sup> 54% of Bronze providers reported an increase in staff teaching qualifications or schemes as a result (in part) of the TEF (79% of Bronze providers reported *any* change);  
49% reported enhanced training or support for staff due to the TEF (78% reported *any* change);  
47% reported developing initiatives to improve teaching standards due to the TEF (83% reported *any* change);  
39% reported increased sharing of best practices across/within departments due to the TEF (87% reported *any* change).

**Figure 3.7 Impact of TEF on Prospective Students**



3.56 An improved reputation among potential applicants was reported to have been at least partially due to TEF by 14% of TEF Contacts (a further 29% reported change not due to the TEF). In contrast, 5% reported a decline in institutional reputation as a result of the TEF, with only a further 3% reporting such a decline not due to the TEF.

3.57 As one might expect, the specific TEF award received correlated strongly to these figures: among Gold providers, 43% stated that the TEF had, at least in part, impacted on an improved institutional reputation among potential applicants (this contrasted to 23% among Silver providers, 0% Bronze, 16% Provisional and 6% no award). Bronze providers were more likely to report a decline in reputation as a result of the TEF (25% compared with: 0% Gold; 3% Silver; 11% Provisional and 0% no award)<sup>8</sup>. 10% of those that received a Bronze award reported that, although the change had not yet occurred, they anticipate their reputation will improve

<sup>8</sup> It is useful to compare these results to those in the applicant survey, where 82% of applicants to Gold providers reported their impression of the provider improved as a result of the TEF award, while 38% of applicants to Bronze institutions reported that it decreased. See Section 4g for more details.

amongst prospective students due to the TEF (compared to 4% anticipating this overall). Despite the qualitative interviews suggesting otherwise, there was no difference by provider type.

3.58 The TEF was considered to have encouraged different types of individuals to apply to their provider by 6% of TEF Contacts (they reported changes such as a shift in the age range of applicants, an increase in ethnic diversity of applicants, and an increase in part-time students). It is interesting to note that Gold providers were far more likely to report this (22%).

3.59 There were no differences between TEF and Academic Contacts in this impact category.

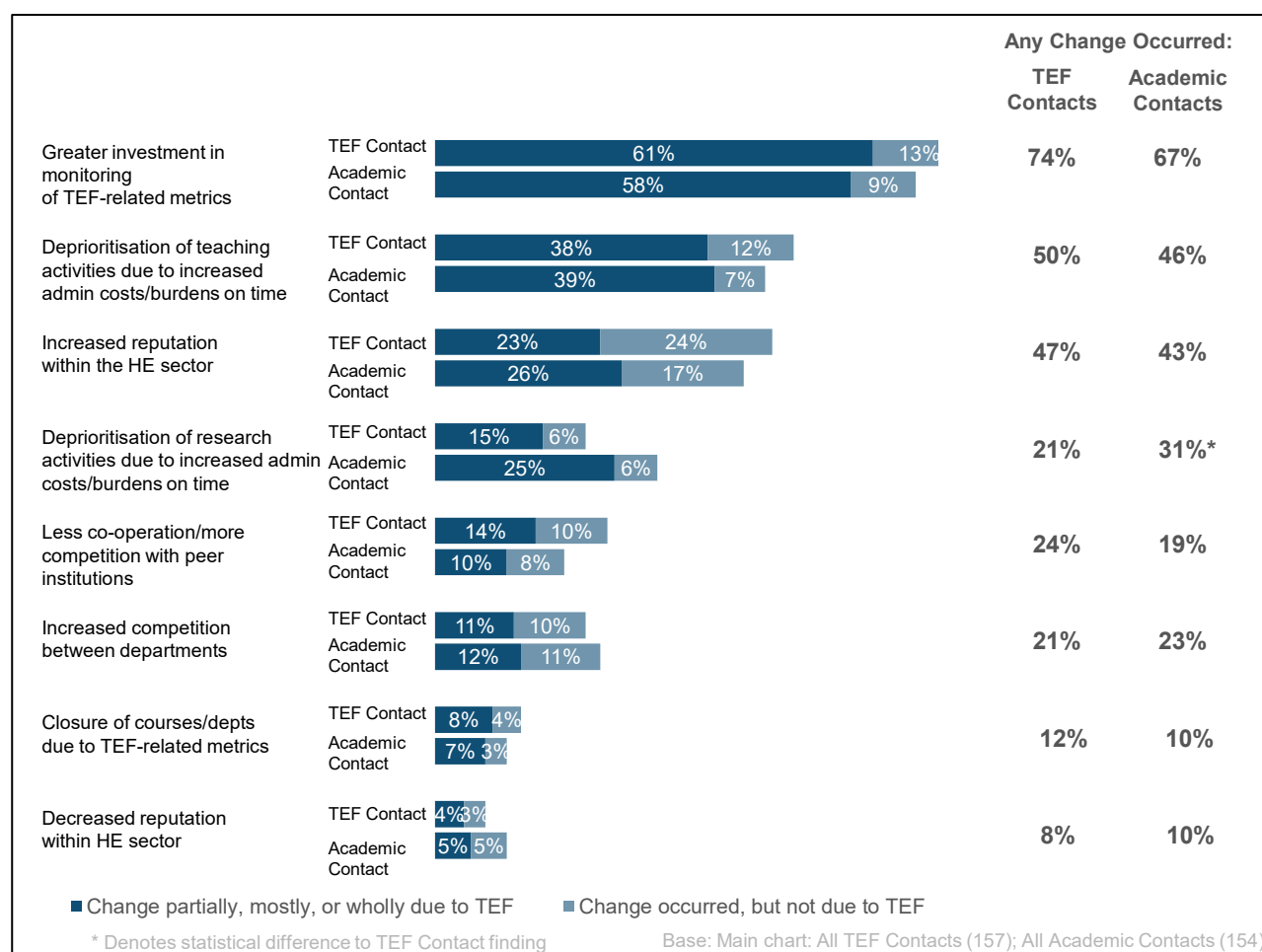
## **Wider impacts**

3.60 This category brings together a range of discrete impacts that could be collectively defined as the 'wider impacts' to a provider. As Figure 3.2 shows, the extent of change in this category varied from very high to low, and in all instances, a high amount of change, relative to other categories, was attributed to the TEF. There were therefore 3 of the top TEF impact items in this category. These are:

- Greater investment in monitoring TEF-related metrics was reported by 74% of TEF contacts, with TEF contributing to 61% of the change (13% not due to TEF).
- Deprioritisation of teaching activities due to increased administration costs or burdens on time, reported by 50% of TEF contacts, with TEF contributing to 38% of the change (12% not due to TEF).
- Increased reputation within the higher education sector, reported by 47% of TEF contacts, with TEF contributing to 23% of the change (24% not due to TEF).

3.61 Figure 3.8 presents all eight items relating to wider impacts.

**Figure 3.8 Wider impacts of the TEF**



3.62 Of all the changes in this category, and indeed across all categories, the TEF was considered to have contributed most to an increased investment in monitoring TEF-related performance indicators such as the NSS, continuation rates and employment data: 61% of TEF Contacts reported the TEF had contributed – at least in part – to this increase, with 16% reporting this as ‘wholly’ as a result of the TEF. Only 13% of TEF Contacts reported such changes occurred regardless of the TEF. This was particularly notable among Bronze award institutions, with 79% reporting an increase in monitoring as a result of the TEF (a total of 85% reported *any* change), as well as among HEIs (69%; a total of 79% reported *any* change).

3.63 The nature of the monitoring process was explored in the qualitative phase of the study, with some TEF and Academic Contacts suggesting they were focusing heavily on retention rates due to the financial importance of high retention rates to the provider. Another group of Contacts felt that the TEF had led to the provider giving more attention to poorly performing subject areas – citing the value of split metrics in relation to specific cohorts of students. Nevertheless, the largest contingent of TEF and Academic Contacts felt that the TEF had simply formalised monitoring processes the provider was already engaged in, but felt the TEF had

been helpful for bringing together the data in one place, so it can be looked at holistically.

- 3.64 The next most common impact the TEF contributed to was a deprioritisation of teaching activities due to increased administration costs and burdens on time (38%), with an additional 12% suggesting this occurred for reasons other than the TEF. In the qualitative interviews TEF and Academic contacts typically reported that the TEF contributed to increased administrative costs and time burden and this related to the TEF submission process itself. They were less likely to report this was due to new activities undertaken in order to ensure a greater emphasis on teaching quality or student outcomes:

*“The time and cost involved [of going through the TEF submission process] is burdensome. It involves a lot of colleagues, doing a great deal of work. You need to lean on a lot of busy people to gain information.”*

TEF Contact at Gold award AP

- 3.65 A further 15% reported that the TEF had contributed to a deprioritisation of research activities, for the same reason. The nature of this deprioritisation was touched on in the qualitative interviews: one TEF Contact remarked that there are now much fewer research-only contracts available at the provider and another felt deprioritisation was reflected by the need for staff to focus more on relationships with their students, than time spent on research activities.
- 3.66 There was an even split between TEF Contacts who felt their increased reputation within the sector was due to the TEF (23%) and those who felt it was not due to the TEF (24%). Of those providers that received a Gold award, 56% stated their increased reputation was due to the TEF; with 11% of providers with a Gold award reported that their reputation had increased irrespective of the TEF award, highlighting the positive impact the award has had for these providers. In contrast, 15% of Bronze award providers – all post-1992 HEIs or FECs – reported that the TEF award had contributed to an increased reputation (a further 11% reported change irrespective of the award).
- 3.67 Conversely, 8% of TEF Contacts reported that their reputation in the sector had decreased, with 4% attributing this to the TEF. This rose to 24% of Bronze award providers deeming this decrease to have been at least partially as a result of the TEF (an additional 13% of Bronze providers reported this change was not due to TEF). This figure was also higher among HEIs (8%) than FECs (4%) and APs (2%).
- 3.68 Additional impacts of the TEF include less co-operation/more competition with other institutions (14%), more competition across departments (11%), and the closure of certain courses or departments (8%). A minority of TEF Contacts (8%) reported that they consider the TEF has resulted in the closure of courses or departments, with only a further 4% stating this would have happened anyway. These three impacts

were more likely to be experienced by Bronze providers, and they were more likely to attribute them to the TEF: 25% reported less co-operation/more competition with other institutions (38% citing any change), 27% increased departmental competition (49% citing any change), and 22% course closure (27% citing any change).

## Other impacts

3.69 A minority of TEF contacts in the quantitative survey reported other changes that had occurred in the previous two years due to the TEF, additional to those generated from the qualitative interviews. These changes mostly related to investment in learning technology, and changes to data management processes, including greater focus on KPIs, data-driven decision making, and programme level analysis.

## Summary of impacts of TEF on HE providers with no TEF award

3.70 The survey captured the perceptions of change and impact of the TEF among both providers which had received a TEF award, and those which had not. While findings in the previous sections included providers with no TEF award, this section specifically draws out findings just for those providers with no award.

3.71 Half of providers with no award participating in the survey were FECs (52%), while 28% were APs. It is also worth noting that the majority (77%) of respondents answering on behalf of providers with no award were TEF Contacts; as shown in sections above, TEF Contacts were generally both less likely to report change, and attribute this to the TEF.

3.72 In terms of the degree of change over the last two years, HE providers with no award typically followed a similar pattern to those with an award. There were only two changes where they were more likely to have experienced change in the last two years: 'different types of applicants interested in or applying to the institution' (39% reported any change, compared with 26% of those with an award), and 'greater difficulty in recruiting teaching staff' (36% reported any change, compared with 23% of those with an award).

3.73 As Table B.3 in Appendix B shows, across most measures, providers with no award were less likely to report that the TEF had contributed to changes within their organisation. The only exception, where providers with no award were *more* likely to report change as a result of the TEF, related to the increased difficulty for the provider in attracting local employer partners (8% compared with 1% with any award), suggesting that holding a TEF award can make for a more attractive proposition for employers.



3.74 The three most commonly reported impacts of the TEF according to providers with no TEF award were:

- Greater investment in monitoring of TEF-related metrics (47%, compared with 68% of those with an award)
- De-prioritisation of teaching activities due to more admin costs/burdens on time (33% vs. 41%)
- Increased demands on teaching staff to support students (25% vs. 39%)

### **3d Value of the TEF for HE Providers**

3.75 In the qualitative phase of the research, undertaken before the survey, providers were asked for their perceptions on the value of the TEF to their provider as well as to the Higher Education sector more widely. Respondents' views were explored more broadly in the qualitative interviews and they were not prompted to comment on the TEF's value in relation to each of its objectives.

3.76 This section explores the main values identified:

- Opportunity to reflect on relevant metrics
- Greater accountability of the Higher Education sector
- Raising institutional profile
- Supporting applicant choice

3.77 It was noticeable that there was very little commentary from providers about the value of the TEF in relation to enhancing students' skills and knowledge to help meet employers' needs, one of the four objectives of the TEF.

### **Opportunity for reflection**

3.78 Providers reported that the TEF submission process provided the opportunity for them to reflect on teaching and student outcome practices within their provider, in addition to how these may vary by student characteristics.

3.79 One of the ways in which it did this was to bring senior management together to discuss how 'teaching excellence' is defined and practised within the provider, including whether any teaching practices may be more or less favourable towards students from particular demographic backgrounds. For example, for an HEI in Wales, the TEF submission process provided them with the opportunity to explore student outcomes for Welsh vs. English-language speaking students, and to compare any differences in teaching practices conducted in Welsh and in English.

3.80 A TEF Contact at another HEI felt that although they did not see the TEF as a direct measure of teaching excellence, it raised the profile of the metrics internally and highlighted how they could be better utilised to understand and improve the student experience. This TEF Contact reported that their provider had used the NSS scores to look at differences in student satisfaction by department.

## Accountability

3.81 As part of the TEF-awarding process, HE providers' performance in each of the metrics (NSS, DLHE, HESA continuation data) is benchmarked against other providers, matched to the profile of students they admit.

3.82 Some providers felt that the TEF awards would lead to greater accountability within the Higher Education sector, as the benchmarking aspect of the TEF-awarding process would raise the awareness of how well providers perform for particular groups of students relative to other providers. Following this, it was perceived that this enhanced understanding of relative performance would prompt providers to modify their teaching practices to ensure greater student outcomes for all.

*"It has the opportunity to shake things up [within the HE sector], because of the benchmarked nature of it. It's much more clear that you're being judged on the type of students you take in and then what you do with them. It felt like a fairer process and it threw up some interesting things. It has a value in that it does stimulate to drive continuous improvement and educational excellence and that's a positive thing."*

TEF Contact at Gold award HEI

3.83 Further, it was felt that this increased institutional accountability would promote transparency within the sector, as the TEF award system would provide a standardised system to measure teaching quality and student outcomes across all providers, irrespective of other factors. For example, one TEF Contact at an AP felt that the receipt of a Bronze award would provide a 'wake up call' to HEIs commonly perceived as high-performing, yet who did not perform as well in the TEF as expected.

*"The benefits are potentially improvements in the teaching at institutions where teaching is not necessarily good, which will lead to a better student experience. It will be great [for the sector] because some of the 'big players' have received Bronze awards and have had a little wake up call".*

TEF Contact at Provisional award AP

## Raising institutional profile

3.84 Providers perceived that the TEF award system would bring a number of benefits to those in receipt of a 'higher' TEF award (Gold / Silver). The 'Bronze' award tended to be perceived negatively among HE providers, including those who were not in receipt of this award, and this was expected to be detrimental to the provider's profile and reputation more widely (although as shown in section 3c, the survey determined that 15% of providers with a Bronze reported an increased reputation within the HE sector as a result of the TEF). This perception is explored in the next section, titled 'Design of the TEF'.

3.85 Overall, providers were of the view that receipt of a Gold or Silver TEF award would have a positive impact on institutional reputation. This was a strong theme among APs and FECs. Prior to the TEF, APs and FECs perceived themselves to be less visible as providers of high quality teaching within the Higher Education sphere, compared to HEIs. They suggested this was due to the prominence given to a provider's research output and applicants equating this with high quality teaching. APs, FECs and 'post-92 institutions' considered a poorer judgement with regards to research output has traditionally led to the perception of a poorer quality teaching output as well. They felt that the TEF award helped to 'level the playing field' with more 'traditional' universities.

*"The Gold helped us become more visible with regards to Higher Education offer, and you can stand up in an Open Day and say that someone has looked at what we do and given us a Gold badge and that is really precious to us."*

TEF Contact at Gold award FEC

*"Commonly across the sector there is some frustration about the simple way [people] make a judgment about research quality in universities, but very little in the way of judging the quality of teaching and learning... we regarded it as a way of telling the world that our learning and teaching was good."*

TEF Contact at Gold award FEC

*"Some former post-92 universities have been criticised for not being research intensive, yet they have been rewarded by the TEF system for showing the quality of their teaching and student outcomes. TEF raises the profile of universities that we don't hear about."*

TEF Contact at Silver award HEI

3.86 Related to this, FECs and APs in particular felt that the TEF would redress the weight of importance given to research activity versus teaching within the Higher Education sector because the benchmarking nature of the awarding process encourages providers to invest in improving the student experience. This was therefore expected to help shift attention towards the students and how the

provider's teaching practices impact student outcomes. More 'traditional' HE providers were typically less forthcoming in stating that there is a need for such a re-balancing, in part because they felt their teaching was already of a very high standard.

*"It has been good, and interesting, to see the larger institutions who one would have expected to do well, not doing so well, and the focus on the student and how things are taught as opposed to just their reputation. It makes you think about the quality of teaching and whether institutions have become somewhat complacent."*

Academic Contact at Gold award FEC

*"Although the shift of importance to teaching is good there is also a danger that the research excellence could be diluted. I know for other institutions it has allowed for a shift from research to teaching or at least valuing it. We've always had a good mix so didn't need to change the balance."*

TEF Contact at Gold award HEI

## Perceptions of value in informing applicant choice

3.87 A key aim of the provider-level TEF is to provide applicants with an independent resource to help them with their decisions regarding which providers to consider for application to a Higher Education course. During the qualitative interviews providers were asked for their views on the extent to which they think the TEF will inform applicant choice and decision-making regarding higher education. The impact of the TEF on applicant choice from the applicants' perspective was explored more fully in the online survey with applicants, covered in Sections 4f-4h.

3.88 The majority of providers felt that it was too early to speculate as to the value of the TEF awards on student choice and decision-making, or that they had not yet perceived any value to the applicant body.<sup>9</sup>

*"I think it's still a work in progress in regards to better informing student choices and better meeting the needs of employers and business. There is so much information like consumer rights information and Uni stats [website] plus other factors like location, course and study style so it's hard to know how much influence the TEF would actually have."*

TEF Contact at Gold award FEC

3.89 A TEF Contact at an FEC perceived that there are many information sources for applicants to help with their decision-making, with the TEF perceived to be 'confusing' to applicants and not as important as other factors.

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<sup>9</sup> 15% of all applicants did make use of the TEF during decision making (see Section 4f).

*“The outcomes are totally confusing to students - what do they mean? I don't think most student would consider it much. There are other factors that are more important when making their decision: cost, travel, accommodation, social life, whether the course is suitable, employability.*

TEF Contact at No award HEI

3.90 However there were a few providers who perceived the TEF awards to be of value to applicants, with one Academic Contact reporting that the TEF provides another source of information that can be used as part of the decision-making process.

*“Anything that gives students a better choice or more information, the more things we can get judged on, the better it is for the student.”*

Academic contact at Gold award FEC

3.91 A TEF Contact at one HEI perceived the TEF award system to offer valuable information to under-represented groups in particular (e.g. BAME applicants, those from low polar quintiles, mature applicants, applicants with disabilities). For this Contact, a provider's receipt of a TEF award implied good outcomes for all learners and therefore the potential for social mobility. This Contact felt that applicants could use the TEF award as a starting point and research further into the provider's offer to see how it caters to students of a similar background.

## Perceptions of TEF against its objectives

3.92 Following the themes that emerged regarding the value of the TEF from the qualitative interviews, the online survey sought to explore more fully the extent to which providers perceived that the TEF would be able to meet each of its core objectives, framed as:

- Raising esteem for teaching
- Better inform student choice in decisions about where to study
- Recognising and rewarding excellent teaching among staff
- Enhancing students' skills and knowledge to help meet employers' needs

3.93 As illustrated in Figure 3.9, TEF Contacts were most likely to agree that the TEF would raise esteem for teaching, at least to some extent<sup>10</sup> (68%). Over half of TEF Contacts agreed that the TEF would better inform student choice in decisions about where to study (57%) and a slightly lower proportion agreed that the TEF recognised and rewarded excellent teaching (54%). A lower proportion (40%)

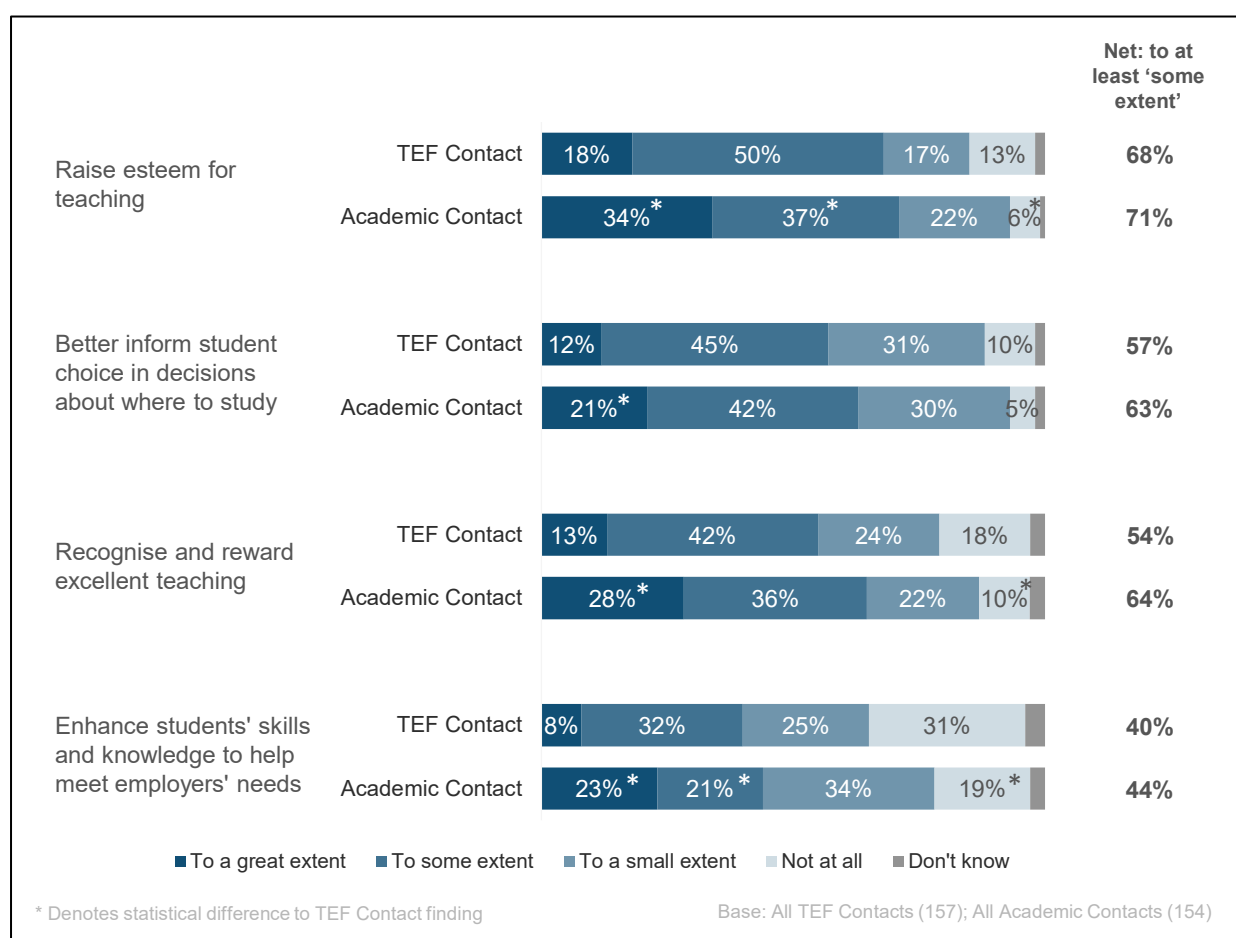
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<sup>10</sup> The 'at least to some extent' figure is a net figure of the following response options: 'to some extent' and 'to a great extent'.

agreed that the TEF enhanced students' skills and knowledge to help meet employers' needs.

- 3.94 At an overall level, there was little difference between TEF Contact and Academic Contact responses, with similar proportions rating the extent to which TEF will meet its objectives as 'at least to some extent'. Academic Contacts were however much more likely than TEF Contacts to agree that the TEF would be able to meet each of its objectives 'to a great extent'. Indeed, around a third (34%) felt that the TEF would raise esteem for teaching 'to a great extent' (compared with 18% of TEF Contacts), as shown by Figure 3.9.

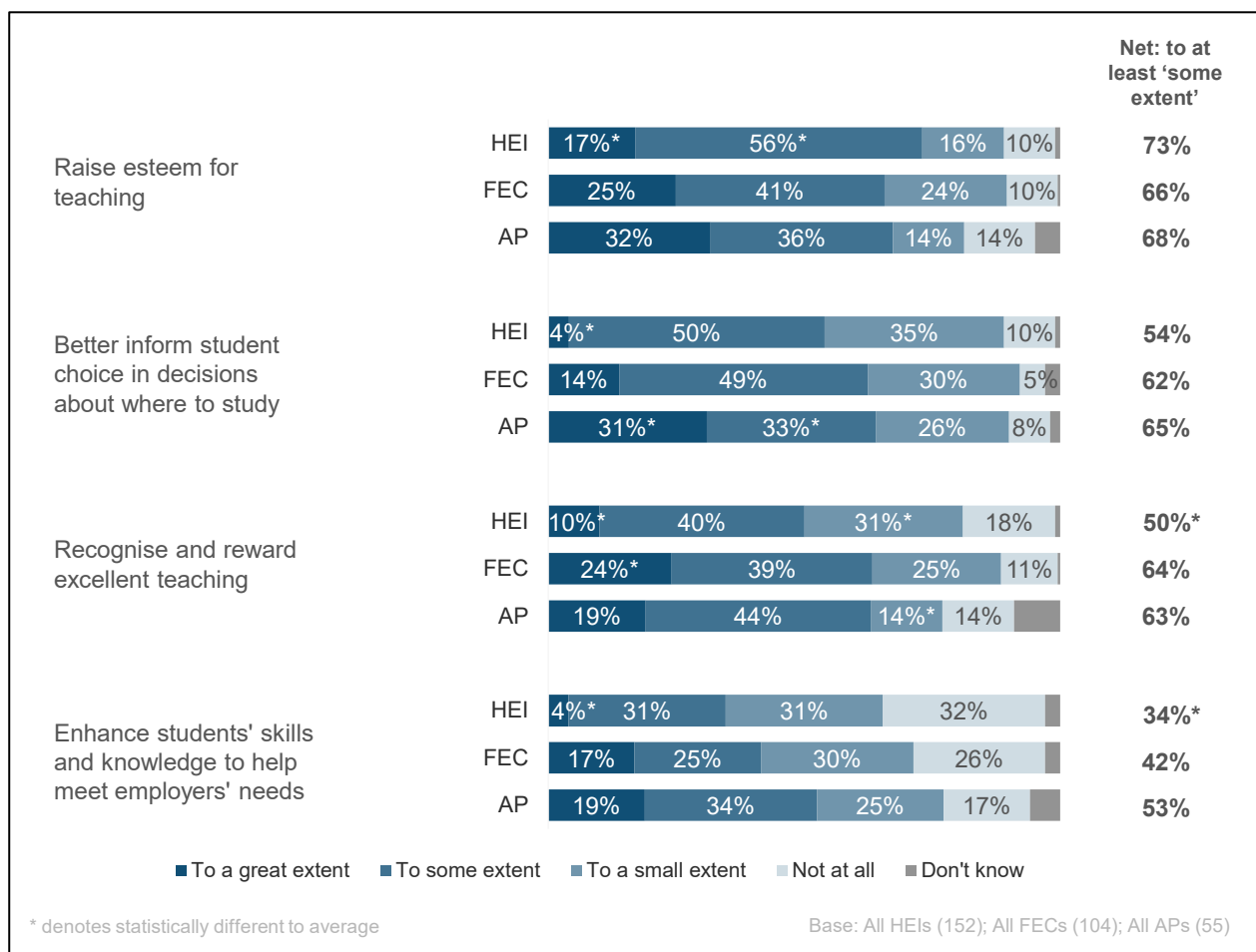
**Figure 3.9 Extent to which the TEF will be able to meet its objectives**



- 3.95 These are more positive findings than those obtained in the qualitative interviews, where TEF Contacts more commonly reported that it was too early to discern the impact of the TEF on applicant choice or that they were not certain what the TEF would bring to the sector. This illustrates that there is an element of uncertainty underpinning perception of the value the TEF brings.
- 3.96 There was some evidence to confirm qualitative themes that saw greater confidence in the TEF among AP and FEC representatives. As Figure 3.10

illustrates, Contacts at FECs and APs were generally more likely to state the TEF was likely to meet its objectives 'to a great extent' than Contacts at HEIs.

**Figure 3.10 Extent to which the TEF will be able to meet its objectives by HE provider type**

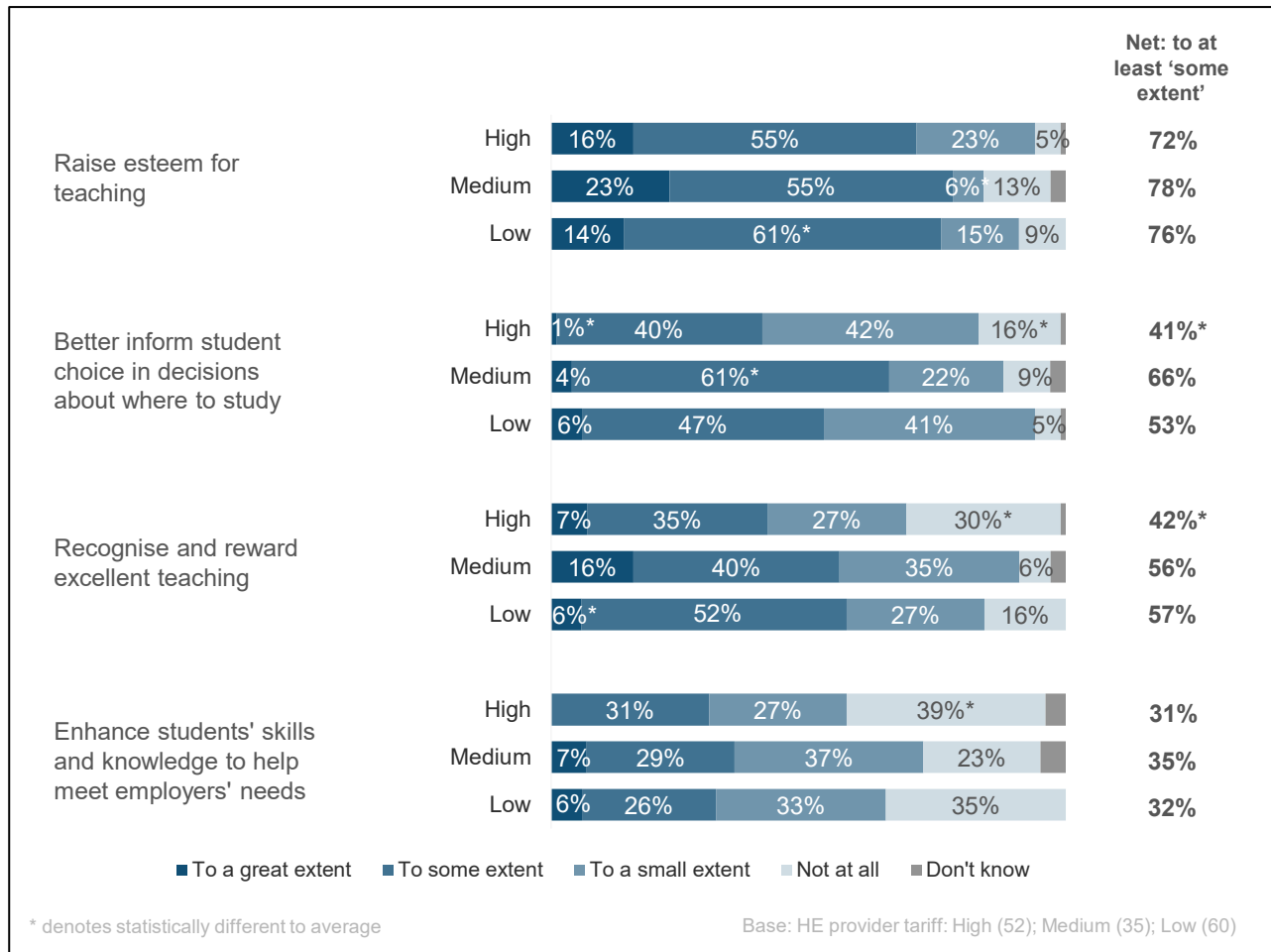


3.97 There was no clear pattern in response by the TEF award providers received: across all four objectives the only noticeable differences were that Bronze providers were less likely to report that the TEF will support student choice (44%) at least to some extent, while providers with a Provisional award were more likely to report that the TEF will enhance students' skills and knowledge to help meet employers' needs (58%)<sup>11</sup> at least to some extent.

<sup>11</sup> NB Base for Bronze providers is 45, and Provisional 37.

3.98 Those at high tariff institutions were more likely to answer 'Not at all' to all objectives except raising esteem for teaching, as illustrated in Figure 3.11.

**Figure 3.11 Extent to which the TEF will be able to meet its objectives by average tariff**





### 3e Design of the TEF

3.99 This section explores providers' views on the design of the TEF, and whether the design allows for its aims to be achieved.

#### Interpretation of the TEF awards

3.100 During the qualitative interviews, HE providers raised concerns over applicants' interpretation of a Bronze award. There was concern that receipt of a Bronze award may lead applicants to perceive the provider to be of 'poor' quality, despite that provider having already met national quality standards. This perception of a Bronze award was felt to have potential consequences on the provider, such as lowered esteem within the Higher Education sector and an impact on recruitment.

*"The problem is if you're Bronze it is a tarnished title and this has implications for staff and for students, there is less sophisticated knowledge about what it actually means."*

TEF Contact at Bronze award HEI

3.101 Further, some providers felt that the negative perception of a Bronze award might be amplified among international students, for whom league tables and scoring systems were perceived to hold more weight in decision-making compared to UK applicants. For one TEF Contact, the awarding of 'Bronze' awards was felt to have a negative impact on the UK Higher Education system as a whole, as it may indicate to international applicants that the UK has low-quality providers of Higher Education.

*"Higher education rankings are hugely valued abroad and I'm not sure if a large proportion of our universities having a 'Bronze' is sending out a good message. I think that's quite a negative message and I don't think it's the message that TEF intended. It's fine if you get Silver or Gold, but if you get Bronze you're interpreted as being sub-standard which is not right."*

TEF Contact at Silver award HEI

#### Role of benchmarking

3.102 TEF metrics are benchmarked: providers are assessed according to performance levels that account for the demographic profile of students studying at a provider. This incorporates subject of study and student demographics (entry qualifications, age, ethnicity, sex, disability, educational disadvantage (POLAR), level of study, and year).

3.103 Despite the benchmarking process, a number of providers raised concerns with the TEF metrics that feed into the TEF assessment process. These providers

believed that there were issues outside of the provider's control that are not accounted for in the benchmarking process, such as vacancies within the local economy, and social and cultural environments unique to the local area (although such information can be provided as contextual data to support TEF assessments). Consequently, these providers felt that these issues influenced the TEF metrics and therefore disadvantaged them in the TEF award process.

- 3.104 For example, a TEF contact at a FEC reported that the majority of students attending their college were female, and from working class backgrounds, who often had familial caring responsibilities that impacted their studies. This TEF Contact said that their students tend not to look for jobs outside of the local area once graduating and this may affect their employment status as it may take them longer to find employment. Others still may choose not to work after completing their course. This TEF Contact perceived their employment outcomes metric to be negatively impacted as a result.

*"The retention benchmark is perceived to be too simple, and doesn't take into consideration the demographics of institutions such as <FEC name>, where a large proportion of students are participating in HE for the first time and come from families who are known to have a low participation rate in HE."*

TEF Contact at Bronze award FEC

- 3.105 Further, a few felt that providers specialising in creative arts, or students on creative arts courses in general, may have skewed DLHE data as it takes relatively longer for graduates of these courses to enter employment into their chosen field, compared to graduates of other courses.

*"The way creative subjects are measured are not very useful for the TEF as people don't go in to arts to get a job quickly. Therefore, DLHE scores are not always relevant to students pursuing an Arts career as it takes longer than 6 months... Realistically it's not always the best measure of an arts education and not everything should be measured around whether students get a job or not straight afterwards."*

Academic Contact at Silver award HEI

## Validity of the TEF

- 3.106 One overall aim of the TEF is to measure and recognise excellence in teaching quality and student outcomes among providers of Higher Education. While HE providers welcomed an award that was designed to recognise these areas, they raised concerns about the metrics that are used to measure teaching quality (NSS, HESA Continuation, DLHE), and whether teaching quality has been conflated with student satisfaction. Providers described the TEF as a 'blunt instrument' or a 'proxy' with which to measure teaching quality.

*“It is definitely worth having a framework that puts the emphasis on teaching quality, but this isn’t really it. But not in the exact form of TEF at the moment. We would look to see if we can measure teaching quality more directly, but we are homing in on measures of students’ satisfaction and we call it teaching excellence.”*

Academic Contact at Silver award HEI

- 3.107 In addition, a TEF Contact at an HEI felt that the metrics do not always reflect the current status of the institution, for example in cases where particular courses have since closed, yet former students’ data is still included in the metrics.

*“Data collected through the metrics can become outdated and do not reflect current situation of the uni. For example some courses that were included in the metrics have since closed.”*

TEF Contact at Silver award HEI

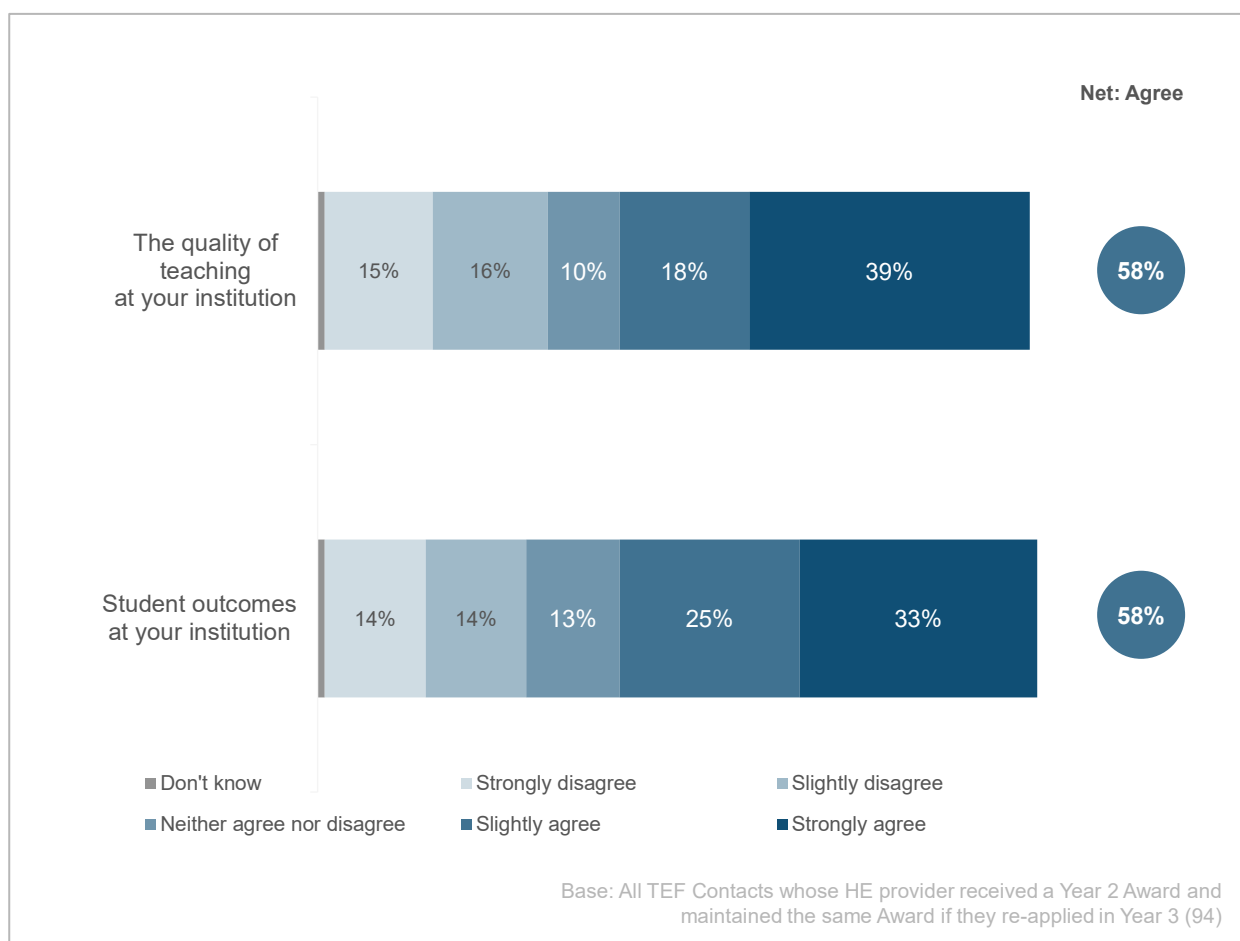
- 3.108 An Academic Contact at an HEI echoed this view and felt that while the student voice is important in the assessment of teaching quality, using the NSS data as one of its key measures does not accurately reflect the measurement of teaching quality. A few providers mentioned that direct observations of teaching practices should have been incorporated into the TEF awarding process, in addition for the opportunity for providers to contextualise their metrics data.

*“This is a ‘bone of contention’. The TEF does not measure teaching quality... how does the NSS relate to the quality of the teaching experience? Do the TEF metrics show the full picture?... There is no conversation to discuss the themes from the submission, the award is all based on the metrics”*

TEF Contact at Silver award HEI

- 3.109 As illustrated in Figure 3.12, just over half (58%) of TEF contacts agreed that the TEF award their institution received in 2017 (Year 2) is a fair representation of the quality of teaching at their institution and the same proportion (58%) also agreed that their TEF award is a fair representation of their student outcomes.

**Figure 3.12 Perception of the TEF award as a fair reflection of teaching quality and student outcomes**



3.110 There was no difference in TEF Contact and Academic Contact responses here, however as one might expect there was a strong association between TEF award and perception of 'fairness'. Providers which received a Gold TEF award in 2017 (Year 2) were more likely to agree that this award is a fair representation of their teaching quality (90%), compared to institutions who received either a Silver (66%) or Bronze award (25%).

3.111 Similarly, Gold-awarded providers were also more likely to agree that their award is a fair representation of student outcomes at their institution (88%), compared to providers which received a Silver (63%) or Bronze award (28%).

### 3f Co-ordination of the TEF submission

3.112 In 2017, 295 providers of Higher Education applied for a TEF award, blending nationally-collected datasets with a supporting submission designed to: outline the institutional context; respond to the data; and demonstrate the impact of institutional strategies on teaching quality and student outcomes. Discussions with TEF and Academic Contacts as part of the qualitative phase of the evaluation led to a greater understanding of how the TEF submission is coordinated by providers of Higher Education.

3.113 Initially, TEF Contacts were asked how they came into the role. Many felt they were the 'natural choice', taking into account their present role within the provider, understanding of the HE sector more generally – TEF Contacts typically had a long history of employment in strategic positions within the HE sector – as well as positions they might have held on TEF development committees during the design of the framework. TEF Contacts had also commonly been involved in the formative stages of TEF<sup>12</sup>, and were therefore considered the institutional authority on the subject. It was this familiarity with the provider and the contextual underpinning of the TEF that justified their appointment.

*"It [the TEF submission] aligns with whoever is taking up the bulk of the educational remit [at the institution]."*

TEF Contact at a Bronze award HEI

3.114 Typical job titles for individuals holding the position of TEF Contact were Head of Quality and Development, Director of Student Services, and Dean for Learning. The seniority of these positions underlines the importance providers place on the TEF, but the breadth of roles may also allude to how providers vary in their interpretation of the function of the TEF.

3.115 TEF Contacts may assume the role of principal author of the provider submission and will typically enlist the help of Academic Contacts for evidence that strengthens the application, including, for instance, the ways in which the design and structure of their courses has improved for the benefit of the student body.

*"You're looking at legacy metrics, so you look at the data that is showing improvements more so than the metrics indicated. So we could then show how we were striving forward and making improvements in particular areas."*

TEF Contact at a Silver award FEC

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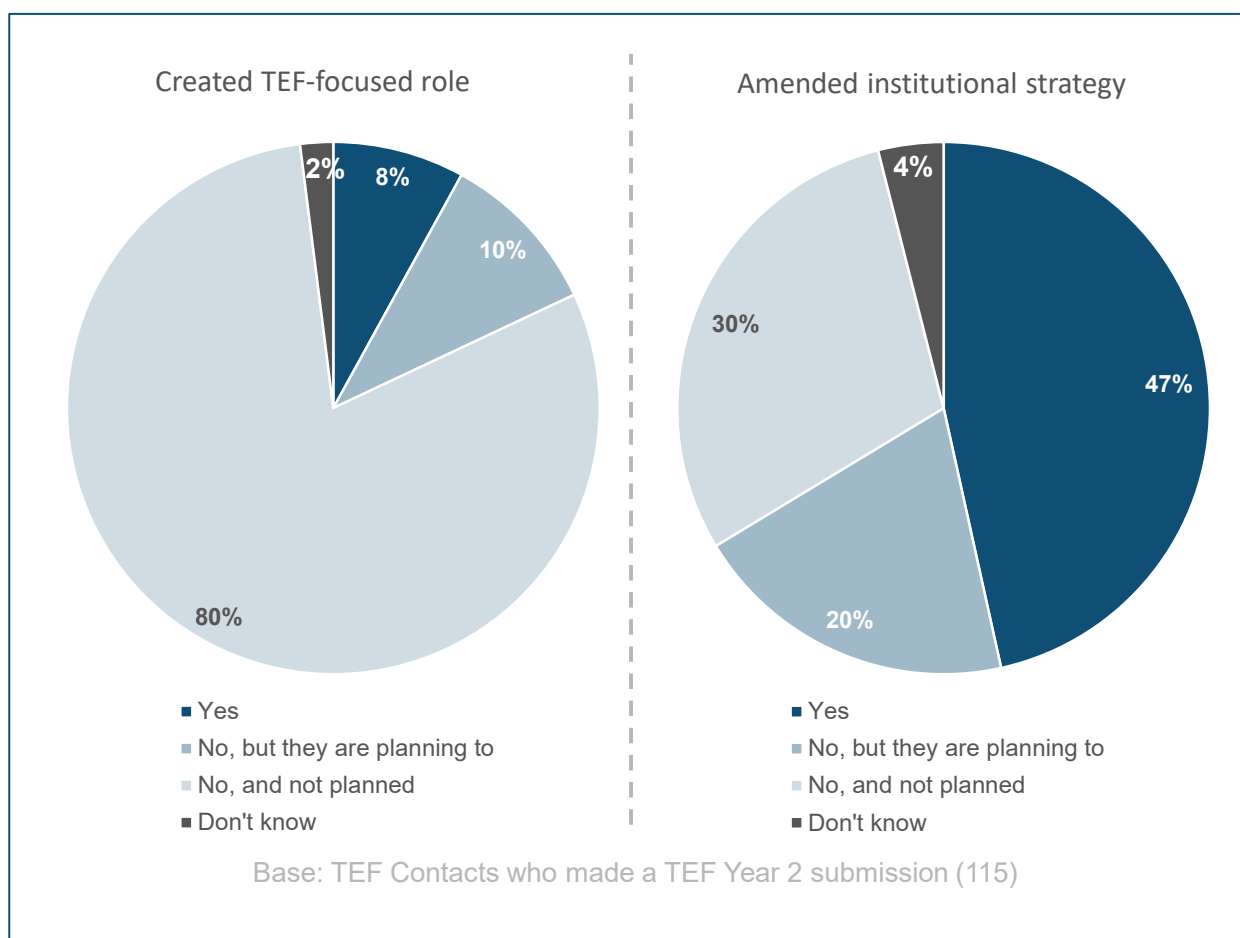
<sup>12</sup> The focus of this report is on the 2016-18 period of TEF, although some of the TEF Contacts had been involved in the developmental process of TEF

- 3.116 There were, however, noticeable differences in the specifics of this process based on provider type. It emerged that within smaller providers (predominantly APs and FECs), the TEF Contact will tend to take sole responsibility for the provider submission, with additional input from colleagues. Larger providers (HEIs) go about things differently; some TEF and Academic Contacts from these providers mentioned they had established a dedicated TEF 'working group' to collate evidence for the submission. This may suggest that HEIs invest more heavily in the TEF submission process in comparison to FECs and APs, possibly due to the nature and size of the provider.
- 3.117 These qualitative discussions gave cause for a section of the quantitative survey to be dedicated to substantiating these accounts of the TEF submission process. TEF Contacts from providers who had made a TEF submission were asked whether a specific role with a focus on the TEF had been created within the provider. As Figure 3.13 shows, in the main, providers are not creating such specific posts. Of providers who had made a TEF 2017 Year 2 submission only 8% had created this post, with a further 10% reporting that they planned to do so.
- 3.118 HEIs were most likely to (plan to) create a specific post (21%) – compared to just 4% of FECs<sup>13</sup> – which may highlight the additional resource HEIs are able to channel to TEF-related activities.

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<sup>13</sup> Please note: the base size for TEF Contacts from APs who applied for a TEF award in 2017 was under 25, so has not been reported on here.

**Figure 3.13 Whether provider has created a TEF-focused role or amended its institutional strategy to incorporate TEF activities**



3.119 Two-thirds (67%) of TEF Contacts whose provider had made a TEF submission said that their ‘institutional strategy’ had been amended to incorporate activities directed at gaining, maintaining or improving the TEF award. Nearly half (47%) said it had already happened, and an additional 20% were planning to amend their strategy (see Figure 3.13) FECs were much more likely than HEIs to report their strategy had been, or was going to be, amended (85% vs. 49%).

3.120 Of all providers who made a TEF submission in 2016-17 (TEF Year 2), 74% had either created a new post for this purpose, or amended their institutional strategy (or planned to do so). Only 4% had already taken both measures.

3.121 Satisfaction levels with the TEF submission process were mixed: while 53% were satisfied with the process (16% ‘very’ satisfied), 22% reported that they were dissatisfied (3% ‘very’ dissatisfied). Those reporting that they were dissatisfied with the process were asked why this was. Dissatisfaction appeared linked to the level of award received, with some Bronze award holding providers considering the award an unfair reflection of their offer. These providers felt their submission and metrics justified a higher award and their dissatisfaction was related primarily to the award received. However, in other cases, dissatisfaction occurred due to a lack of

resource within the provider and poor data metrics. Some also perceived the timing of the submission window in relation to the release of the metric data and related information to be a challenge.

*“The process favours institutions with more resources to commit to developing the provider submission. In a small institution that work has to be added to already hectic workloads.”*

TEF Contact at Silver award HEI

*“It requires far greater data capability and focus across the institution, and investment in the same, drawing resources away from the core activities underpinning teaching excellence.”*

TEF Contact at Bronze award HEI

### 3g Institutional engagement and awareness

3.122 How the TEF is received and understood by providers of Higher Education is vital for the success of the scheme. With provider-wide knowledge and understanding of the TEF, providers of Higher Education are better equipped to manage the submission process and adapt to changes in TEF policy. Perhaps most significantly, a greater level of institutional engagement is likely to alter the day-to-day practices of staff: if they are aware of strategic decision-making related to the TEF and how the TEF will impact their role, teaching quality and outcomes for the student population may ultimately improve.

#### Staying informed on the TEF

3.123 As part of the qualitative study, TEF and Academic Contacts were asked how they stay informed on the TEF. TEF Contacts routinely consult government publications to keep abreast of the latest TEF developments.

*“I found looking at provider submissions in the OfS helpful and the analysis as to who got what award and what they said in their provider submissions.”*

TEF Contact at Gold award HEI

3.124 They also attend TEF-focused seminars, briefings and related conferences (specifically the Higher Education Academy<sup>14</sup> conference). These events seem to be well attended by these individuals, implying a high level of engagement with the TEF within the HE community. TEF Contacts view these TEF-centred events as an opportunity for cross-sector learnings, using them to take a ‘temperature check’ of

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<sup>14</sup> Now part of ‘Advance HE’

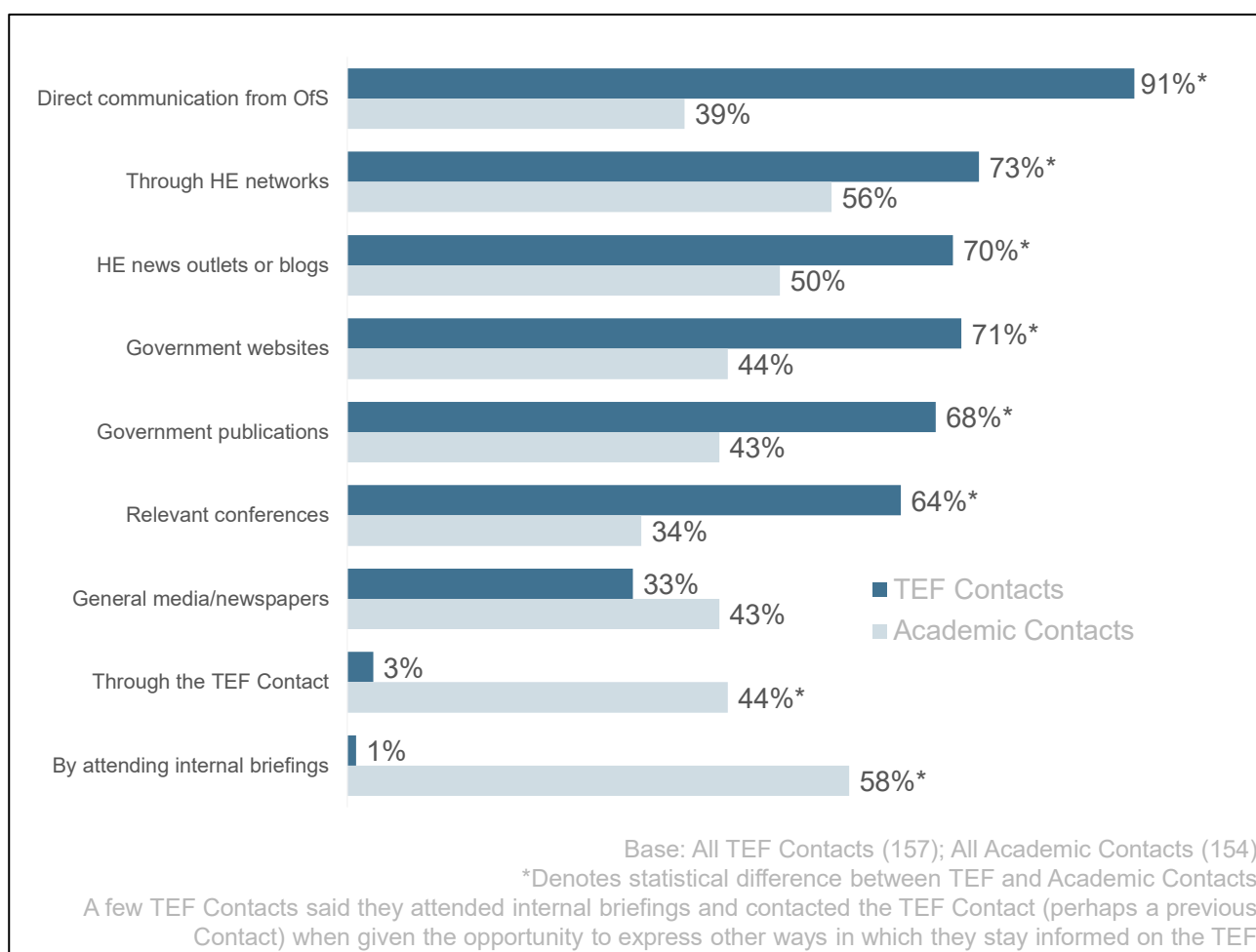


the HE sector and get a feel for the prevailing mood within the sector in relation to the TEF. They also use these opportunities to gather information and seek guidance that will help them maintain and improve their award.

3.125 Conversely, Academic Contacts are kept informed on the TEF via primary TEF Contacts. Unless there is cause for them to be involved in the process, they are unlikely to attend external briefings or visit websites, although some mentioned they will independently review publications if they are particularly interested in understanding the implications of the TEF for their provider.

3.126 The survey quantified some of these themes. As Figure 3.14 reveals, TEF Contacts most frequently stay informed via direct communication from the Office for Students (91%), through the Higher Education network (73%) and through Higher Education news outlets or blogs (70%). Government websites (71%) and publications (68%) are also common means by which TEF Contacts stay informed of the TEF. Academic Contacts were most likely to stay informed on the TEF by attending internal briefings (58%), but they also commonly used HE networks (56%) and HE news outlets or blogs (50%).

**Figure 3.14 Ways in which TEF or Academic Contact stay informed with the TEF**



3.127 TEF and Academic Contacts at HEIs are more likely to stay informed through the HE network and HE news outlets and blogs than their counterparts at FECs and APs. Four in five (80%) respondents from HEIs said they use the Higher Education network compared 64% of FECs and 52% of APs, which may either imply a greater engagement and interest in the activities of other providers in relation to the TEF amongst the HEI population, or it may reflect a greater level of access to the network amongst this provider type.

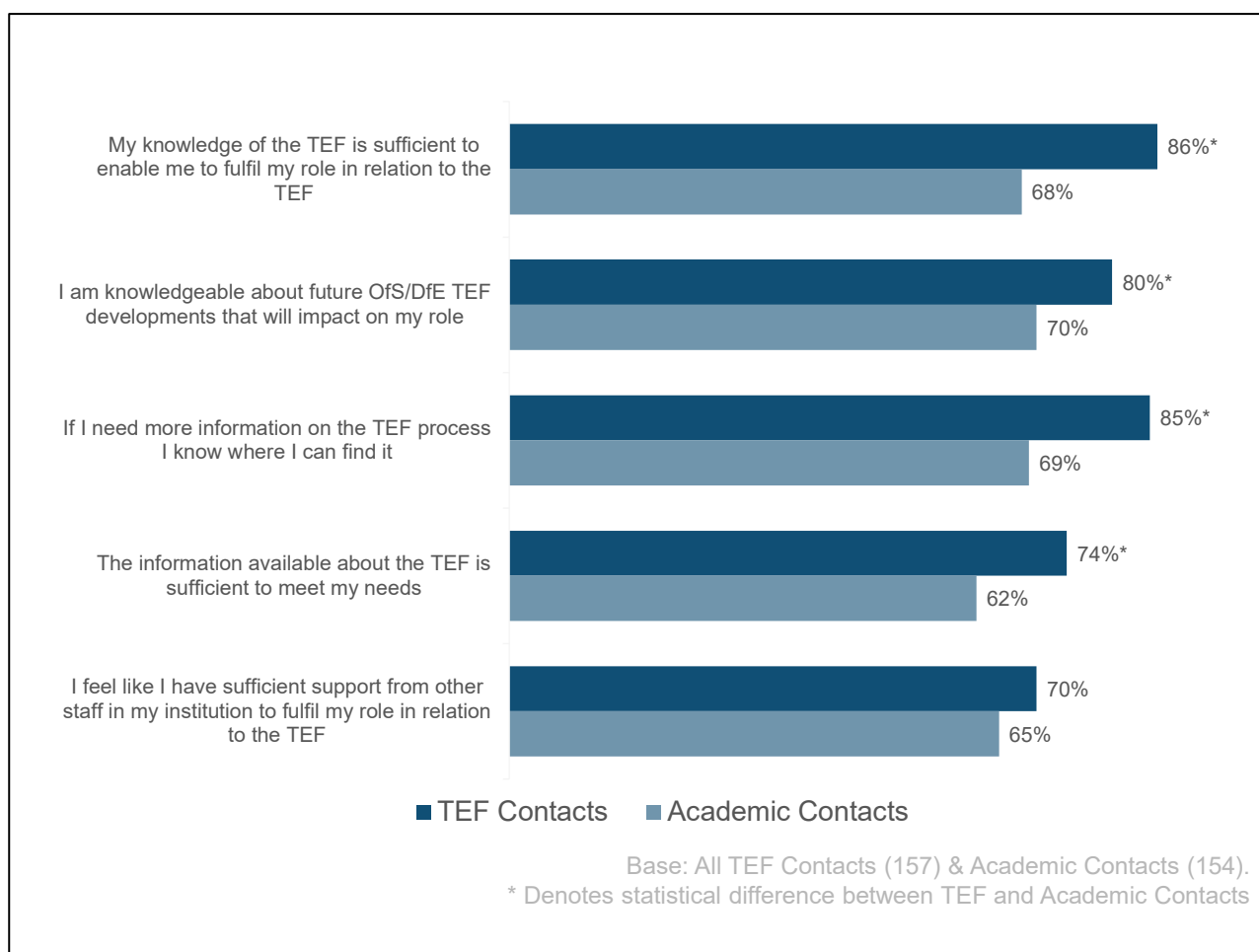
### **Fulfilling roles in relation to the TEF: knowledge, availability of information and staff support**

3.128 As part of the quantitative phase of the study, TEF and Academic Contacts were asked the extent to which they agreed with a series of statements regarding their knowledge of the TEF and its impact on their role.

3.129 In the main, TEF Contacts agreed that they did have the requisite knowledge of, and information about, the TEF, as well as adequate support from colleagues to fulfil their role. The vast majority (86%) of TEF Contacts agreed that their knowledge of the TEF was sufficient to fulfil their role, roughly the same proportion (85%) said they knew where to find information on the TEF if it was needed, and 80% recognised how TEF's future development would impact their role.

3.130 Comparing the two groups, TEF Contacts were more likely than Academic Contacts to agree with the majority of statements, reinforcing the findings from the qualitative phase insofar as these primary contacts are generally closer to the TEF in terms of its development, the way it is structured and how the awarding process is administered. Indeed, as Figure 3.15 shows, 86% of TEF Contacts agreed that they have sufficient knowledge of the TEF to fulfil their role in comparison to just 68% of Academic Contacts. A similar trend is found in responses to most of the other statements.

**Figure 3.15 Extent to which TEF and Academic Contacts agree with a series of statements about their knowledge and awareness of the TEF**



3.131 It is, however, interesting to note that TEF Contacts are generally more heavily involved in the submission and act as the TEF representative at the provider, which would logically involve a greater level of responsibility in relation to and knowledge of the TEF. So although individuals who require a comprehensive understanding of the TEF feel adequately supported in terms of knowledge, available information and support from colleagues, it appears more needs to be done to support individuals on the periphery of the TEF (the Academic Contacts) in an institutional context. Some of these individuals felt they may lack the knowledge and skills to fulfil their role in relation to the TEF. This might also reflect a lack of clarity on what their role is in relation to the TEF where it is less clearly defined than the TEF Contacts’.

3.132 As might be expected, providers with no award, and indeed those with a Provisional award, were typically less likely to agree across these statements, as Table 3.2 shows.

**Table 3.2 Extent to which providers agree that with a series of statements about their knowledge and awareness of the TEF by TEF award**

	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Provisional	No award
<i>Unweighted Base: All providers</i>	58	111	45	37	60
My knowledge of the TEF is sufficient to enable me to fulfil my role in relation to the TEF	89%	91%*	(98%)*	(60%)*	71%*
If I need more information on the TEF process I know where I can find it	88%	82%	(97%)*	(71%)	72%*
I am knowledgeable about future OfS/DfE TEF developments that will impact on my role	79%	84%*	(91%)*	(62%)*	69%
The information available about the TEF is sufficient to meet my needs	69%	77%*	(86%)*	(52%)*	64%
I feel like I have sufficient support from other staff in my institution to fulfil my role in relation to the TEF	79%	76%	(72%)	(62%)	62%

\* denotes statistically different to average.

( ) denotes base size between 25 and 49 (figure still included).

3.133 Those who felt that their knowledge was lacking typically wanted more information on metrics and benchmarking (33%), and information on future changes and the long-term impact of the TEF (28%).

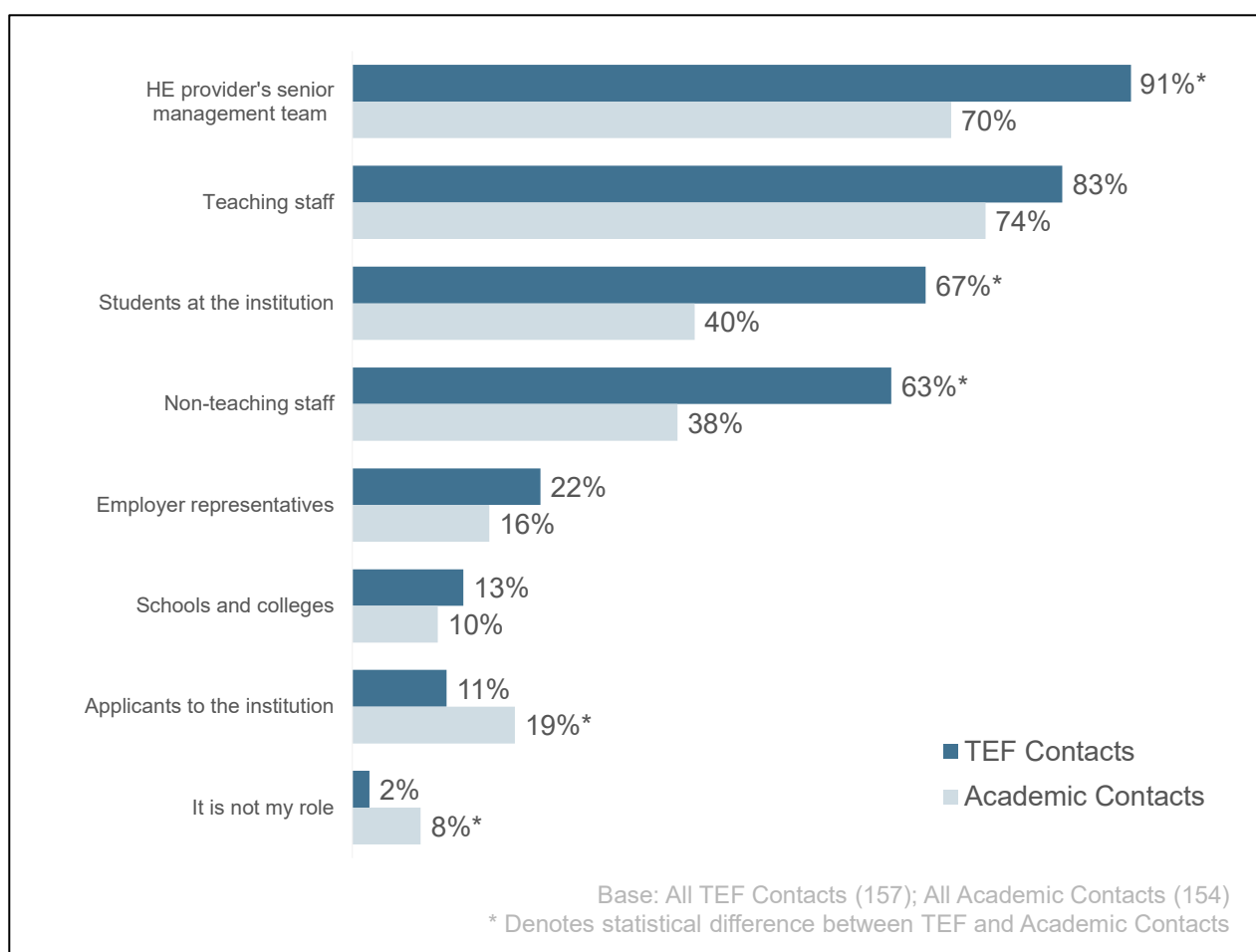
## Promoting the TEF

3.134 As part of the study, TEF and Academic Contacts revealed who they had personally communicated with to promote awareness of and engagement with the TEF. For TEF Contacts, two groups are communicated with most frequently for this purpose; the provider's senior management team (91% had communicated with this team about the TEF) and its teaching staff (83%).

3.135 As Figure 3.16 shows, they were less likely to personally engage with stakeholders outside the provider such as employer representatives (22%), schools and colleges (13%), and applicants to the provider (11%). Such communication might be expected to come from other individuals at the provider, although this could cause difficulties if their understanding of the TEF is limited.

3.136 Additionally, a minority (2%) of TEF Contacts felt it was not their role to promote awareness of and engagement with the TEF. In these cases, there may be a specific individual at the provider responsible for communication around the TEF. This proportion rose to 8% among Academic Contacts.

**Figure 3.16 Groups providers have communicated with to promote awareness of and engagement with the TEF**



3.137 Communication within HEIs regarding the TEF appeared to be somewhat more widespread than in either FECs or APs, as shown in Table 3.3.

**Table 3.3 Groups TEF and Academic Contacts have communicated with to promote awareness of and engagement with the TEF**

	HEI	FEC	AP
<i>Unweighted Base: All providers</i>	152	104	55
Senior management team	89%*	89%	66%*
Teaching staff	91%*	83%	63%*
Students at the institution	79%*	48%*	46%*
Non-teaching staff	68%*	47%*	49%
Employer representatives	20%	27%	17%
Applicants to the institution	14%	16%	10%
Schools and colleges	13%	16%	4%*
It is not my role	1%*	1%	11%*

\* denotes statistically different to average.

3.138 While, as the quantitative study showed, the majority of TEF Contacts communicate about the TEF to a range of different groups, there was some evidence in the qualitative study of TEF Contacts deciding to limit information about the TEF. This is due to a variety of factors including a conviction that promoting it would be unnecessary, for example in instances when a provider is not obligated to apply for an award and has made the decision not to<sup>15</sup>. Within this group, there is also an unwillingness to inconvenience, distract or burden staff with information that is not expected to impact their day-to-day role. They feel that trust is placed on them, as the TEF Contact, to write and submit a submission that is accurate and representative of the provider as a whole. In other words, TEF Contacts are left to get on with their job.

*“Generally, the awareness is low. It’s been on a ‘need-to-know’ basis.”*

TEF Contact at a Gold award HEI

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<sup>15</sup> Currently, participation in the TEF is voluntary for all providers of HE, but will become mandatory in 2019-20 for English providers with more than 500 registered students

## Provider-wide awareness of the TEF

- 3.139 Interviews with TEF and Academic Contacts suggested that institutional awareness of the TEF varies greatly. There was, however, consensus that awareness is growing among staff, and that staff are beginning to recognise its impact.

*"When it first came out it was very low on their [academic and non-academic staff] agendas. It's become more prominent as we're in year three now."*

TEF Contact at a Silver award FEC

- 3.140 In addition to these broad observations, specific patterns emerged from the discussions with TEF and Academic Contacts. Across providers, awareness was generally lower at smaller providers. Within providers, awareness was typically dependent on the role or position of the staff member. Senior members of staff (including those on the executive board) usually had a more sophisticated, detailed understanding of the TEF whereas academic and professional staff had a comparatively narrower understanding. This latter view was shared by TEF and Academic Contacts alike; both sets of individuals agreed that those closest to the TEF and the provider submission were more likely to know a good deal more about TEF than those with only a peripheral role.

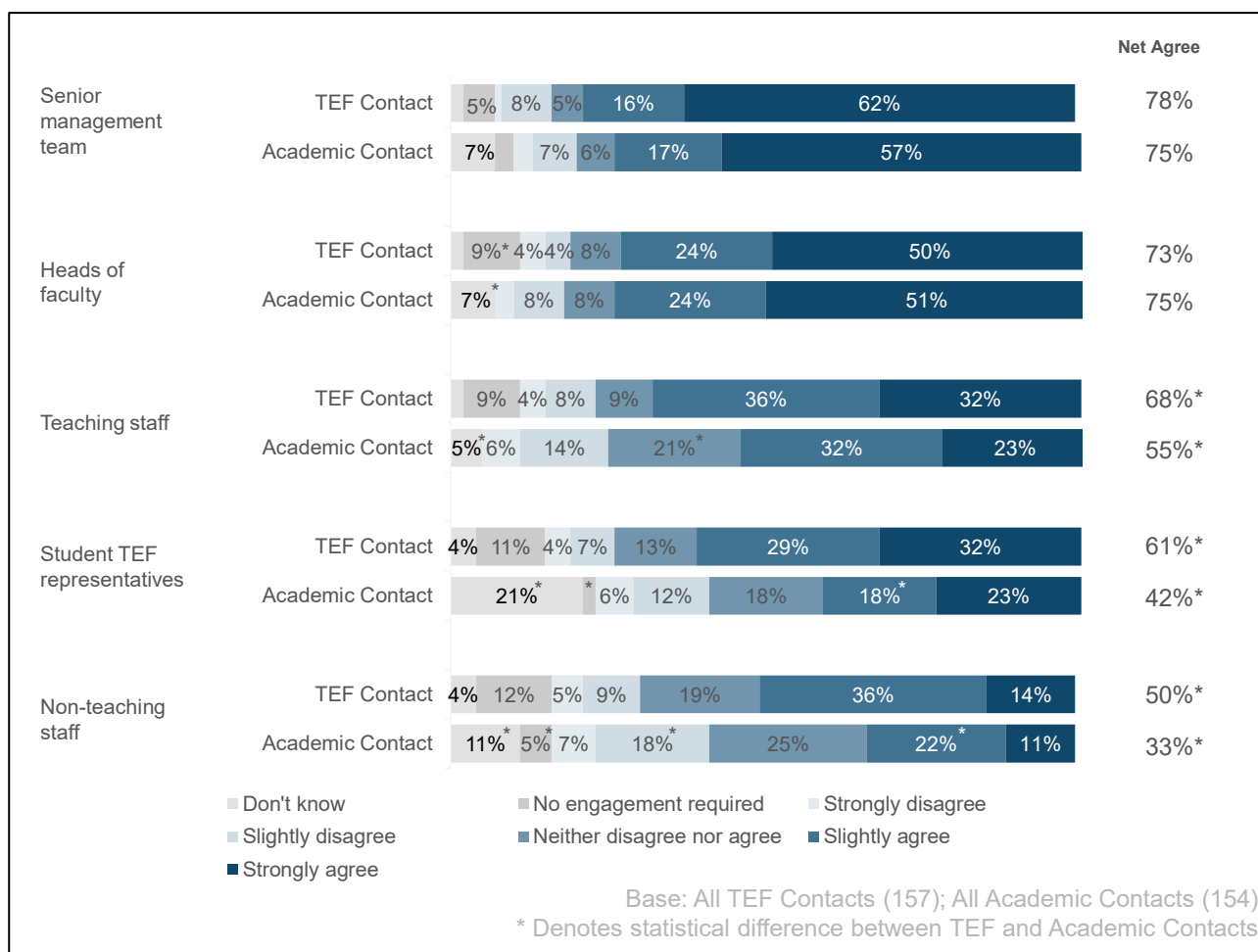
*"Before we got the award [awareness] was pretty low and even now it is difficult for academic staff to fully understand what it is and exactly what it covers... There can be an attitude of 'we're TEF Gold, so surely everything is fine'."*

TEF Contact at a Gold award FEC

- 3.141 To develop the themes emerging from the qualitative phase of the study, TEF and Academic Contacts were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that key groups within their provider had sufficiently engaged with the TEF. The groups in question were: the senior management team; heads of faculty; teaching staff; student TEF representatives; and non-teaching staff.

- 3.142 Generally speaking, TEF Contacts agreed that the requisite level of engagement with the TEF had been achieved among the senior management team (78% agreed the level of engagement with the TEF had been sufficient from this group), heads of faculty (73%), teaching staff (68%) and student TEF representatives (61%). However, they were less likely to say that non-teaching staff had been sufficiently engaged with the TEF, as shown in Figure 3.17. Half (50%) of the TEF Contacts agreed that non-teaching staff had sufficiently engaged with the TEF.

**Figure 3.17 Extent to which providers agree that the level of engagement with the TEF had been sufficient**



3.143 Comparing the two respondent types – TEF and Academic Contacts – it is clear that they have different expectations or beliefs about each group's level of engagement. TEF Contacts were more likely than Academic Contacts to agree that teaching staff (68% vs. 55%), non-teaching staff (50% vs. 33%) and student representatives (61% vs. 42%) had sufficiently engaged with the TEF. This may in part be because Academic Contacts appeared more uncertain whether the level of engagement had been sufficient (highlighted by the higher proportions answering 'Don't know').

3.144 A minority of TEF Contacts were also more convinced than Academic Contacts that particular groups within the provider were not required to engage with the TEF. TEF Contacts were more likely than Academic Contacts to say that heads of faculty (9% vs. 0%), teaching staff (9% vs. 0%), non-teaching staff (12% vs. 5%) and student representatives (11% vs. 2%) were not required to engage with the TEF. This may reveal a discrepancy in the way TEF and Academic Contacts see the role of each group in relation to the TEF.



3.145 Earlier in this report (see Table 3.3), communication within a provider was shown to be more widespread in HEIs than APs in particular. For APs, this appears to stem from a perception among some TEF Contacts that some stakeholders do not need to engage with the TEF. For example, 15% of Contacts at APs felt that no engagement was required among the senior management team, while 18% considered this was not necessary among Heads of Faculty. This may reflect the more autonomous role TEF Contacts in smaller providers have, echoing findings from the qualitative interviews explored in Section 3f.

3.146 There was also some differentiation by TEF award received: providers with a Bronze award were more likely to state that there was sufficient engagement from Senior Management (92%), and Heads of Faculty (92%). Meanwhile those with a Gold award were more likely to state that there was sufficient engagement from student TEF representatives (78%) and non-teaching staff (64%). As might be expected, providers with no award were less likely than providers with any award to report a sufficient level of engagement across all stakeholders, as Table 3.4 shows.

**Table 3.4 Extent to which providers agree that the level of engagement with the TEF had been sufficient by TEF award**

	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Provisional	No award
<i>Unweighted Base: All providers</i>	58	111	45	37	60
Senior management team	83%	86%*	(92%)*	(73%)	67%*
Heads of faculty	80%	80%	(92%)*	(71%)	64%*
Teaching staff	76%	68%	(78%)	(64%)	56%*
Student TEF representatives	78%*	61%	(62%)	(44%)	44%*
Non-teaching staff	64%*	46%	(57%)	(52%)	34%*

\* denotes statistically different to average.

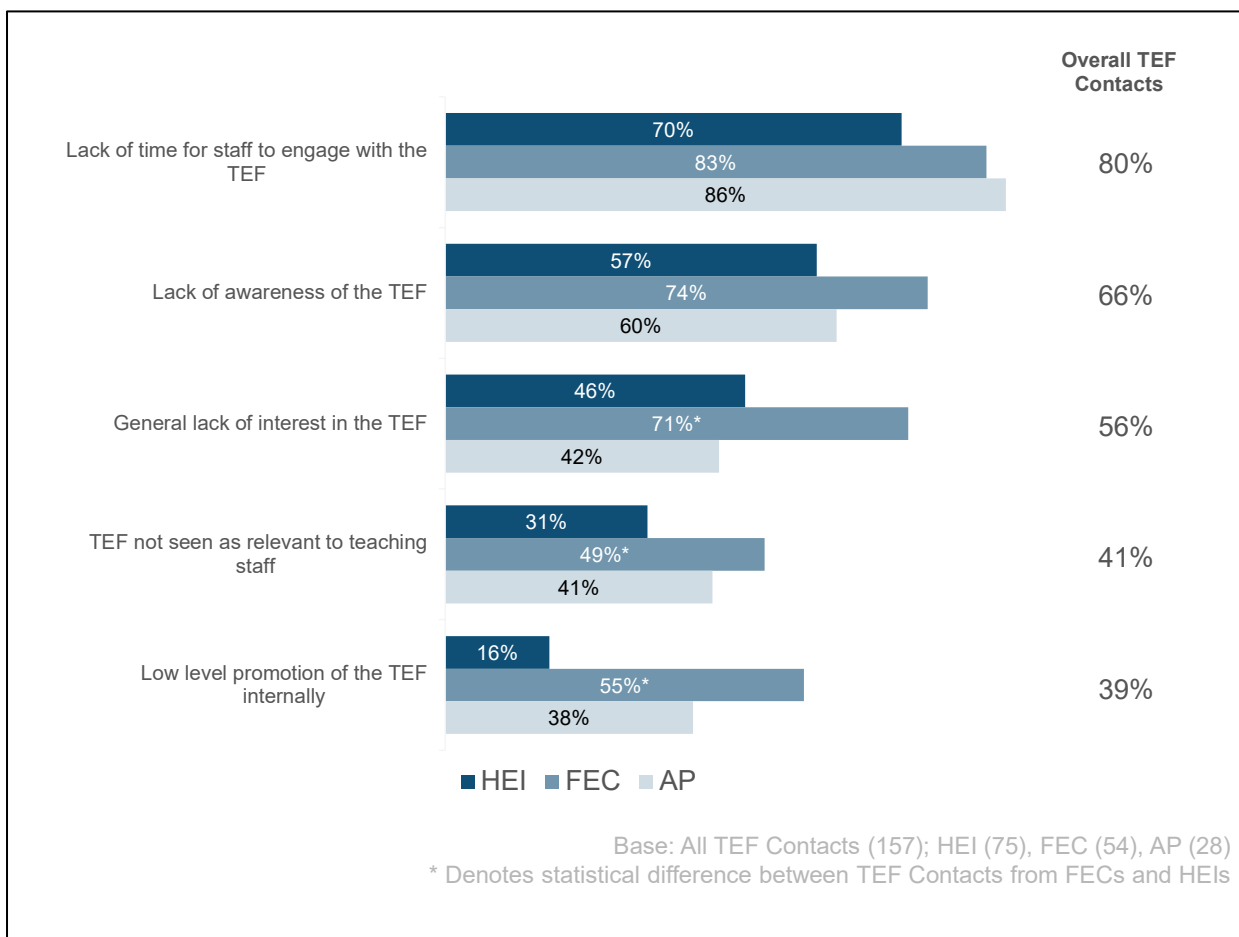
( ) denotes base size between 25 and 49 (figure still included).

3.147 TEF Contacts reported whether they considered a series of factors to be a barrier to wider engagement with the TEF within their provider. Across the cohort, the most considerable barrier to engaging with the TEF was the lack of time staff had to engage with the TEF, with four in five (80%) TEF Contacts perceiving this to be at least a minor barrier. The other key barrier perceived by TEF Contacts was a general lack of awareness of the TEF – two-thirds (66%) felt this was a barrier to some extent.

3.148 Less significant barriers to wider engagement of the TEF from the perspective of TEF Contacts were the perception amongst teaching staff that the TEF was not relevant to them (41%), and the low level of promotion of the TEF internally (39%).

3.149 As illustrated in Figure 3.18, respondents from FECs were more likely than those from HEIs to say a number of the factors mentioned were a barrier to wider engagement with the TEF within their provider.

**Figure 3.18 Extent to which TEF Contacts think the following are barriers, preventing wider engagement with the TEF**



### 3h Utilising the TEF

3.150 By awarding providers a Gold, Silver or Bronze award, TEF aims to be a mechanism which can assist applicants to Higher Education in making informed choices about where to study. With this in mind, a key focus of this evaluation was to understand providers' approaches to promoting their TEF award.

3.151 From the qualitative phase of the study, it became clear that the majority of providers do take active steps to promote their award, but the extent to which they do so varies considerably. It appears the level of promotion is chiefly contingent on the level of the award in absolute terms and, to a lesser extent, relative terms (compared to competing providers). Indeed, there was evidence from discussions that a minority of providers do not mention their award if they are unhappy with the

outcome. This reveals the impact providers perceive the award may have on their reputation amongst applicants.

*“No, if we got Silver this year we would [promote it], but [we’re] currently desperately trying to keep it quiet. Generally, our competitors have Silver, so [we] don’t want to promote it”*

Academic Contact at Bronze award HEI

3.152 In the main, Gold and Silver awards are seen as ‘promotable’, and, conversely, Bronze is viewed much less positively, especially when applicants’ knowledge of what this means is considered to be limited. This reflects themes explored earlier: the knowledge of the mechanism underpinning the TEF is limited, meaning university staff and students (and by extension, applicants) might not fully appreciate that all providers with a TEF award have already met the requirements of the quality assessment system in home nation. Or even if applicants do appreciate this, TEF and Academic Contacts feel it could damage the provider’s reputation nonetheless, by the very nature of an award-based system where Bronze award providers are seen as performing less well compared to others. Perhaps more investment is required in reshaping the narrative around the TEF because currently Bronze awards are not always seen as valuable amongst TEF applicants (see Sections 4c and 4g for the applicant perspective on this).

3.153 Irrespective of these discussions, the TEF award a provider receives is generally not seen as ‘the be all and end all’, particularly for providers who have a high existing reputation. For these providers, a TEF award is seen as an ‘additional’ selling point, not necessarily something a provider would ‘lead’ with on their promotional materials. This possibly reflects the relative novelty of the TEF; for providers with a distinguished history, a ‘poor’ TEF award is unlikely to diminish their reputation amongst applicants and students. Perhaps, then, the TEF is of greater value to providers without this historic eminence.

*“It’s not the only positive [thing] about the university, so it wouldn’t drown everything else out.”*

TEF Contact at Gold award HEI

3.154 The qualitative discussions revealed that TEF awards were typically promoted through the following channels: the provider’s prospectus (including other promotional materials like leaflets and adverts); its website; social media channels; and at recruitment fairs. There were a couple of TEF and Academic Contacts from the same provider who felt more could be done to promote the award. This may reveal a disconnect between staff involved in the TEF at a provider and a provider’s marketing department.

*“It’s on the promotional material, along with the NSS scores, but it’s not particularly overt. I’m not sure if we’d have made more of it if we’d got Gold, but perhaps we would have.”*

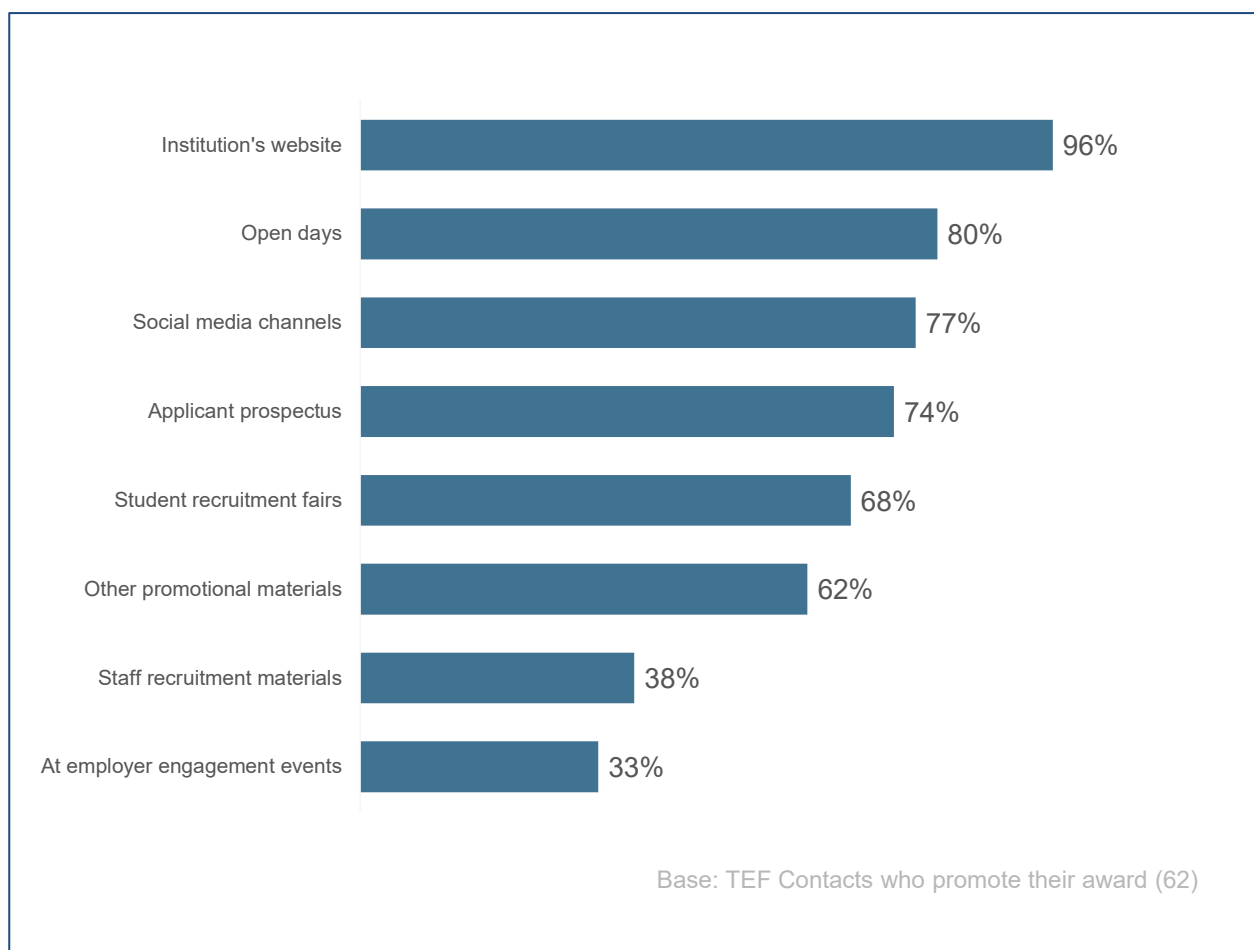
TEF Contact at Silver award FEC

- 3.155 As a result of these discussions looking at the channels through which the TEF is promoted, a section of the quantitative survey looked at the most common ways in which TEF awards are promoted and the reasons why they are not promoted by particular providers.
- 3.156 Of the providers who applied for a TEF award in 2016-17 (Year 2), the majority promoted the TEF award they received. Exactly two-thirds (66%) said they used the TEF award they had received in 2017 on external promotional materials. Mirroring the qualitative findings, over nine in 10 providers who received a Gold or Silver award promoted the TEF (93% and 92% respectively) compared to just 12% of Bronze-holding providers<sup>16</sup>, so there appears to be a clear bias towards promoting higher level awards, most likely because these are perceived as a ‘good’ award.
- 3.157 On average, providers who do promote their award do so through more than five different channels, suggesting providers feel the TEF can make a difference to the way they are perceived by applicants, and are investing energy in disseminating this information.
- 3.158 As Figure 3.19 shows, the most common channel by which the TEF awards are externally promoted is the provider’s website (96%). The next most commonly mentioned channel the TEF award had been promoted was during open days (80%), which, as Section 4j reinforces, is a critical juncture in the applicant’s decision-making process.

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<sup>16</sup> Please note, this question was only asked of TEF Contacts so the base size is relatively low: Gold: 29; Silver: 53; Bronze: 17).

**Figure 3.19 Places TEF Contacts said their provider's award was promoted**



3.159 Reinforcing assertions that a Bronze award is viewed negatively by the Higher Education community, during interviews TEF Contacts who did not promote their award typically said this was because they felt a Bronze award was not a cause for celebration. Others simply felt the TEF was not representative of the quality of their provider's learning and teaching, considering it to oversimplify their offer.

*"We do not believe that the award properly reflects what we offer. Prospective students to our institution apply on the basis of other criteria."*

TEF Contact at Provisional award AP

## 4. Applicant views and use of TEF

### 4a Introduction

- 4.1 This chapter seeks to evaluate the TEF from the perspective of applicants, i.e. individuals who submitted an application for an undergraduate degree at a UK Higher Education provider for the academic years 2018-19 or 2019-20, by March 2018. At the point of applying, the most recent TEF awards available for use by applicants were for 2017 (TEF Year 2).
- 4.2 The findings are taken from an online quantitative survey with 2,838 applicants, and follow-up in-depth interviews with 30 applicants. Fieldwork took place in Spring 2018.
- 4.3 The chapter covers applicants' levels of awareness of the TEF, their self-reported and tested knowledge of the TEF and the way that applicants used the TEF in their decision making process. In addition to this, the chapter considers the impact that the TEF had on their perception of providers, their satisfaction with the choices that they made and how TEF compares to other factors used in the decision-making process.
- 4.4 Throughout the chapter, analysis has been conducted on different groups of applicants. Table 4.1 summarises these different 'bases' for each section of the chapter. This should provide a useful reference tool when reading the report.
- 4.5 A Glossary of terms appears at the end of this report.

**Table 4.1 Applicant bases used for different analyses**

Analysis / Section	All applicants	Aware of TEF at time of application	Aware of TEF at time of application and at least some knowledge	Aware of TEF at time of application and aware of TEF award of any chosen HE provider	Aware of TEF at time of application and aware of TEF award of first choice HE provider
Base	2,838	1322	1015	1098	863
Awareness and knowledge of TEF	✓				
Understanding of TEF			✓		
Correct knowledge of TEF award of chosen HE providers		✓			
Sources of TEF information		✓			
Use of TEF in decision making	✓				
Impact of TEF awards on perception of HE provider and their teaching quality					✓
Impact of TEF awards on provider choice	✓			✓	
Satisfaction with information used and confidence in chosen HE providers	✓				
Relationship of TEF with other information sources used to assist decision making	✓				
Segmenting the applicant population by information used	✓				

## 4b Awareness and knowledge of the TEF

- 4.6 The first TEF award ratings were announced publicly in June 2017, with the second-year awards announced in June 2018, just prior to the beginning of the fieldwork period for this research. Applicants' levels of awareness of TEF were measured, along with measures regarding how much they knew about the TEF and when they gained this knowledge.

### Overall awareness and knowledge of the TEF

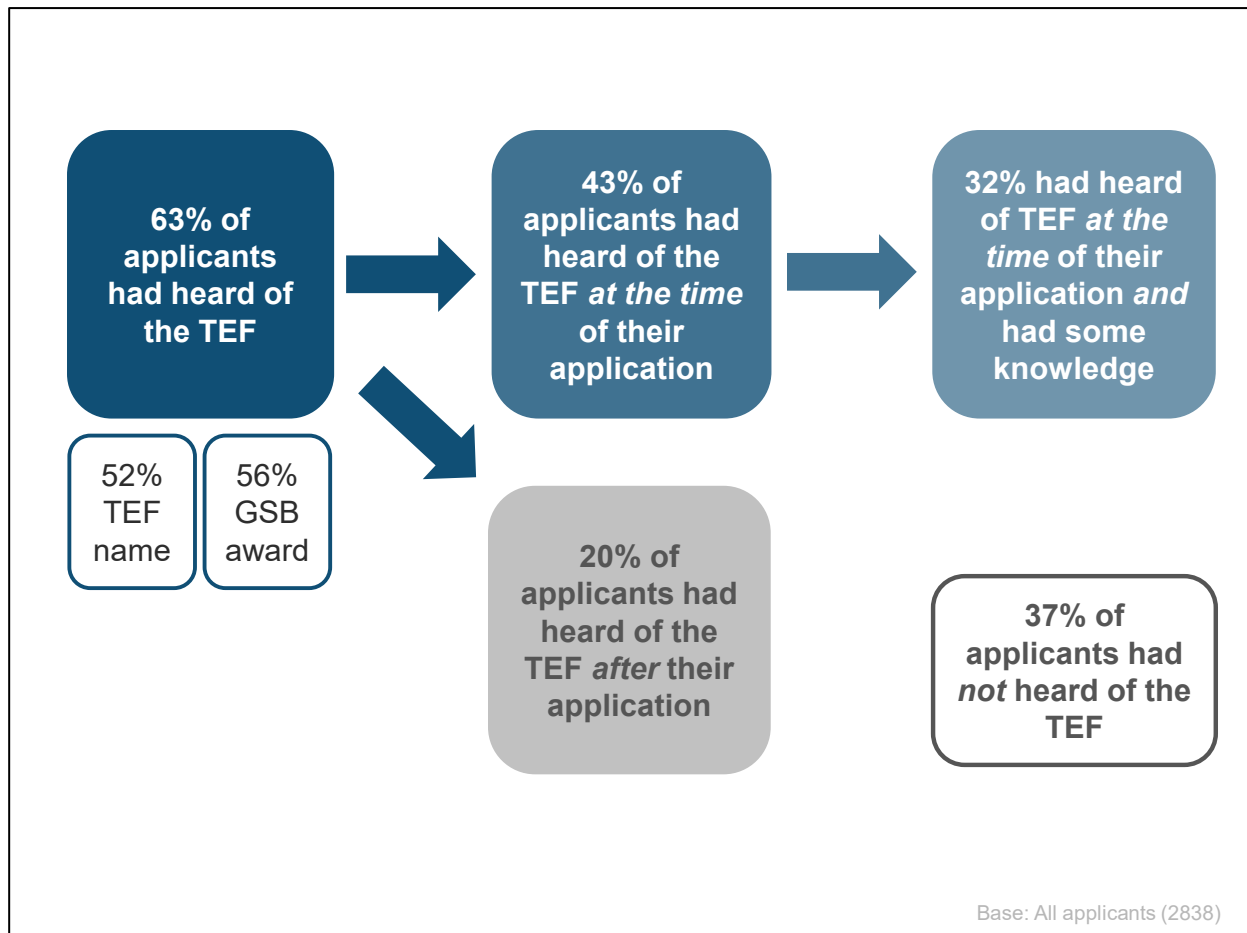
- 4.7 Applicants were first asked about their basic awareness of the TEF. Applicants who had heard the TEF name, or had heard of the awards associated with the TEF (Gold, Silver, Bronze or Provisional), were considered to have been 'aware of TEF'. **Amongst all applicants, 63% were aware of TEF** (52% had heard of the name and 56% had heard of the associated awards).
- 4.8 A key objective of the evaluation is to explore the use and impact of TEF on applicant decision making. It is important therefore to focus on those who became aware of TEF *before or while making their application* (and who therefore had the opportunity to use it in their decision making). **Amongst all applicants, 43% were aware of TEF at the time of their application** (6% before thinking about where to study; 28% while considering where to study and 9% when narrowing down choices).
- 4.9 Applicants were then asked about their knowledge of TEF. An applicant was considered to have some knowledge of TEF if they reported that they were aware of TEF and knew a little, a fair bit, or a lot about the TEF. **Amongst all applicants, 32% were aware of TEF at the time of their application and had least some knowledge of the TEF<sup>17</sup>.**

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<sup>17</sup> Please note that while awareness of TEF was confirmed in the survey as being before or during the application process, knowledge might have been gained pre or post application.



Figure 4.1 Levels of applicant awareness of TEF



- 4.10 UCAS research (2018) found that 35% of applicants who had applied by the UCAS January deadline had heard of TEF before making their application<sup>18</sup>. This compares to 43% in this research. There were several methodological differences between this research and the UCAS research that may have affected the resulting awareness figures produced by these two studies.
- 4.11 One methodological difference lies in the way that each survey asked questions about awareness; this evaluation prompted for awareness of both the TEF name *and* the awards associated with TEF, and whether this was known at the time of application. The UCAS research by contrast formally describes TEF and asks whether applicants had heard of TEF prior to applying through UCAS. Beyond this key difference there are also subtle differences in the wording of the awareness questions and the measurement of responses, which means that questions asked across the two surveys to establish ‘knowledge’ are not directly comparable.
- 4.12 The timing of the fieldwork was also different between the two pieces of research and may also have had an unknown bearing on results. UCAS fieldwork took place

<sup>18</sup> UCAS (June 2018), ‘The Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) and demand for full-time undergraduate higher education’

at the point of submitting an application, whereas fieldwork for this evaluation took place in Spring.

## Awareness and knowledge of the TEF by key sub-groups

- 4.13 As shown in Table 4.2, the TEF award of applicants' first choice HE provider was closely associated with their awareness and knowledge of the TEF. Applicants whose first choice provider achieved a Gold TEF award were more likely to be aware of the TEF at the time of application and to have some knowledge of the TEF (45%, compared with 30% Silver and 25% Bronze). Applicants whose first choice HE provider did not receive a TEF award were less likely to have some knowledge (16%). There was also an association with university tariff; those applying to universities with a high average tariff were more likely to be aware of TEF when applying and have some knowledge (38% compared to 27% medium and 28% low).
- 4.14 Students domiciled in the UK were more likely to be aware of TEF at the time of application and to have some knowledge (35%) in comparison to both EU students (26%), and international students (17%)<sup>19</sup>. Among those domiciled in the UK, POLAR Quintile 2-5 applicants were most likely to have knowledge of the TEF (40%). This compared to 33% of POLAR Quintile 1 applicants.
- 4.15 There were some differences as well by the type of course students applied to. Those applying to an undergraduate course that was not a degree were less likely than average (32%) to be aware of TEF at the time of application and to have some knowledge of the TEF (13%), as were those applying to an Arts subject (21%). In contrast, those applying to a Natural Sciences courses were more likely to have some knowledge of the TEF (37%).
- 4.16 There were also notable demographic differences in levels of knowledge of the TEF at the time of application<sup>20</sup>:
- Younger applicants were more likely to have some knowledge of the TEF. (39% of applicants aged 18 or under, compared to 24% of applicants aged 19-21 and 22% aged over 21).
  - Male applicants were also more likely to have some knowledge of TEF (39% compared with 29% of female applicants).
  - White applicants were slightly more likely to have some knowledge of the TEF (34% compared to 31% of BAME applicants).

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<sup>19</sup> This compares to 19% for UK domiciled students, 9% for EU domiciled students and 10% for non-EU domiciled students, as determined by UCAS 2018 report cited previously.

<sup>20</sup> By age and gender, these subgroup differences also held *within* the award type of applicants' first choice HE provider: while younger applicants, and male applicants were more likely to select a Gold awarded provider, this was not the only driver for their heightened awareness.

- Applicants whose parents had a degree were slightly more likely to have some knowledge of the TEF (35% compared with 32% of those without).
- Applicants with a disability were less likely to have some knowledge of the TEF than those without (29% compared with 33%); there was no difference by whether applicants had special educational needs.
- Applicants to HE providers based in Northern Ireland were notably less likely to be aware of TEF at the time of application (6%) or to have some knowledge at the time of application (3%).

**Table 4.2 Awareness and knowledge of TEF by demographic profile**

Subgroup	Base (All)		Aware of TEF at time of application	Aware of TEF at time of application <i>and</i> some knowledge
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,838</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>43%</b>	<b>32%</b>
<b>TEF award of first choice provider</b>				
Gold	999	%	56%*	45%*
Silver	1,187	%	41%*	30%*
Bronze	232	%	36%*	25%*
Provisional	18	%	{ }	{ }
No award	319	%	25%*	16%*
<b>Location of first choice provider</b>				
England	2,318	%	45%*	35%*
Northern Ireland	56	%	6%*	3%*
Scotland	286	%	36%*	23%*
Wales	116	%	39%	31%
<b>Tariff of first choice provider</b>				
High	1,644	%	49%*	38%*
Medium	659	%	35%*	27%*
Low	372	%	41%	28%
<b>Domicile</b>				
UK	2,234	%	46%*	35%*
EU	345	%	38%*	26%*
International	69	%	29%*	17%*
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	670	%	48%*	39%*
Female	1,669	%	41%	29%*
<b>Age</b>				
18 or under	2,399	%	51%*	39%*
19-21	307	%	34%*	24%*
21+	118	%	31%*	22%*
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
White	1,804	%	45%*	34%*
BAME	552	%	41%	31%

\* denotes statistically different to average

{ } denotes base size under 25

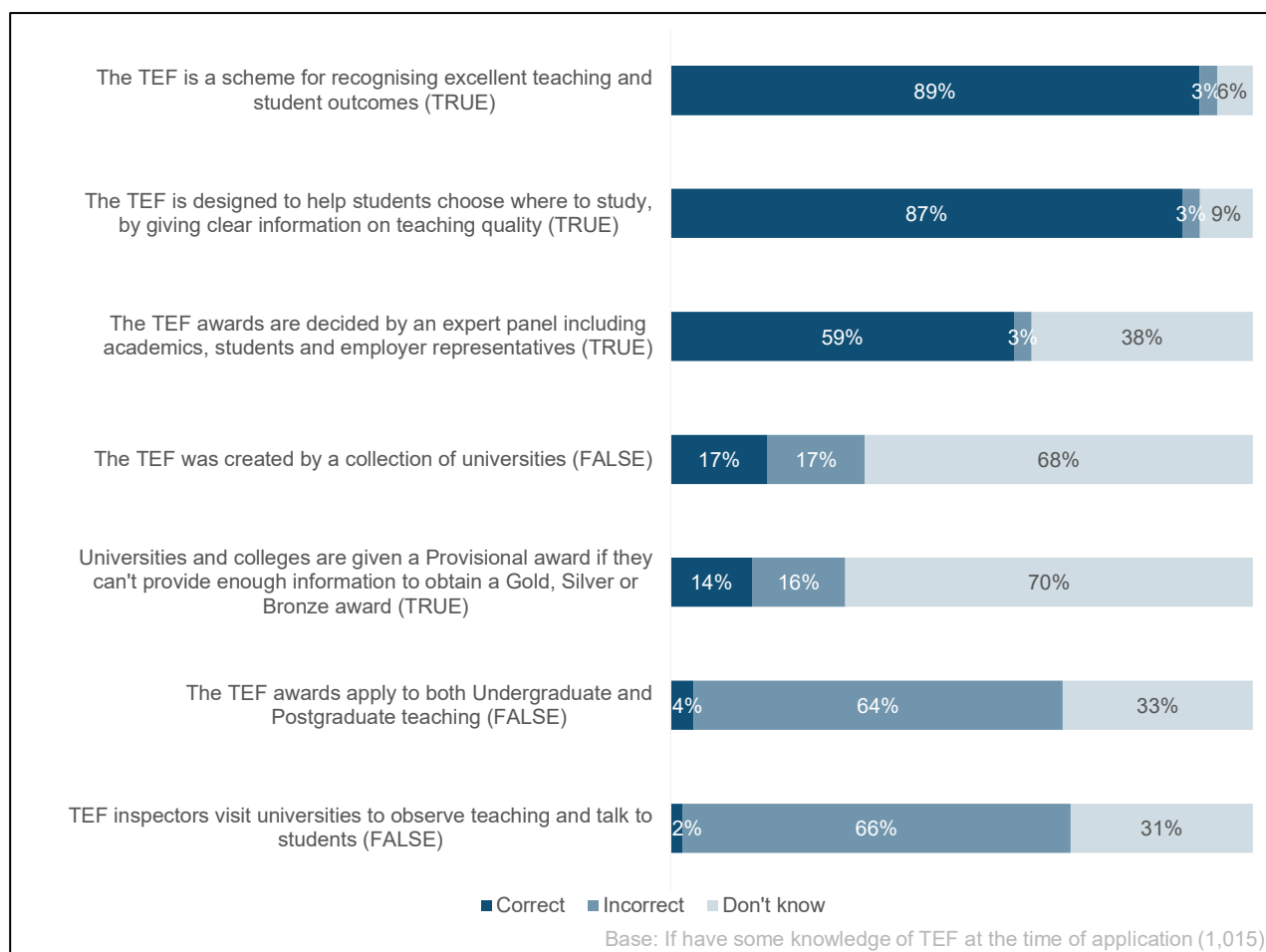
## 4c Understanding of the TEF

- 4.17 In addition to investigating levels of applicants' self-reported awareness and knowledge of the TEF, the research also examined applicants' understanding of its purpose, the methodology by which awards are given and the criteria that informs the TEF.

### Understanding of the TEF background and purpose

- 4.18 Applicants who were aware of TEF at the time of their application and who had some knowledge of TEF (32% of all applicants, as shown in Figure 4.1) were asked whether they thought a number of statements about the background and purpose of TEF were true or false. The question was designed to contain 4 true statements and 3 untrue statements which were shown in a random order.
- 4.19 As shown in Figure 4.2 there is fairly widespread *prompted* understanding of two of the key objectives of TEF. The vast majority (89%) of applicants aware of TEF at the time of their application with some knowledge of the TEF correctly answered that the TEF is a scheme for recognising excellent teaching and student outcomes (although the title of the award makes this fairly explicit). Similarly, 87% correctly answered that it is designed to help students choose where to study by giving clear information on teaching quality.

**Figure 4.2 Accuracy of applicant response to statements regarding TEF background and purpose**



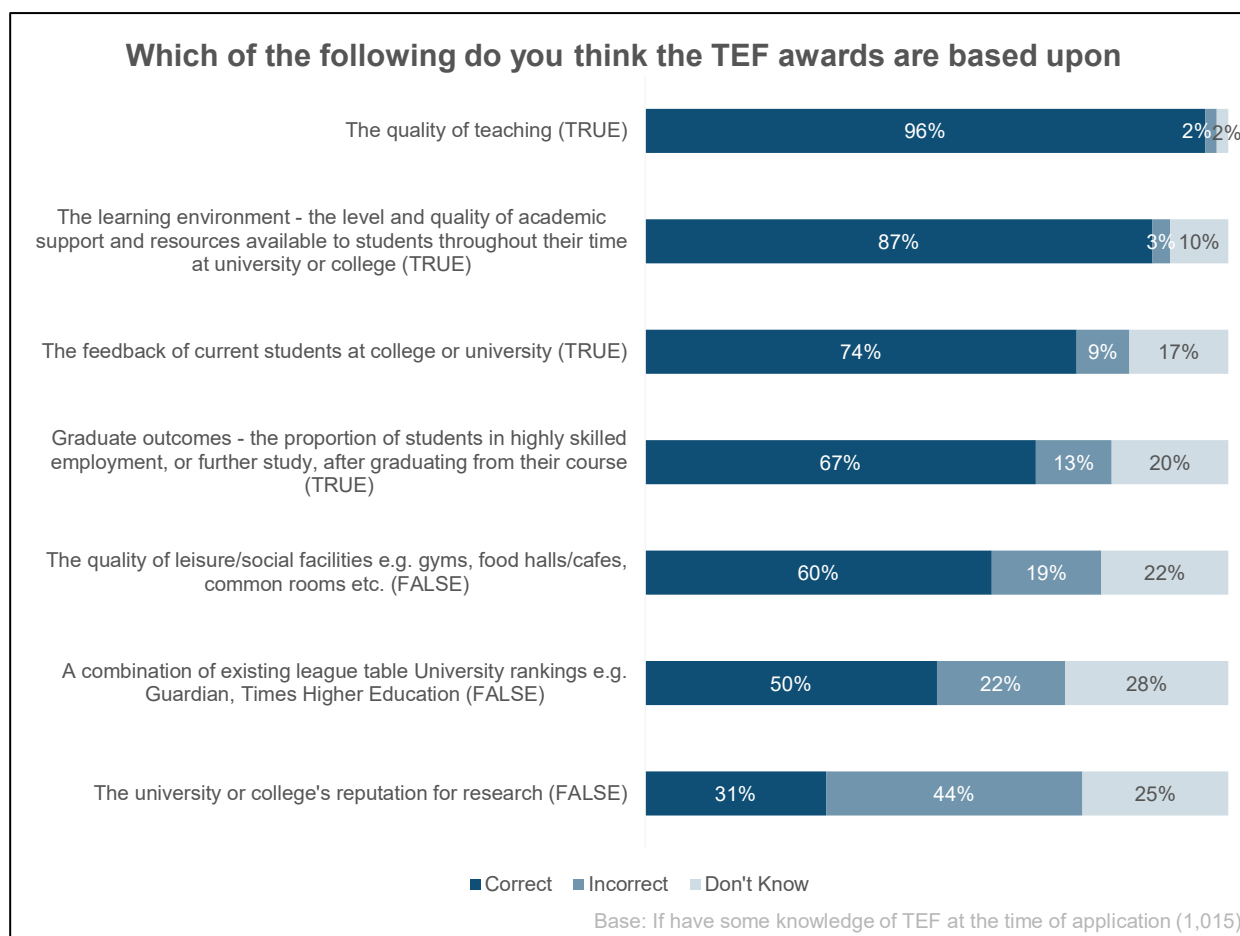
- 4.20 The largest misconceptions related to the TEF award being determined following an official inspection (66% said that this false statement was true, with only 2% correctly identifying the statement as false), and that the TEF applies to both Undergraduate and Postgraduate teaching (64% stated this false statement was true). The first of these misconceptions was a key theme that emerged from the qualitative interviews and is discussed later in this section.
- 4.21 Two statements were also met with a particularly high level of ‘don’t know’ responses, indicating a lack of understanding around these issues. These statements were that ‘universities and colleges are given a Provisional award if they can't provide enough information to obtain a Gold, Silver or Bronze award’ (70%) and that ‘the TEF was created by a collection of universities’ (68%). This reveals, then, that applicants can be understood to feel uncertain regarding the status of Provisional awards and that they are also uncertain about the origin of the awards in terms of the HE providers or bodies that brought about its creation.
- 4.22 For applicants aware of TEF when applying and with some knowledge of the TEF, 41% correctly responded to between 0-2 statements about TEF background and purpose, 59% to between 3 and 5 statements and less than 1% to 6 or 7 statements. The mean number of statements answered correctly was 2.7 and this deviated little across subgroups.

- 4.23 Although some correlation between applicants' self-reported knowledge of the TEF and their explicit understanding of what informs the TEF might be anticipated, this did not appear to be the case. Mean scores were 2.6 for those with 'a little' TEF knowledge, 2.8 for those who knew a 'fair bit', and 2.7 for those who knew 'a lot'. The same statements were generally answered correctly or incorrectly for each group, with one exception: the statement 'the TEF was created by a collection of universities' was correctly identified as false by 29% who knew 'a lot' compared to 15% that knew 'a little' (15%).

## Understanding of the TEF criteria and metrics

- 4.24 Applicants who reported that they were aware of TEF at the time of application and had some knowledge of the TEF were assessed for their understanding of the criteria that TEF awards are based on. The question was designed to contain 4 statements that were true and 3 statements that were untrue.
- 4.25 As shown in Figure 4.3, nearly all (96%) correctly answered that the TEF is based upon the quality of teaching, whilst 87% knew that it is based upon the learning environment as well. Applicants also commonly correctly identified that the TEF was linked with student feedback (74%) and graduate outcomes (67%) and *not* with the quality of leisure or social facilities (60%).
- 4.26 However, only 31% of applicants correctly identified that the TEF is *not* based upon research reputation (with a greater proportion – 44% – incorrectly stating that TEF was based on this) while 50% correctly identified that it is *not* based upon league table ranking.

**Figure 4.3 Accuracy of applicant response to statements regarding the criteria covered by the TEF**



- 4.27 Amongst applicants who were aware of TEF when applying and had some knowledge of the TEF, 7% answered 0-2 statements correctly about the criteria covered by the TEF, 62% 3-5 statements, and 31% 6-7 statements. The mean number of correct answers was 4.6. There were no differences when considering this by reported levels of awareness of the TEF, with mean scores for those with 'a little knowledge' and those that 'knew a lot' about the TEF of 4.5 and 4.8 for those who knew a 'fair bit'.
- 4.28 At an overall level, therefore, applicants were able to correctly respond to statements about the TEF criteria (mean of 4.6) than they were to statements regarding the background and purpose of the TEF (2.7).

## Understanding of the TEF – findings from the qualitative interviews

4.29 When exploring applicant understanding in more detail in qualitative interviews<sup>21</sup>, applicants were generally aware that an objective of the TEF was linked to assessing or improving teaching quality of providers.

*“[It’s] so that they can improve themselves. They want to score highly so they improve themselves and as a result provide better teaching for students.”*

Female, 18 and under, first choice award Unknown

4.30 Unlike the quantitative research where TEF criteria and metrics were prompted, very few applicants spontaneously mentioned learning environment or student outcomes as part of TEF, inferring from that name that it is exclusively focussed on teaching quality. This was found for both those who were aware and used the TEF, and those who were aware or unaware, but did not use the TEF in their decision-making.

4.31 Applicants displayed various unprompted misconceptions about the TEF when discussing their knowledge of the awards, for example:

- Bronze awards indicate ‘under achievement’, rather than an achievement beyond satisfactory practice (this is discussed in greater detail below);
- Award levels link directly to the fees providers are entitled to offer, with Bronze recipients not able to raise their fees to the higher level;
- TEF provides a ranking system of HE providers’ teaching quality, similar to a league table (which was expected to be in line with league table results).

4.32 Additionally, there was little understanding of what, in particular, was meant or assessed as part of ‘teaching quality’. A small group of applicants generally thought the awards were determined via assessment of lecturer performance in ‘Ofsted-like’ inspections, with limited awareness of the actual assessment and benchmarking process used to determine the award level. Those who made this assumption referenced sitting in on lectures, reviewing the course content and delivery, assessing professors and tutors for their ability to deliver the material and reviewing student progress across the course, and then using this to rate or grade the university on these factors to produce an overall score. Some also included aspects of learning environment in this assessment, such as viewing available facilities and resources.

*“I imagine it’s an Ofsted for universities.”*

Male, 18 and under, first choice Gold award

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<sup>21</sup> Again, as discussed in the methodology section, when interpreting findings from the qualitative strand, it is worth remembering that this was purposively sampled with groups of specific interest targeted.



4.33 These findings are consistent with previous qualitative research by the Office for Students (OfS) on TEF awareness. This OfS research found that awareness of TEF was ‘patchy and inconsistent’ and articulated a number of key misconceptions about the TEF award. These included ‘that assessments are done using observation of lectures, in the style of Ofsted inspections of schools; that fees will be increased in line with awards (i.e. higher fees at Gold-rated providers, lower fees at Bronze-rated); and ratings will closely match current provider reputations.’<sup>22</sup>

4.34 Once applicants became aware (through their own research or during the qualitative interview), they were typically surprised by the range of information taken into account. Use of NSS and DLHE metrics, which some applicants had knowledge of, were also positively received, as was the focus on continuation rates and student outcomes (which was felt to be somewhat unique). Knowing the breadth and depth of information included in the assessment made the TEF award feel more reliable. Some mentioned that knowing this now makes them take the TEF award more seriously and proactively suggested that HE providers should cite the assessment criteria in marketing to increase the awareness, understanding and prestige of the awards.

*“Coming to understand it [the TEF award] more has helped me trust it, and now I would probably view a university lower down the rankings with a better TEF award more favourably than a university higher up with a worse award.”*

Male, 19-21, first choice Gold award

4.35 However, there was some surprise that assessment did not include observations of lectures etc., as some applicants felt that this was the best way to judge teaching capability and quality.

4.36 Applicants who were aware of TEF also commonly suggested that an overarching objective of the TEF awards was to provide an impartial tool to inform student decision-making when assessing prospective universities.

4.37 A major strength of the TEF awards was the perception of them as being unbiased, independent and as providing a truly objective view of HE provider teaching practices, which is underpinned by it being a government developed policy and a rating system that is determined by an independent panel of experts. This is in contrast to other non-governmental information sources (especially league tables), which some felt were more susceptible to bias or influence than TEF.

*“It’s probably just that they want students to have a clear, unbiased view of teaching.”*

Male, 18 and under, first choice Gold award

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<sup>22</sup> Office for Students (May 2018), ‘Report on qualitative research’ by Cragg Ross Dawson.

4.38 These findings about the credibility of TEF versus other information was consistent with previous research, which suggested that ‘the fact that TEF is a government initiative was almost invariably seen in a positive light. This lent it credibility and weight, and made clear that its assessments are done independently of providers themselves. If this were the case it suggested that the ratings would be objective and that applicants could rely on them. It also meant that TEF had a sense of permanence and could be used as a reference point in the future.’<sup>23</sup>

#### 4d Applicant awareness of TEF awards held by chosen HE provider

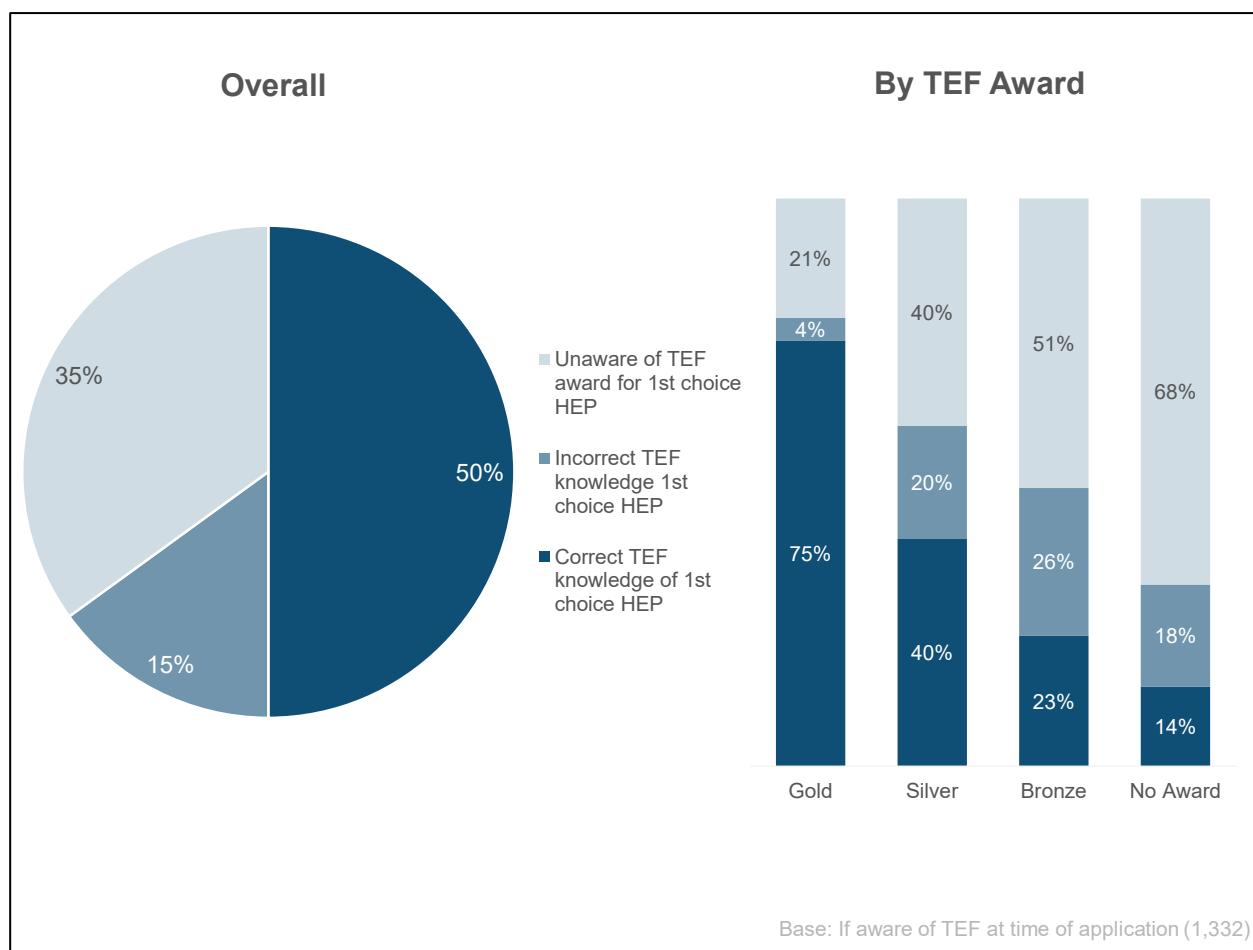
4.39 To further explore awareness and understanding of TEF, applicants were asked if they were aware of the TEF awards of all or some of their chosen providers. Among applicants that were aware of TEF at the time of their application (43% of all applicants, as shown in Figure 4.1), 82% claimed that they were aware of *at least some* of their chosen providers’ TEF awards, with 40% claiming they were aware of *all* of their chosen providers’ TEF awards.

4.40 Applicants that stated they were aware of the TEF award of at least some of their chosen HE providers were then asked to select the award type (Gold, Silver, Bronze, Provisional, no award) that they thought their *first choice provider* received. This has been analysed against the TEF award that was received in 2017 (Year 2) in order to test *actual* knowledge of the TEF award of first choice provider.

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<sup>23</sup> Office for Students (May 2018), ‘Report on qualitative research’ by Cragg Ross Dawson. Pages 20.

**Figure 4.4 Correct knowledge of first choice HE provider's TEF award**



**4.41 Among those that were aware of TEF at the time of their application, 50% correctly identified the TEF award of their first choice provider, 15% gave an incorrect response and 35% stated that they were unaware of the TEF award. As a proportion of all applicants surveyed, the proportion correctly identifying the TEF award of their first choice provider was 22%.**

**4.42** There was a strong association between knowledge of the TEF award and the specific award that providers received: 75% of applicants who were aware of the TEF at the time of application that had applied to a provider with a Gold award correctly identified their first choice provider's Gold TEF award (with only 4% incorrectly identifying the award). As Figure 4.4 shows, the proportion of individuals correctly identifying the award held by their HE provider (or to state their provider's lack of award) was much lower amongst those who applied to providers with a Silver (40%), Bronze (23%) or to providers without a TEF award (14%)<sup>24</sup>.

**4.43** One issue for those applicants whose first choice HE provider hold a Bronze TEF award, and to a slightly lesser extent a Silver award, is the high proportion who are

<sup>24</sup> The base size for those applying to HE providers with Provisional awards was too low to conduct robust analysis.

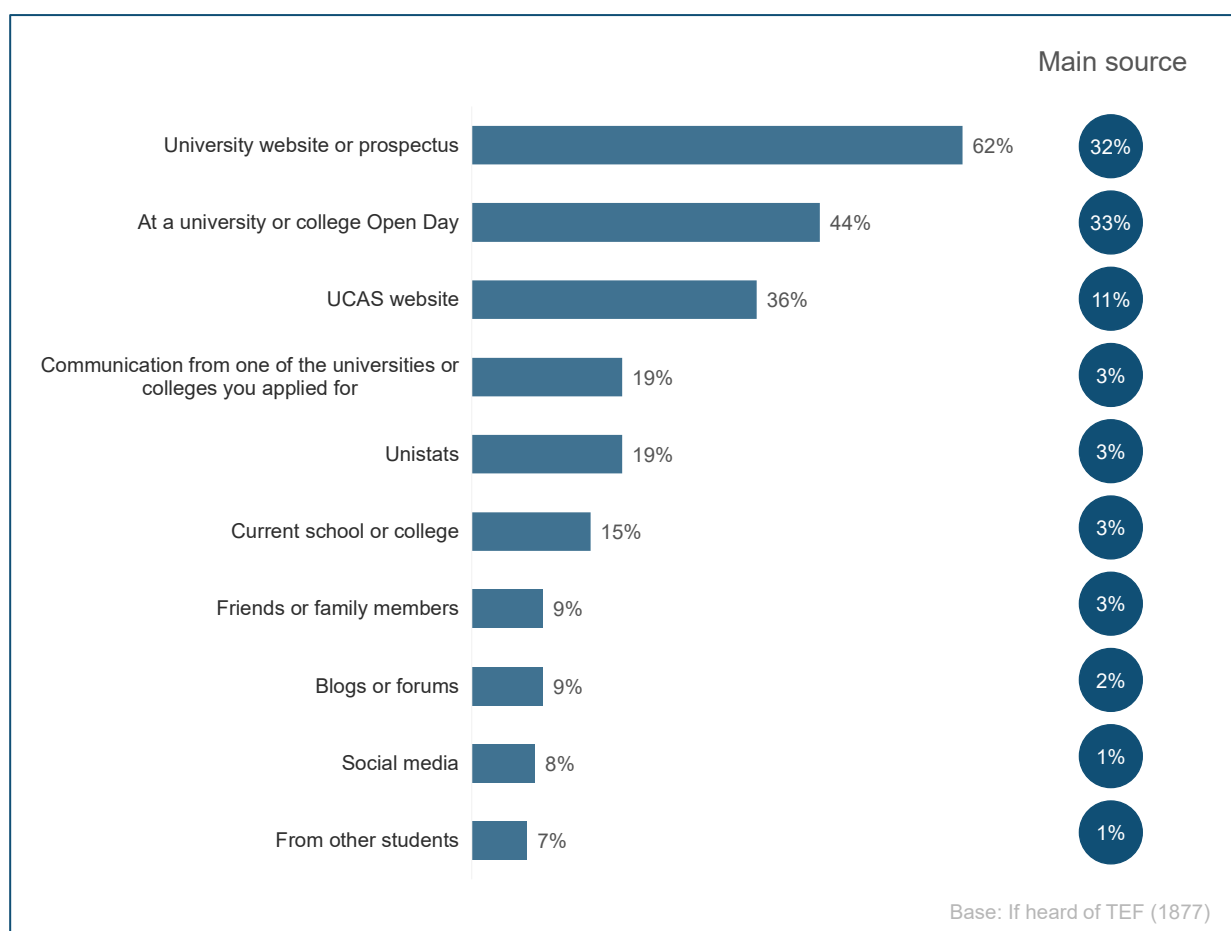
simply unaware of these awards. As discussed in later in this Chapter, this is likely to be result – at least in part – of the lack of marketing and communications from these providers about their TEF award.

- 4.44 International students aware of TEF at the time of application were less likely to correctly identify their first choice provider TEF award (38% correctly identified), compared with 50% of UK applicants and 58% of EU applicants. Male applicants aware of TEF at the time of application (56%) were more likely to identify the correct TEF award of their first choice provider than female applicants (45%).

## **4e Information sources that informed awareness of the TEF**

- 4.45 Differences in levels of awareness can in part be explained by the different information sources through which students became aware of the TEF.
- 4.46 As shown in Figure 4.5 three sources of information dominated in terms of informing awareness of the TEF. Of applicants aware of the TEF at the time of their application, 62% became aware of it through a university's website or prospectus, 44% at an open day, and 36% on the UCAS website (the most commonly used source of independent information). When asked, however, what they considered to have been the main information source through which they heard about the TEF (the 'one that stood out'), as many applicants noted university or college open days as did the university website or prospectus (33% and 32% respectively), indicating the key impact that open days can have for many applicants. In contrast, the UCAS website proved to be less influential in terms of informing awareness of the TEF (only 11% reported this as the main source for hearing about the TEF). Only 15% reported that their school or college had informed them of the TEF (3% main source).

**Figure 4.5 Sources informing TEF awareness**



4.47 Students aged 18 or under – who were more likely to have some knowledge of the TEF – were most likely to state that a university or college open day was the main source of information that they found out about the TEF from (40% compared with 20% of those aged 19+). By contrast, older students aged 19+ were more likely to have found out about the TEF through the UCAS website (14% vs. 9% of younger applicants).

4.48 As would be expected only a very small number of EU and international students noted open days as their main information source (4% and 1% respectively), with a greater emphasis on the university website or prospectus (64% and 54%), and the UCAS website (14% and 16%).

## 4f Use of TEF in decision making

- 4.49 A core objective of the evaluation is to better understand whether and how applicants are using TEF in their decision making. **Among applicants who were aware of TEF at the time of their application** (43% of all applicants as shown in Figure 4.1), **34% reported that they had used the TEF awards to help them make a decision about where to study. This equates to 15% of all applicants.**
- 4.50 There are clear ties between use of the TEF, and the TEF award held by an applicant's first choice HE provider. Applicants whose first choice HE provider had a Gold award were far more likely to use the TEF when deciding where to study (47% of those aware of TEF at time of application) than those whose first choice HE provider had a Silver (25%) or Bronze (23%) award, or had no award at all (14%), as Table 4.3 shows<sup>25</sup>. As Table 4.3 illustrates, while there were some differences of note by subgroup when looking at the all applicant base, there were few differences of statistical significance among those aware of the TEF on application (z-tests were employed to determine significance).
- 4.51 Chi-square testing was also used to identify association between use of TEF and other TEF, HE provision or demographic information. This testing was conducted on all applicants, and the results are presented in Table B.4 in Appendix B. This revealed that the strongest significant association between use of TEF and other subgroups related to the TEF award of an applicants' first choice HE provider<sup>26</sup>. There were much weaker associations across all other subgroups<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>25</sup> The figure for those whose first choice HE provider received a Provisional award has been withheld due to an unweighted applicant base of 9.

<sup>26</sup>  $X^2(4, N=2,687) = 161.736, p < 0.001$ , Cramer's  $V = .245$ .

<sup>27</sup> Cramer's  $V$  effect sizes  $< 0.1$  (weak effect)

**Table 4.3 Use of TEF in decision making by demographic profile**

	<i>Base: Those aware of TEF on application</i>		<i>Base: All</i>	
Subgroup	Base	Use	Base	Use
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,332</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>2,838</b>	<b>15%</b>
<b>TEF award of first choice provider</b>				
Gold	598	47%*	999	27%*
Silver	520	25%*	1,187	11%*
Bronze	96	23%*	232	8%*
Provisional	9	{ }	18	{ }
No award	82	14%*	319	4%*
<b>Location of first choice provider</b>				
England	1,156	35%*	2,318	16%*
Northern Ireland	6	{ }	56	1%*
Scotland	97	24%*	286	8%*
Wales	53	33%	116	13%*
<b>Tariff of first choice provider</b>				
High	845	33%	1,644	17%*
Medium	262	37%	659	13%
Low	172	32%	372	14%
<b>Domicile</b>				
UK	1,115	33%	2,234	16%*
EU	137	41%	345	15%
International	69	24%	227	8%*
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	365	34%	670	17%*
Female	774	31%*	1,669	13%*
<b>Age</b>				
18 or under	1,185	33%	2,399	17%*
19-21	105	35%	307	13%
22+	36	(33%)	118	10%
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
White	890	33%	1,804	15%
BAME	254	32%	552	13%

\* denotes statistically different to average

{ } denotes base size under 25

( ) denotes base size between 25 and 49 (figure still included).

4.52 One focus of the qualitative research was to understand why applicants who made use of the TEF chose to do so, and why those who did not – but were aware of it and valued criteria that informs the TEF such as teaching quality– chose not to.

4.53 Among those who used TEF in their decision-making process, it was usually to supplement their ‘core’ sources of information (such as HE provider websites, open days, league tables, etc.). It was often noted as being more reliable, unbiased and trustworthy than other sources, such as providers’ websites. In most cases, TEF was used to short-list potential HE providers, using the TEF award as another comparative measure of expected course quality, but was otherwise used more generally for context and background research.

*"It's [TEF] useful when used in conjunction with other sources. I looked at the Russell Group and then checked their TEF award and from that then looked at the Sunday Times Supplement to make sure their positioning aligned with their award."*

Male, 18 and under, first choice Gold award

- 4.54 In a few cases, applicants understood that the TEF award was effectively a summary of all the crucial teaching and outcomes-related information, such as quality of teaching, student perspectives, student support facilities, etc. In these minority of instances, the TEF played a greater role in the decision-making process overall. The simplicity with which this information was conveyed was welcomed, while a handful also considered the TEF to be the prime means of determining the level of teaching quality at an HE provider.

*"I found the TEF useful as it is aimed at the 'teaching side' of a University, whereas a lot of the other sources focus on accommodation and the social aspect".*

Female, 18 and under, first choice Bronze award

*"It provides a quick overview of teaching quality and does the work for you; it assesses all of the universities for you, so you don't have to compare every single uni yourself. The fact that TEF is a public body [sic] is motivating – it's less biased."*

Female, 18 and under, first choice Gold award

*"Other websites had different stats and can be overwhelming but the TEF award was more user friendly."*

Female, 19-21, first choice Gold award

- 4.55 Among those who were aware of TEF awards prior to application, but did not make use of it, this seemed to stem mostly from a lack of clarity over what the awards entailed (reflecting the fact that the TEF is a relatively new initiative in comparison with other well-established sources used in decision making e.g. league tables or traditional reputation). A handful of applicants for example commented on experiencing confusion around the polarised results between TEF and league tables (where a highly ranked university would have a Bronze or Silver TEF award), which due to the historical use of league tables as a source of information, in some cases reduced the credibility of the TEF. Similarly, lack of knowledge about the assessment process meant some believed the award process was less rigorous, making the results less reliable.

*"It's not as exclusive. It seems like it would be a lot easier to get 'excellent teaching', than to get a spot in the top 10 [in the league tables]."*

Female, 18 and under, first choice Bronze award

- 4.56 For others, TEF simply felt irrelevant to their process. For applicants who stated that they would only apply to providers who were highly-ranked (in league tables) and



traditionally highly reputable universities, the TEF award was not valuable to them. In these cases, applicants commonly stated that the quality of the university and its teaching was considered as a given, regardless of the TEF award they received.

*"I was applying to good Universities and you know that the teaching at all of them is going to be good, so it wasn't a big deal for me. Whatever TEF award [provider] gets, you know that it's good for teaching really."*

Male, 18 and under, first choice Gold award

- 4.57 While many of those who made use of the TEF awards valued its ultimate simplicity, for those that made little use of the TEF, this was a key limitation. The inability to differentiate HE providers beyond a Gold, Silver or Bronze award restricted its usability.

*"It's not detailed enough, and not all universities show which award they have, making it harder to compare and see which universities have which award."*

Male, 19-21, first choice Silver award

*"The Gold, Silver, Bronze format is very narrow - there should be a system that differentiates those at the top of 'Gold' from those that just scrape it. It also can't tell you what the services are like, or what the people are like - it gives you a very general overview of the institution"*

Male, 18 and under, first choice Gold award

- 4.58 Ultimately, the TEF award was primarily key to decision-making for applicants when they were choosing between two otherwise 'equal' HE providers. In these instances, of 'all other considerations being equal' most stated they would choose the HE provider with the better TEF award.

*"If there were two places that were exactly the same then the Gold would have one up on the Silver."*

Female, 19-21, first choice Gold award

- 4.59 When asked what would be needed to improve TEF's relevance to students during the research and application process, suggestions included:

- Needing more information about the assessment and benchmarking process to help students understand the award levels, what is considered and its value to them;
- More explanation of what the different award levels mean and what distinguishes a Gold vs. Silver vs. Bronze provider in real terms;
- More information on the reasons for the award and why that level was given, such as points for different aspects assessed. One applicant mentioned assessment breakdowns to provide more information about the provider's scoring, e.g. receiving an award for each of Teaching Quality, Learning Environment and Student Outcomes, as well as the overall award.

*“If there was a way to find why a certain uni has got a certain award that would be quite useful.”*

Female, 19-21, first choice Gold award

*“I wish there would be more explanation about these awards. Explain why certain universities got a Gold or got a Silver.”*

Male, 18 and under, first choice Bronze award

- More publicity of the awards and their purpose, including HE providers playing a greater role in raising awareness of their own award and what it means for students.

## 4g TEF impact on perception of providers and their teaching quality

4.60 One of the objectives of the evaluation is to explore the impact that TEF has had on applicant perceptions. This section explores the effect that the TEF award had on applicants' overall perception of their preferred HE provider and on the quality of teaching at that provider.

### Impact of TEF on overall perception of first choice HE provider

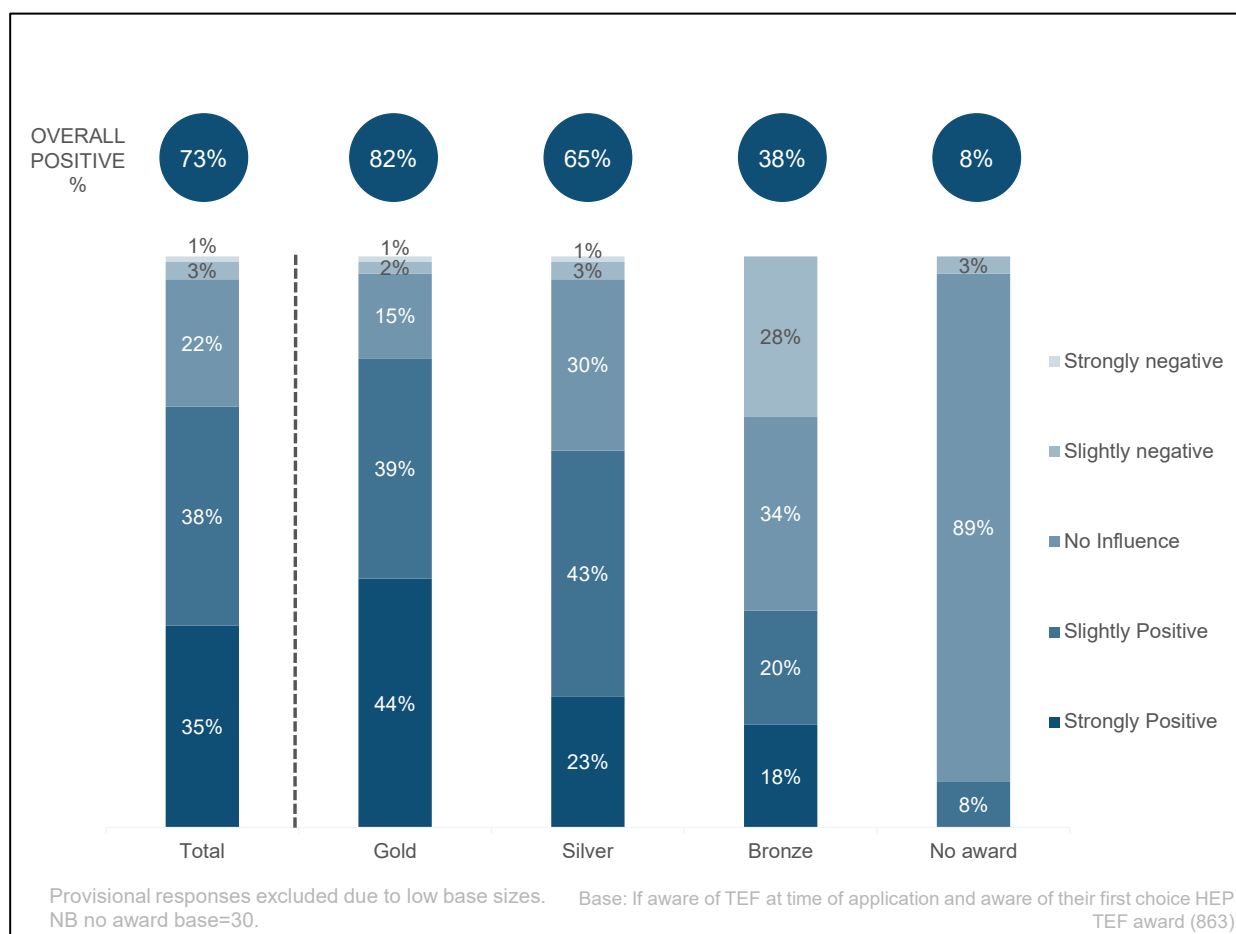
- 4.61 This section explores the influence of the TEF award of an applicant's first choice HE provider on their *overall perception of the provider*. It is focused on those applicants who were aware of the TEF at the time of their application, and said they were aware of the TEF award of their first choice provider. These applicants represented 30% of the total population surveyed (863 individuals).
- 4.62 The majority (73%) of applicants who were aware of the TEF at the time of application, and who stated that they were aware of the TEF award of their first choice HE provider, reported that the TEF award had a positive influence on their overall perception of the provider, with just 4% reporting it had a negative influence.
- 4.63 Unsurprisingly, Gold TEF awards (82%) were much more likely to result in more positive perceptions of a provider than both Silver and Bronze awards (65% and 38% respectively), as shown in Figure 4.6<sup>28</sup>.
- 4.64 While only 4% reported that their first choice provider's award had a negative influence on their perception of the provider, this rose to 28% amongst those who applied to an HE provider with a Bronze award (compared to just 2% and 4% of applicants to Gold and Silver award providers respectively). This figure is still lower

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<sup>28</sup> As discussed earlier, this relates to the *perceived* award an applicant's first choice provider received, based upon the TEF award that the applicant stated their first choice provider held, whether correct or incorrect.

than the proportion (38%) citing the Bronze award made them feel more positive towards their HE provider. Base sizes for applicants to Provisional award HE providers were too low to allow for robust analysis.

**Figure 4.6 Influence of the TEF award on overall perceptions of first choice HE provider**



4.65 Those applying to medium and low tariff HE providers as their first choice were more likely to report that the TEF award that their first choice provider received had positively influenced their perception of the provider compared with those applying to high tariff providers. 82% of applicants applying to a medium tariff provider as their first choice provider, and 80% applying to a low tariff HE provider felt the provider's TEF award influenced their perceptions positively, compared with 69% applying to a high tariff provider. Such differences by tariff held regardless of the award received.

4.66 There were no differences by age, domicile, ethnicity or POLAR quintile for the influence of providers' TEF awards on the applicants' perception of the provider.

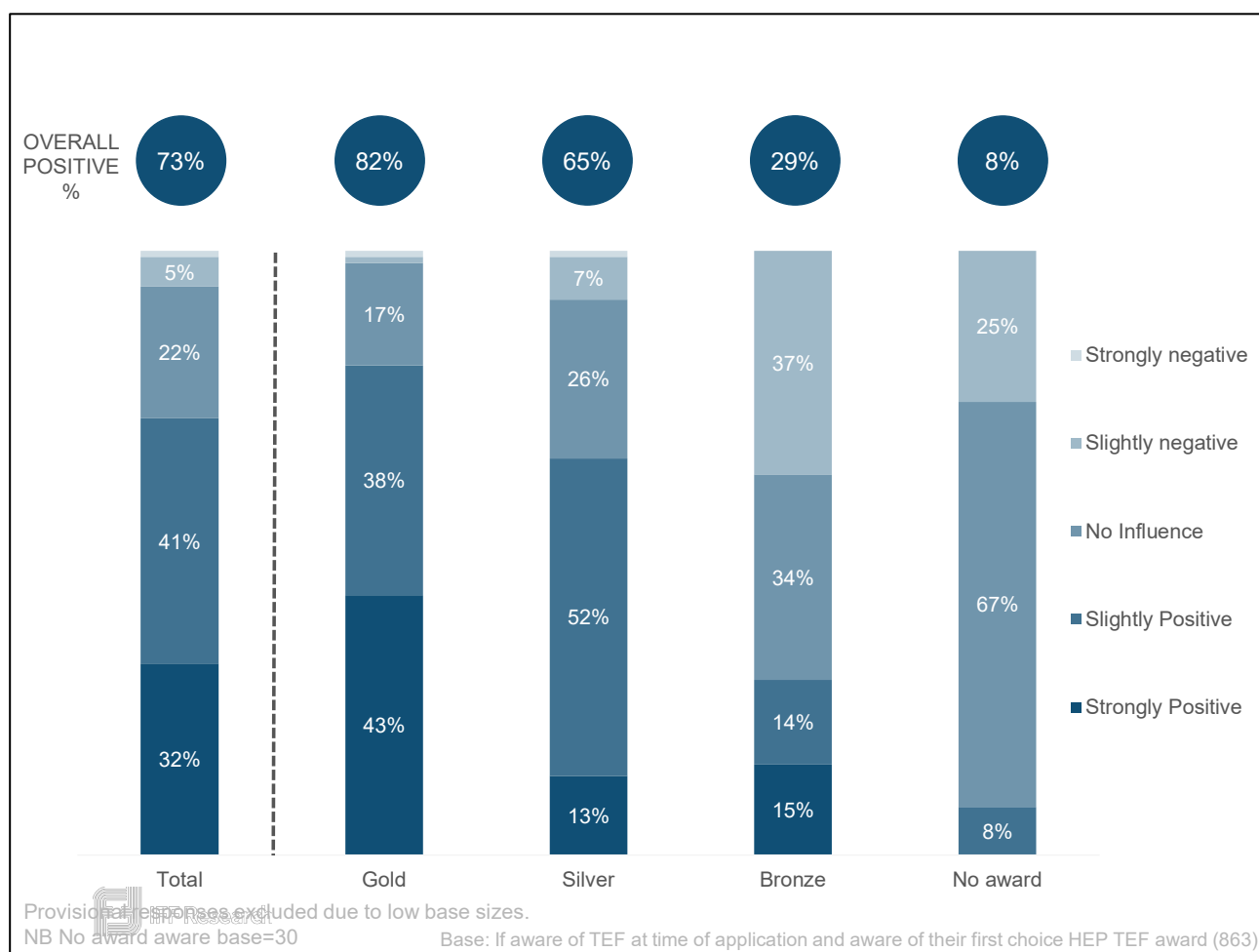
### **Impact of TEF on perception of teaching quality at first choice HE provider**

4.67 Around three-quarters (73%) of applicants that were aware of the TEF at the time of application and said they were aware of their first choice provider's TEF award, indicated that it positively influenced their view of teaching quality at their HE

provider. Only 6% of these applicants stated that it had a negative influence on their view of the teaching quality at this provider.

- 4.68 As Figure 4.7 shows, there was a strong pattern when stratified by the TEF award held by the applicant's first choice provider, with 82% reporting that the Gold award of their first choice HE provider had positively influenced their perception of teaching quality, more than the 65% of Silver award applicants and 29% of Bronze award applicants.

**Figure 4.7 Influence of the TEF award on perception of teaching quality of first choice HE provider**



- 4.69 Findings relating to the impact of the TEF award on the perception of teaching quality therefore follow a similar pattern as the impact on overall perceptions of the provider. The central difference of note relates to the impact of a Bronze award. Applicants who thought their first choice provider had received a Bronze award were more likely to say this had a negative influence (37%) on their perception of teaching quality than a positive one (29%). Conversely, 28% of applicants reported that a Bronze award had a negative influence on their overall perception of their first choice provider compared to a greater proportion (38%) citing this had a positive influence. Such differences by tariff held regardless of the award received.

- 4.70 Subgroup differences followed similar patterns as those relating to the impact on perception of the provider overall.

## **Influence of TEF awards on general perception of providers – findings from the qualitative interviews**

- 4.71 Applicants in qualitative interviews were directly asked how different TEF awards (including no award) affected, or would affect, (if they did not use the TEF in their decision making) their impression of HE providers that they were interested in applying to.
- 4.72 Amongst the qualitative interviewees, perceptions of the TEF award levels came with very clear implications for teaching quality, but tended to not dramatically affect final decisions.
- 4.73 Generally applicants did not recall learning the exact meanings of each award, but made assumptions based on the traditional interpretations of Gold, Silver and Bronze in other contexts. Of those who did receive some explanation of their meaning, this was most often directly from an HE provider, e.g. at a university open day it was explained while promoting the university's award level.
- 4.74 Gold awards were recognised as being the 'best of the best', reflecting the highest standard of teaching and increasing confidence in what a student can expect to receive. Many also assumed that those receiving a Gold award did something more to earn it, e.g. had something unique, innovative or exceptional in their teaching practices that made them stand out.

*"The uni is committed to student learning and the teaching quality is really good...students are happy."*

Female, 18 and under, first choice Bronze award

- 4.75 Silver awards did not have a clear or consistent interpretation amongst applicants; this was the award level that required the greatest degree of clarification and the where some applicants admitted to having difficulty distinguishing between the Silver and Gold awards. In some cases, a Silver award was interpreted as a 'neutral' or 'standard' level, for others it denoted 'second tier quality', while for others it was seen as being an 'above average' rating. Most described this level of award as implying good teaching, but with 'gaps' or with room for some improvement.

*"Its [teaching quality] is still decent but there is room for improvement."*

Female, 18 and under, first choice Gold award

- 4.76 The majority of applicants interviewed interpreted Bronze TEF awards to reflect sub-standard teaching quality, although a minority did suggest that a Bronze award denoted that the provider displayed average or standard quality of teaching. All applicants noted that the gap between Gold and Bronze was large, and expected that there would be substantial differences in the quality of teaching between the two groups.

4.77 Overall, Bronze awards were most often seen as reflecting negatively on a provider's teaching quality. Applicants reported that providers achieving a Bronze award suggested that – in relative terms – these providers were underperforming against other providers with regards to teaching quality and support, facilities and student outcomes in relative terms, but also – in absolute terms – it was an indication that their teaching practices were of low quality.

*"Why are you even a university? They're obviously not up to standard at all."*

Male, 18 and under, first choice Gold award

*"Tutors don't have a clue what they're doing...teachers can't teach, the facilities and support are lacking."*

Male, 18 and under, first choice Gold award

4.78 The majority of applicants who used TEF in their decision-making process stated that they often excluded Bronze awarded providers completely from their search, or said that it deterred them applying to a provider (even if other factors did persuade them to ultimately include the provider within their selection). Applicants who excluded Bronze providers completely from their search were often exclusively considering universities who achieved high league table rankings, or traditionally had a strong reputation e.g. Oxbridge, or Russell Group providers (these providers also typically received a Gold or Silver TEF award). Those who came across this situation in their application process often referenced other important information items that are more/as important to them and make up for a Bronze (or in some cases a Silver award), for example atmosphere, course modules, campus, etc.

4.79 In a minority of cases, applicants interpreted this level of award as denoting average performance (rather than below average or poor). They felt that while the HE provider was unlikely to be demonstrating high quality credentials, they may not necessarily provide a poor teaching experience (with some reference to national teaching standards needing to be met). These applicants often wanted additional information about the provider and its assessment to understand the reasons behind the award before excluding them from their list. In one case, an applicant said she would consider a Bronze over a Gold university if she had visited both and felt the Bronze was a better fit for her, choosing to follow her own judgement over the award.

*"It's still good that [provider] has an award but it would prompt me to do more research into them."*

Female, 18 and under, first choice Gold award

*"It wouldn't particularly affect my perception, it would just make me think the university could be good in other ways."*

Male, 18 and under, first choice Bronze award

4.80 As with Bronze awards, a No award classification was also seen as a deterrent, with most applicants making the assumption that the provider's teaching quality is so poor as to not qualify for a Bronze or higher award. Comments in relation to providers receiving no TEF award included language such as 'underperforming', 'unsatisfactory', 'having something to hide', and questioning the legitimacy of the provider.

4.81 The exception to this are well known universities where their reputations 'precede them'. In such instances a lack of award would not be an issue, as their quality is known and assumed.

*"I would imagine there are some universities that just don't need it. I'm not sure if [prestigious providers] have a TEF award... but they've got such a high reputation, that they don't need any more going for them."*

Male, 19-21, first choice Gold award

4.82 For a minority of applicants, it was assumed that HE providers simply had not been assessed yet or that the provider had chosen not to pursue the award. In these instances, a lack of award had no impact on their perceptions of an HE provider, as they had other information sources they could use to make a judgement.

*"It would mean either the institution felt that they were above the award, or, for whatever reason, not going to effort to get the award."*

Male, 19-21, first choice Gold award

4.83 The meaning of Provisional awards was largely unknown. Applicants commonly stated that they either had not heard of this scenario before and/or assumed the provider has not been assessed yet. In some cases, it was assumed this status was reserved for newer, less established HE providers. Due to the lack of understanding, a Provisional award was often considered a deterrent, but applicants felt they would need to explore the rationale for the award and research the provider more before making any judgement.

## 4h Impact of TEF on provider choice

4.84 One of the key objectives of the TEF is to better inform students' choices about what and where to study. This section contributes to our understanding of this by assessing the impact the TEF had on applicants' decision making process and, ultimately, on changing behaviour.

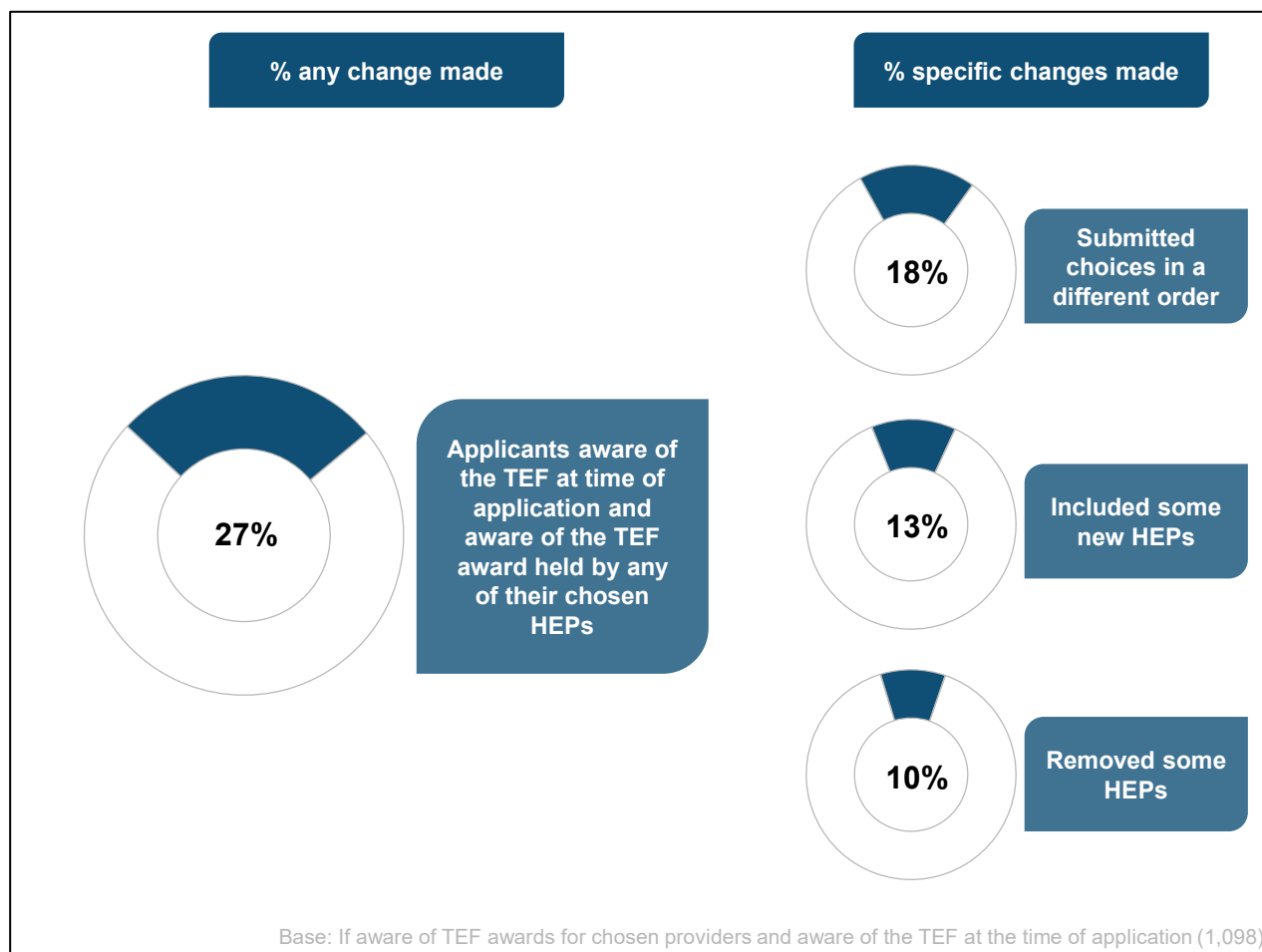
4.85 In order to analyse impact of TEF on provider choice, this section is based on applicants that were aware of the TEF at the time of application and were aware of the TEF awards of *any* of their chosen providers. This accounted for 1,098 applicants (39% of all), as shown in Table 3.1.

4.86 **Amongst this group of applicants, 27% made changes to their potential university or college choices as a result. This equates to 11% of all**

**applicants.** Subgroup differences are explored returning to the initial figure of 27% reporting any change to the submission:

- 4.87 As Figure 4.8 illustrates, the most common change related to the submitting of preferences in a different order (18%).

**Figure 4.8 Impact of TEF award on provider choice**



- 4.88 As mentioned above, 18% of those aware of the TEF award of any of their chosen HE providers and aware of TEF at the time of application reported that they changed the order of their submission as a result of the TEF awards:

*"I had planned on having [provider A] and [provider B] as my two top choices, but I changed it to [provider C] and [provider A] because of the Gold TEF received by the first University and its higher entry requirements, which suggested a higher reputation."*

Female, 18 and under, first choice Gold award

*"I had a clear idea of the five Universities I wanted, but for my second choice I seriously considered [provider A] above [provider B] after learning of their TEF award. Although their reputations are quite different, because they got the TEF award I was more confident of [provider A] - I couldn't find [provider B]'s TEF award."*

Gender unspecified, 18 and under, first choice Silver award



*"I changed [provider A] to [provider B] as my first choice, as [provider A] had Bronze."*

Male, 19-21, first choice Gold award

- 4.89 A slightly smaller proportion (13%) decided to include new HE providers in their choices as a result of viewing the TEF awards that they held.

*"I originally couldn't think of a fifth university so added [provider] as it has good quality teaching"*

Gender unspecified, 18 and under, first choice Gold award

*"One of the universities wasn't high in rankings but it had this award so I added it."*

Female, 18 and under, first choice Bronze award

*"I originally wanted to apply only to Russell Group universities but when I saw that [provider] had a higher TEF score than many Russell Group unis I changed my mind and investigated that uni as well. This became my first choice."*

Male, 18 and under, first choice Silver award

- 4.90 A further 10% removed or discounted some universities or colleges as a result of the TEF. Applicants who selected a provider with a Gold or Silver award as their first choice, were much more likely (11% and 9% respectively) to remove HE providers from their potential choices due to TEF than those whose first choice provider had a Bronze or no award (both 1%). This finding was clearly brought out in the qualitative interviews as well.

*"There was a highly respected University with a lower TEF award than my preferred University. I decided to remove the idea of going to that university as I did not see that the teaching was up to the same standard as the other university."*

Female, 18 and under, first choice Gold award

*"[Provider] had a Silver award so I decided not to apply for them - in fact I think I probably excluded all universities without a Gold award."*

Male, 18 and under, first choice Gold award

*"One University I liked had a Bronze TEF award, and a similar one I hadn't considered had Silver, so I compared them and swapped out the Bronze one."*

Female, 18 and under, first choice Silver award

*I added the [provider A] and removed [provider B] from my provisional list of choices. This happened because I already had the impression that the two universities were similar in a variety of aspects regarding student life, quality of teaching and the sorts, so in this case, their TEF results were a deciding factor in which to include as a choice.*

Female, 18 and under, first choice Silver award

4.91 Subgroup differences are explored returning to the initial applicants group of 27% reporting any change to their application:

- While there was little difference in terms of applicant likelihood to have made changes by TEF award of their first choice HE provider, applicants to providers with a medium (33%) or low (34%) mean UCAS tariff were more likely than applicants to high UCAS tariff institutions (22%) to have made any changes as a result of the TEF.
- Applicants that were dissatisfied with the information sources available to them (42%), were much more likely than those that were satisfied (24%) to have made any changes.
- Applicants from a BAME background (36%) were more likely than white applicants (23%) to have made changes.

4.92 These and other findings by key demographics are shown below in Table 4.4.

**Table 4.4 Proportion of applicants who made changes to choices as a result of TEF award**

Subgroup	Base: Aware of TEF on application & aware of awards for chosen providers		Base: All	
	Base	Any change made	Base	Any change made
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,098</b>	<b>27%</b>	<b>2,838</b>	<b>11%</b>
<b>TEF award of 1<sup>st</sup> choice provider</b>				
Gold	533	28%	999	16%*
Silver	405	26%	1,187	10%*
Bronze	73	24%	232	6%*
Provisional	8	{ }	18	{ }
No award	56	24%	319	4%*
<b>Location of 1st choice provider</b>				
England	963	27%	2,318	12%*
Northern Ireland	3	{ }	56	1%*
Scotland	70	18%	286	5%*
Wales	46	(30%)	116	12%
<b>Tariff of 1st choice provider</b>				
High	700	22%*	1,644	10%
Medium	216	33%*	659	12%
Low	137	34%*	372	11%
<b>Domicile</b>				
UK	915	27%	2,234	11%
EU	114	27%	345	10%
International	59	27%	69	9%
<b>Gender</b>				
Male	332	25%	670	12%
Female	605	27%	1,669	10%*
<b>Age</b>				
18 or under	989	25%	2,399	12%
19-21	79	38%*	307	13%
21+	25	(16%)	118	3%*
<b>Ethnicity</b>				
White	724	23%*	1,804	9%*
BAME	217	36%*	552	16%*
<b>Satisfaction with information sources</b>				
Satisfied	842	24%*	2,034	11%
Neutral	210	36%*	613	12%
Unsatisfied	42	(42%*)	167	12%

\* denotes statistically different to average

{ } denotes base size under 25

( ) denotes base size between 25 and 49 (figure still included).

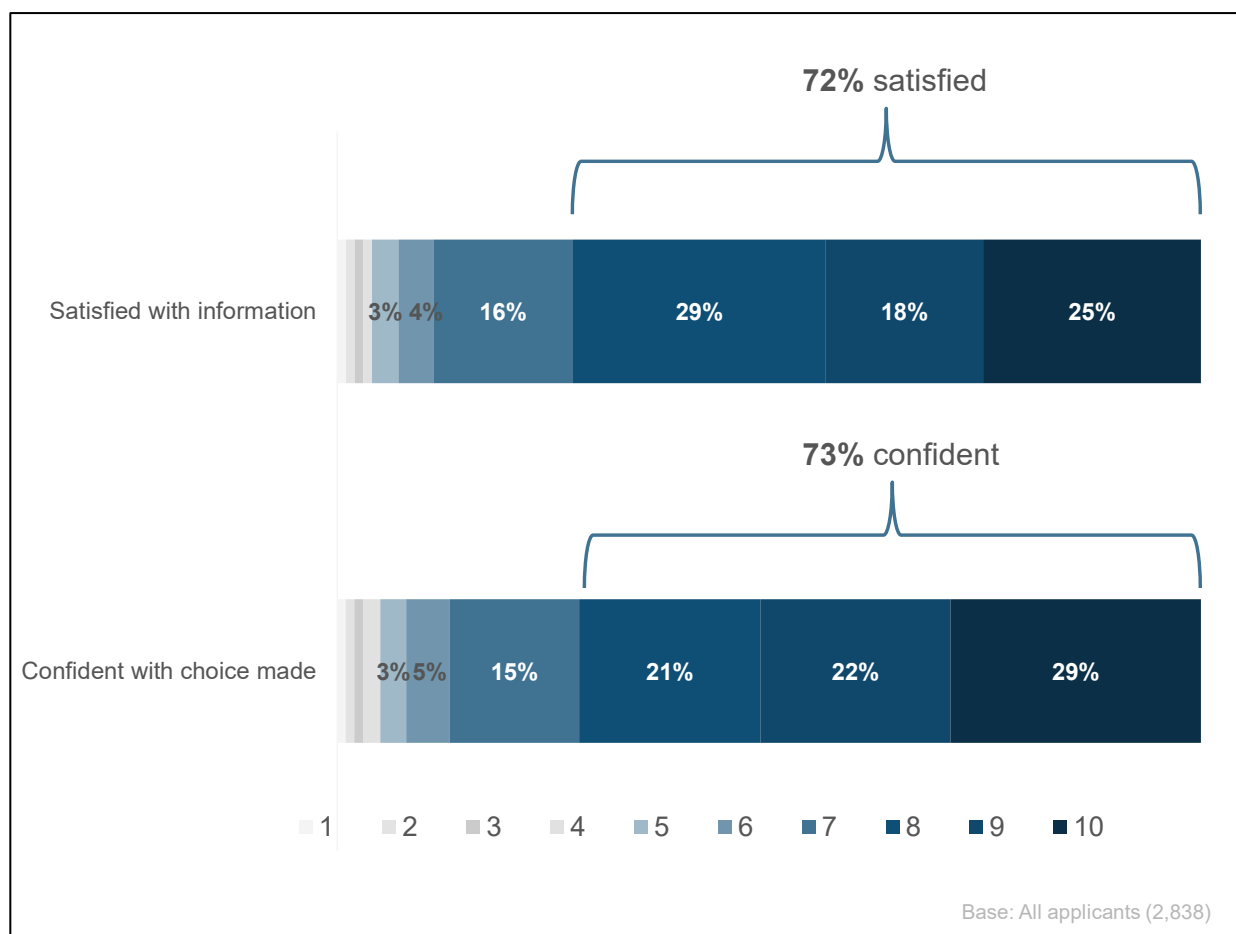
## 4i Satisfaction with choice

- 4.93 A key purpose of the TEF is to provide more information about teaching quality and student outcomes to applicants to aid their decision making process when considering where to study Higher Education. This in turn may impact on satisfaction with the information applicants used to make provider choices, and confidence in the decision made<sup>29</sup>.
- 4.94 At an overall level, applicants were largely satisfied with the information that they used when deciding where to study for their undergraduate degree, with 72% of all applicants indicating that they were satisfied, which we have identified as any score of 8 out of 10 or above. A further 20% of applicants responded with a score of 6 to 7 out of ten when rating the information that they used. Just 7% of applicants indicated that they were dissatisfied with the information by rating it with a score of 1 to 5.
- 4.95 Similarly, as Figure 4.9 shows, the majority (73%) of applicants were confident that they have applied to the right providers for them.
- 4.96 Of all applicants, 81% were both satisfied with the information they had used and confident in the choices they had made. Only 2% of applicants were satisfied but not confident and 3% confident but not satisfied. A further 3% were both dissatisfied with the information they used *and* lacked confident in the choices they had made (a response of 1-5 across both measures).

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<sup>29</sup> As well as an increase in satisfaction with decision-making, providing too much information could, for some applicants, lead to information overload and a reduction in applicants' satisfaction with decisions. CFE. (2014). Advisory study and Literature review: UK Review of the provision of information about higher education.

**Figure 4.9 Satisfaction with information used and confidence in chosen HE providers**



- 4.97 There were some subtle differences by TEF award of applicants' first choice provider. For example, applicants to Bronze award HE providers were much more likely to say that they were very satisfied with the information they used (32% giving a score of 10) than applicants to Gold award providers (22%), while they were also more likely to say that they were dissatisfied (11%, compared to 6% for applicants to Gold award providers). This indicates that applicants to HE providers with Bronze awards are more polarised in their views about the sufficiency of the information that they used to decide where to study. There were however no similar differences relating to confidence with choice.
- 4.98 Applicants that were aware of the TEF at the time of applying were more likely (79%) than those that were not (69%) to be satisfied with the information used when deciding upon their HE providers. However, of applicants aware of TEF at the time of applying, those that used the TEF in their decision making and those that did not, were equally as likely to be satisfied with information they used (both 77%). There were no differences in confidence levels between these groups.

4.99 There were some differences by provider type, with applicants to APs (14%) more likely than applicants to HEIs (7%) or FECs (0%)<sup>30</sup> to be dissatisfied with the sufficiency of the information available to them. In contrast, applicants to APs and FECs (85%) were more likely than applicants to HEIs (73%) to be confident that they had made the right choices.

4.100 There were no differences of note by HEP tariff, gender, age and domicile, although the following subgroups all exhibited different satisfaction or confidence levels:

- White applicants were more likely to be satisfied with information and confidence in their choice (76%; 77%) than BAME applicants (68%; 63%).
- Applicants that lived in POLAR Quintile 1 areas (70%), which indicates less advantaged individuals, were less likely than applicants that lived in Quintile 2-5 areas (78%) to be satisfied with the information used. Contrastingly, 87% of POLAR Quintile 1 applicants were confident in their choice, compared to 71% of POLAR Quintile 2-5 applicants.
- Applicants without special educational needs were much likely to be satisfied with the information used to decide where to study (75%) or confident in their choice of provider (74%) than those with special educational needs (63% and 62% respectively).
- Applicants that applied to their HE provider for the next academic year were more confident in their choices than those that deferring to the next academic year (73% vs. 52%).

4.101 Regression analysis was employed to explore which information items regarding HE provider choice drive applicant satisfaction with information sources and confidence with their choice (please see full list of information items in Table 4.5). The regression analysis was run using a composite value of responses to questions about how much applicants used sixteen information items when considering where to study, and how important they considered them to be.

4.102 Across all models used for this regression analysis however, the R-squared value produced was very low, with a highest value of 5.4%. As a result of this, we conclude that use of specific information items, and the value with which they are held, have not served as predictors in the overall applicant sample for either satisfaction with the information used to decide where to study or confidence that applicants have made the right choice. As use and value of the TEF award was also included in the model we can conclude that this also has not driven satisfaction with information available or confidence with choice.

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<sup>30</sup> Note FEC base=35

- 4.103 However, there are other factors that may have lowered association in this regression analysis. For example, the time that has passed between applicants completing their application and taking part in this research may have allowed other variables (e.g. post-application additional information; participation in examinations) to have influenced satisfaction with information and confidence in choices made. This would mean the strength of association between information items used to make decision and the resulting satisfaction and confidence would lessen, and the regression analysis would accordingly be low.
- 4.104 A detailed methodology of the regression analysis and accompanying results are presented in Appendix C.

## **4j Relationship of TEF with other information items used to assist decision making**

- 4.105 This section investigates the extent of use and importance of the TEF in relation to other information that applicants use when making their decisions on where to apply to for undergraduate study. Applicants' responses about use and importance of individual information items are initially presented, along with analysis from the follow-up interviews with selected applicants. In order to then gain a more in-depth understanding of how different groups of applicants use the TEF and other information in different ways, a latent class segmentation analysis has been performed, with findings presented towards the end of this subsection.
- 4.106 All applicants were presented with a list of 16 information items and asked how much they used each of these when deciding where to apply<sup>31</sup>. The list of information items was developed with reference to 20 student outcome and teaching quality information items used as predictors in a regression analysis for the TEF Student Choice research (2018, IFF Research<sup>32</sup>), those used in the International Student Survey 2017 (2017, QS Enrolment Solutions<sup>33</sup>), and via discussion with the Department for Education and the Office for Students during questionnaire design.
- 4.107 As Table 4.5 shows, the most common information item used during the decision-making process was the quality of teaching at providers, with (83% of applicants indicating they used this information 'at least a moderate amount'). This was closely followed by a provider's general reputation, and the entry requirements (both 81%).

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<sup>31</sup> A 4-point scale for use was used in the survey, 'not used at all', 'used a little', 'used a moderate amount', 'used a lot.' Applicants could also select 'unsure' for this question.

<sup>32</sup> Full report can be accessed here:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/717771/TEF\\_and\\_Informing\\_Student\\_Choice.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/717771/TEF_and_Informing_Student_Choice.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> Full report can be accessed here: <https://www.internationalstudentsurvey.com/international-student-survey-2017/>

Conversely, information about the university or college's TEF award was least commonly used by applicants, with 15% stating they used it at least a moderate amount (4% said they used the TEF 'a lot').

**Table 4.5 Use and importance of different information items in decision making**

Information items	% used at least a moderate amount	% at least of some importance
<i>Base (Unweighted): All applicants</i>	2,838	2,838
The quality of teaching	83%	95%
Reputation of university or college	81%	90%
The entry requirements	81%	88%
The course content and how it is delivered	79%	92%
Location of university or college	78%	83%
Job prospects and/or starting salary after graduating	68%	87%
Facilities	64%	83%
Whether I felt I would fit in	64%	78%
Links with employers and industry	61%	85%
Ranking in league tables	59%	76%
Feedback from students	56%	82%
The quality of research	56%	77%
Funding available to cover course fees and living costs	49%	75%
Type and/or cost of accommodation	46%	70%
Fee levels of course	31%	57%
The university or college's TEF award	15%	40%

4.108 All applicants were also asked how important the information items mentioned in Table 4.5 were, when considering which providers to apply to. Again, the highest proportion of applicants found the quality of teaching to be of 'at least some importance' in their decision making (95%), followed by the course content and how it is delivered (92%), reputation of the university or college (90%) and entry requirements (88%). Similarly to findings regarding use of information, the university or college's TEF award was considered to be of at least some importance by the



lowest proportion of applicants (40%; 9% said the TEF award was 'very important').<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> A 4-point scale for importance was used in the survey, 'not important at all, 'of little importance', 'moderately important', 'very important.' Applicants could also select 'unsure' for this question.

- 4.109 Whereas the findings around information use and importance in applicant decision making suggest that the TEF award plays a relatively small role in the process, it is worth stressing that the criteria and metrics covered by the TEF, incorporating information on teaching quality, the learning environment and student outcomes are all relevant to applicants.
- 4.110 Information on teaching quality was found to be the most used and most important of the 16 information items tested, while information on job prospects / starting salary (student outcomes) was the sixth most used and fifth most important. There was no direct information item corresponding to the broad concept of 'learning environment', but two relevant criteria covered here were the course content and how it is delivered (fourth most used; second most important), and facilities (seventh most used and most important).
- 4.111 Conversely information about a TEF award was rated as the least used and least important of the 16 information items. This suggests that there is currently a disconnect between the use and importance of information incorporated in the TEF, and use and importance of the TEF itself.
- 4.112 It should be noted that when looking only at applicants who were aware of the TEF at the time of their application, usage and importance scores for TEF did increase. Almost three in ten (28% compared with 15% of all applicants) stated that they used the TEF at least a moderate amount in decision making, with 60% reporting (40% of total sample) that TEF was of at least moderate importance in their decision making. For this subgroup of applicants, information about an HE provider's TEF award was the fifteenth most used and important of the sixteen information items.

### **Relationship of TEF with other information items – findings from the qualitative interviews**

- 4.113 The sampling approach used for the qualitative interviews was specifically designed to explore the disconnect between the use and importance of information incorporated in the TEF, and use and importance of the TEF itself. This was achieved through the following research questions:
- For applicants rating teaching quality high on use and importance (in the quantitative survey), and were aware of, but *did not use* the TEF in their decision making: why was teaching quality information the most useful and important information item, yet TEF was not used in the decision making process?
  - For applicants rating teaching quality high on use and importance, who used the TEF but rated it low on use and importance: why did they rate information around teaching quality higher than they rated the TEF?
- 4.114 The qualitative interviews also sought to explore the relationship between applicants' use of information items relating to learning environment and student

outcomes, and the TEF. For each of teaching quality, learning environment and student outcomes, this section explores what applicants consider to be the main indicators of these broad terms, and how they accessed information about them. This section therefore builds on Section 4f, which covered broader advantages and limitations of the TEF.

- 4.115 Whereas low overall awareness of the TEF is a key reason for its lower levels of use and importance amongst all applicants, these qualitative interviews highlighted important additional aspects contributing to this disconnect between high importance and use of information around teaching quality and lower use and importance of the TEF.

### Teaching quality

- 4.116 In qualitative interviews most applicants noted three main indicators when asked what they understood by the term ‘teaching quality’: how well lesson content is delivered by lecturers (e.g. how engaging and interesting lecturers were, and how well the content is communicated), the level of expertise of lecturers (particularly in subject areas related to practical disciplines, e.g. music production), and staff engagement (e.g. small lecturer to student ratio, and the number of allocated one-to-one student/tutor hours<sup>35</sup>).

*“I went and spoke to the lecturers and a couple of unis I immediately ticked off because the lecturers were so unengaging and so uninterested in people as individual students.”*

Female, 19-21, first choice Gold award

*“It would be someone who was engaging and also someone who was knowledgeable enough about their subject so that any student would feel supported in their education.”*

Female, 18 and under, first choice award unknown

- 4.117 Qualitative interviews also explored where applicants were finding information around teaching quality to help them assess indicators of teaching quality, if they were not finding it via the TEF.
- 4.118 Applicants reported using qualitative data, predominantly via student and lecturer feedback at open days, but also via online student forums such as The Student Room, and testimony from former students (often friends and family members) to aid their assessment of indicators around the teaching quality of a provider. Although league table data was used in the decision making process and by extension quantitative data used in the formation of league tables e.g. NSS and

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<sup>35</sup> Contact time information was predominantly found via conversations with current students during open days, as well as via online student forums such as the Student Room.

DLHE, applicants did not commonly use these data sets as indicators of 'good teaching quality'.

*"There was a huge quantity of student feedback online, and I felt more comfortable following people's advice in real life who I could trust, rather than anonymous sources."*

Male, 19-21, first choice Gold award

- 4.119 It should be noted that the recent OfS report on TEF awareness suggests that applicants are often cynical about providers using student information on courses and teaching quality during open days, perceiving such talks as 'selling exercises' rather than impartial information sharing<sup>36</sup>. This was highlighted by a couple of applicants in qualitative interviews as part of this evaluation, though applicants only noted it in reference to information given about the TEF specifically, e.g. providers continually mentioning their Gold TEF award could come across as 'sales-y' in a minority of cases.
- 4.120 Open days were a source of information that applicants used to assess indicators of teaching quality but only in relation to attending mock lectures and speaking directly to lecturers and not in relation to general speeches attended at open days. This finding concurs with the OfS report, stating that open days were important for 'gaining a feel for the provider'.
- 4.121 The disconnect between limited use and importance of the TEF with high use and importance of information around factors that make up the TEF partially arises due to the type of information applicants use to assess indicators of teaching quality. Applicants stated having more trust in direct feedback from students and lecturers, allowing them to get a real sense of what the level of teaching quality may be like at a provider. However, applicants in qualitative interviews did not associate the TEF as involving direct student or lecturer input.
- 4.122 Therefore, applicants who rated teaching quality as very important and were aware of the TEF but did not use it, appeared not to do so because they felt the TEF did not provide any *additional information* around key indicators of teaching quality, i.e. the personal feedback from staff and students. Equally, applicants who rated teaching quality as very important and *did* use the TEF in decision making, often did not consider it to be as important as other information related to teaching quality for similar reasons.
- 4.123 Highlighting that the NSS, and hence the TEF, involves direct input from students, and that lecturers and students are involved in an expert panel may be important to increasing applicant use of the TEF in the future.

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<sup>36</sup> Office for Students (May 2018), 'Report on qualitative research' by Cragg Ross Dawson.

## Learning environment

- 4.124 In qualitative interviews, applicants suggested that key indicators around 'learning environment' were: good quality facilities (specifically related to the course content), and whether a provider offers a 'open and collaborative culture,' which was especially important to international students, and applicants in art-based subjects)

*"I need a hands-on experience and some unis provided more facilities than others."*

Male, 18 and under, first choice Silver award

*"If you've not got a positive learning environment, something that you feel part of, and welcomed and supported, then you're not going to do very well".*

Female, 18 and under, first choice Silver award

- 4.125 Applicants assessed these key indicators around learning environment predominantly through open days. There was a feeling amongst applicants that it is necessary to understand the learning environment in person where possible, with international students also heavily relying on videos from websites and online student forums as a surrogate measure for a 'real-life' experience. As with assessing indicators of teaching quality, applicants rarely consulted quantitative metrics when judging whether an HE provider had a 'good learning environment'.

*"To really get a sense of what the university's about, you really have to go there. Anyone can put together a nice website."*

Male, 18 and under, first choice Gold award

- 4.126 Similar to investigating the disconnect between use and importance of TEF and teaching quality, applicants commonly did not associate learning environment with the TEF, as the information they were looking for to assess indicators of 'a good learning environment' was based on personal experience of visiting a provider, or using University website/YouTube videos, where a visit was not possible.

- 4.127 It was also noted by several applicants in qualitative interviews that they were unaware that the TEF encompassed information around learning environment, as it was not included in the name of the measure:

*"I think a lot of students are of the view that it is [solely] a teaching assessment because of the name."*

Male, 18 and under, first choice Bronze award

## Student outcomes

- 4.128 In qualitative interviews, applicants noted three main indicators that they used to assess the student outcomes of an HE provider: the relationship the provider or department has with industry (the option of placement or sandwich year in a course format was often considered to be desirable), the average salary within six months upon completion of a degree and the employment level of graduates from same

course (also employment level in managerial positions), and the overall reputation of the University.

*“It’s all about connections, if you don’t have them you’re not going to make it as an actor.”*

Female, 18 and under, first choice Provisional award

- 4.129 In many cases, applicants stated using data around employability and average salary from the relevant course page on the University website, with little evidence of direct use of graduate outcomes / DLHE data via official government sources. A few respondents also mentioned using sites such as Unistats and Which University to source information about the graduate employment rate and average graduate salary of universities and courses that they were considering.
- 4.130 The disconnect between the low use and level of importance assigned to the TEF by applicants, and the relatively high use and importance of information about student outcomes (job prospects and salary) is primarily driven by the low level of awareness that the TEF is informed by student outcomes. Whereas the student outcomes is reflected in the full name of the TEF, applicants in qualitative interviews were not aware of this.
- 4.131 It is possible that positioning the TEF as an ‘objective measure’ to provide information around student outcomes would be attractive to applicants, who once aware of the TEF, highly value its impartiality and objectivity, in comparison with some other information used in the decision making process.

## **4k Segmenting the applicant population by information used**

- 4.132 A recent research review of information use behaviour for making decisions of where to apply to HE, suggests there are groups of applicants who use HE provider information in different ways to make their decisions<sup>37</sup>. To investigate further, groups of applicants in this research who used particular combinations of information in their decision making were identified by conducting a latent class analysis. These identified groups of applicant ‘information users’ (applicant ‘types’ or ‘segments’) were then analysed further to identify associated levels of awareness and use of TEF.

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<sup>37</sup> <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/cfe-research-2018-student-information-use-and-behaviour.pdf>

- 4.133 From the initial analysis, a 5-segment model was generated which identified five distinct types of applicant information user. The segmentation analysis and user types generated are presented in Appendix D<sup>38</sup>.
- 4.134 The TEF measures for all applicants (awareness and use, reported in sections 4b and 4f) were measured for each of the five types of information user. In many cases the information user segments differed from the rates reported for all applicants. This indicated that the TEF appeals differently to different types of applicants.
- 4.135 The range across the five segments and rates for all applicants are as follows:
- Heard of TEF: segment range 46-69%; all applicants 63%
  - Aware of TEF at time of application: segment range 20-51%; all applicants 43%
  - Have at least some knowledge of TEF at time of application: segment range 12-42%; all applicants 32%
  - Use of TEF: segment range 2-24%; all applicants 15%
  - Made any change to their potential university or college choices as a result of the TEF award: segment range 5-16%; all applicants 11%.

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<sup>38</sup> Figures in Appendix D have been presented for completeness and transparency, and should be used with caution. The segmentation categories are identified based on use of information items specific to this research and therefore may not be generalizable to other applicant populations.

## 5. Conclusions

5.1 The research study sought to understand the extent to which the provider level TEF is meeting its objectives as listed below. This chapter considers each in turn.

- Better inform students' choices about what and where to study.
- Raise esteem for teaching.
- Recognise and reward excellent teaching.
- Better meet the needs of employers, business, industry and the professions.

### 5a Better inform students' choices about what and where to study

5.2 A key factor in determining success here is the extent to which applicants to HE are aware of, and making use of, the TEF. There are promising signs in this respect. Despite the first awards being announced in June 2017 (TEF Year 2), over two-fifths (43%) of applicants were aware of the TEF at the time they applied to HE. On top of this, 15% of all applicants used the TEF to help their decision-making process, rising to 34% among those aware at the time of application: this indicates potential future levels of use of the TEF in decision making should general awareness levels of TEF increase.

5.3 It should be borne in mind that applicants use information to make their choices in different ways, and it would not be realistic that all applicants would want to use TEF as part of their decision making process. The segmentation analysis supports this, with different rates of TEF use (2-24%) amongst the five different types of applicant information user identified in this research.

5.4 More however can be done to raise awareness of the TEF, as there are some potential sources of awareness that appear to be underutilised. For example, few applicants have heard about the TEF from their school or college, and applicants appear reliant on HE providers promoting their award through their website or prospectus, or at open days.

5.5 The HE provider research showed that while those with Gold and Silver awards actively promote their award to students, HE providers rarely promote Bronze awards as they are concerned (with some justification) that applicants may consider this a sign of poor teaching quality. This contributes to two potentially detrimental impacts for the TEF. Firstly, with certain providers choosing not to advertise their TEF award, it limits applicants' awareness of the TEF. The second impact relates to a separate, but linked, area of applicant feedback, concerning the notion that a three-tier system, of Gold, Silver, Bronze, does not contain a sufficient level of granularity to allow applicants to make an informed choice. With providers



effectively reducing the TEF to a two-tier award system (Gold vs. Silver) through their promotion choices, this compounds the issue.

- 5.6 To better help applicants' choice, applicants require a clearer understanding of what the TEF is designed to show. In the main it is typically understood in quite limited terms as a measure of teaching quality, and can be mistakenly perceived as one made following official inspections. But there is great appetite for trustworthy information sources that showcase teaching quality, learning environment and student outcomes, all criteria that inform the TEF. A recognition that the TEF covers all three areas may increase use of TEF among applicants. Highlighting that the NSS, and hence the TEF, involves direct input from students, and that lecturers and students are involved in an expert panel may also serve to increase applicant use of the TEF in the future.
- 5.7 Finally, the survey also revealed that engagement with the TEF varies considerably by demographic. Currently, older learners and those domiciled outside of the EU are less likely to be aware of the TEF, and thus the TEF is less likely to be better informing student choice among these segments of the applicant population. By way of contrast, while EU applicants were generally less aware of the TEF than UK applicants, those that were aware were far more likely to make use of it than others, while BAME applicants were more likely to report that they made changes to their HE provider choice as a result of seeing the TEF awards.

## **5b Raise esteem for teaching**

- 5.8 The study provides evidence that the TEF is proving a catalyst for change in the HE sector, further encouraging senior management to develop and invest in initiatives that boost the student experience and their outcomes, and ensure staff deliver teaching of high quality. This in turn might be expected to raise esteem for teaching in the HE sector: indeed, 68% of TEF Contacts and 71% Academic Contacts feel that the TEF will meet this objective, to some or a great extent.
- 5.9 FECs and APs in particular welcomed the focus of the TEF on teaching quality, considering it might help re-balance hierarchies based on traditional reputations and league tables that emphasise research qualities. Nevertheless, there was little evidence so far to suggest a shift in applicants' perceptions of these different provider types (although applicants were not specifically probed on this line of enquiry).
- 5.10 While the TEF has led to improved morale among staff (10% of TEF Contacts reported this, and 18% of Academic Contacts), it has also contributed to a deterioration in morale (15% TEF Contacts; 20% Academic Contacts). Lower morale was particularly notable at providers with a Bronze award. The longer term implications of this should be considered.

## **5c Recognise and reward excellent teaching**

- 5.11 Some HE providers raised concerns that the design of the TEF, in its use of NSS, does not adequately measure teaching quality, because it only measures student satisfaction with quality. This, providers contended, therefore undermined the ability of the TEF to encourage teaching excellence. However, applicants considered student feedback and experience of speaking with lecturers at open days to be key indicators of good teaching quality, i.e. they are influenced less by objective measures attending to the quality of lectures, and the student experience, and more by subjective experiences and personal reflections. As the TEF is in part based on student experiences (such as the NSS data), this suggests TEF is focusing on the measures that applicants care about.
- 5.12 Irrespective of views of its design, there is already a clear indication that the TEF is prompting certain HE providers to invest in their teaching practices. Changes in this regard are particularly evident among Bronze providers, which highlights that providers take the results and the potential reputational impact seriously.
- 5.13 There is further evidence from the study of the TEF awards as being seen to boost institutional reputations:
- 56% of Gold providers reported that their TEF award had contributed - at least in part - to an increased reputation within the HE sector.
  - 43% of Gold providers reported that their TEF award had contributed - at least in part - to an increased reputation among potential applicants.
  - Nearly all at Gold (93%) and Silver (92%) providers used the TEF award when promoting themselves to potential applicants.
- 5.14 Finally, it should be noted that across a number of measures, Academic Contacts were more likely than TEF Contacts to report that the TEF was contributing to change in their organisation, emphasising the impact TEF is having 'on the ground', closer to the delivery of teaching.

## **5d Better meet the needs of employers, business, industry and the professions**

- 5.15 The research covered the views of applicants and providers so views from industry were out of scope for this project. However, the indications are that this is an area in which the TEF has further to go in order to meet its objective. Across all four objectives, TEF Contacts were least likely to agree that the TEF would meet this particular objective (40% answered 'to some extent'). Other key survey findings include:

- 37% of TEF Contacts reported an increased emphasis on student outcomes in the last two years, in part because of the TEF (this rose to 71% among Bronze providers).
- 22% of TEF Contacts communicated about the TEF with employer representatives.
- 21% saw an increase of student exposure to employability opportunities as a result of the TEF.
- 17% reported developments to the careers services as a result of the TEF.
- 11% reported enhanced employer partnerships as a result of the TEF.
- 11% witnessed an increased use of 'sector experts' as a result of the TEF.
- 8% of providers without an award reported increased difficulty in attracting local employer partners, compared with 1% of those with an award.

## 5e Summary

- 5.16 The impact of TEF is likely to take many years before it is fully felt, both as it moves from institution to subject level, but also because it should help drive a cultural change amongst students and providers. This research was designed to detect any early signs that this change may be occurring; to identify any areas for improvement as TEF implementation continues and to provide an independent piece of research to feed into the independent TEF review in 2019.
- 5.17 The research provides evidence that a year after the first Provider-level TEF Year 2 awards were published (in June 2017), the TEF is already considered by HE Providers and demonstrated by HE applicants to be contributing to change in the HE sector, helping to redress the balance between teaching and research, supporting those with a Bronze award to make changes to their offer, and providing applicants with a new information source on which to base their HE choices.
- 5.18 Nevertheless, awareness and understanding of the TEF – particularly within certain groups of the applicant population – needs to improve in order for the TEF to meet its full range of objectives.

## Appendix A: Sample profile

Table A.1 Provider qualitative interview responses

		TEF Contact		Academic Contact		Unique providers		TEF award eligible provider population	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Total		26		19		30		480	
HEP Nation	England	20	77%	16	84%	24	80%	441	92%
	Rest of UK	6	23%	3	16%	6	20%	39	8%
HEP Type	HEI	14	54%	11	58%	14	47%	154	32%
	FEC	7	27%	5	26%	9	30%	226	47%
	AP	5	19%	3	16%	7	23%	100	21%
TEF award 2017	Gold	6	23%	6	32%	7	23%	60	13%
	Silver	7	27%	6	32%	8	27%	114	24%
	Bronze	5	19%	4	21%	6	20%	54	11%
	Provisional	3	12%	3	16%	4	13%	61	13%
	None	5	19%	0	0%	5	17%	191	40%

Table A.2 Provider quantitative survey responses

		TEF Contact		Academic Contact		Unique providers		TEF award eligible provider population	
		n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Total		157		154		195		480	
HEP Nation	England	143	91%	146	95%	179	92%	441	92%
	Rest of UK	14	9%	8	5%	16	8%	39	8%
HEP Type	HEI	75	48%	77	50%	85	44%	154	32%
	FEC	54	34%	50	32%	72	37%	226	47%
	AP	28	18%	27	18%	40	21%	100	21%
TEF award 2017	Gold	30	19%	28	18%	34	17%	60	13%
	Silver	53	34%	58	38%	62	32%	114	24%
	Bronze	17	11%	28	18%	25	13%	54	11%
	Provisional	16	10%	21	14%	25	13%	61	13%
	None	41	26%	19	12%	49	25%	191	40%

**Table A.3 Applicant survey responses**

		Quantitative responses		Qualitative interviews		Population (March 2018 UCAS deadline)
		n	%	n	%	%
<b>Total</b>		<b>2,838</b>		<b>30</b>		
<b>Gender</b>	Female	1,669	59%	12	40%	58%
	Male	670	24%	15	50%	42%
	Unknown	499	18%	3	10%	0%
<b>Age</b>	18 and under	2,399	85%	24	80%	55%
	19-21	307	11%	6	20%	30%
	22+	118	4%	0	0%	15%
	Unknown	14	0%	0	0%	0%
<b>Domicile</b>	UK	2,234	79%	27	90%	81%
	EU	345	12%	2	7%	8%
	International	227	8%	1	3%	11%
	Unknown	32	1%	0	0	0%

## Appendix B: Detailed response tables

**Table B.1 Institutional change and impact of the TEF in the last two years according to TEF Contacts**

Specific change	No change	Change anticipated	Small change	Moderate change	Large change	ANY CHANGE	Would have occurred anyway	Partially due to TEF	Mostly due to TEF	Wholly due to TEF	ANY CHANGE DUE TO TEF
<i>Base: All TEF Contacts (157)</i>											
<b>Student Experience</b>											
Enhanced interventions for improving student retention	18%	6%	24%	29%	22%	<b>76%</b>	54%	19%	2%	0%	<b>21%</b>
Changes in course content, delivery or assessment with an aim to improve student satisfaction	15%	9%	22%	30%	23%	<b>76%</b>	54%	19%	2%	1%	<b>22%</b>
An increased emphasis on closing the attainment gap	14%	8%	26%	26%	22%	<b>74%</b>	44%	26%	2%	1%	<b>29%</b>
An increased emphasis on teaching quality/learning environment	17%	5%	25%	21%	31%	<b>78%</b>	48%	25%	3%	0%	<b>29%</b>
More focus on improving experience for cohorts with negative flags	26%	12%	15%	26%	18%	<b>59%</b>	27%	23%	5%	2%	<b>30%</b>
An increased emphasis on student outcomes	18%	7%	20%	32%	23%	<b>75%</b>	37%	32%	5%	<1%	<b>37%</b>
<b>Student Employability</b>											
More difficulty for the institution in attracting local employer partners	73%	5%	4%	8%	0%	<b>11%</b>	6%	3%	0%	0%	<b>3%</b>
More difficulty for students in securing employment	70%	8%	7%	4%	1%	<b>12%</b>	9%	0%	<1%	0%	<b>&lt;1%</b>
Communication with students earlier in their degree about career aspirations	24%	6%	25%	27%	16%	<b>68%</b>	47%	15%	3%	0%	<b>17%</b>
Developments in careers services to aid student employability outcomes	20%	11%	23%	27%	15%	<b>65%</b>	46%	16%	1%	0%	<b>17%</b>

Enhanced or additional partnerships with employers	19%	5%	29%	26%	17%	<b>72%</b>	58%	10%	1%	0%	<b>11%</b>
Increased student exposure to opportunities to develop and build employability	17%	7%	27%	28%	16%	<b>71%</b>	49%	18%	2%	1%	<b>21%</b>
<b>Teaching Staff</b>											
Reduction of research-only contracts	80%	2%	<1%	0%	0%	<b>&lt;1%</b>	0%	0%	0%	0%	<b>0%</b>
Increased teaching staff resignations	71%	5%	10%	3%	<1%	<b>14%</b>	8%	1%	1%	0%	<b>2%</b>
Greater difficulty in recruiting teaching staff	64%	3%	12%	9%	2%	<b>24%</b>	16%	<1%	<1%	<1%	<b>1%</b>
Increased use of industry experts to raise sector-specific knowledge	42%	5%	25%	18%	4%	<b>47%</b>	32%	11%	0%	0%	<b>11%</b>
Increased emphasis in recruitment on acquiring teaching staff with appropriate teaching competencies and skills	40%	8%	20%	18%	9%	<b>47%</b>	26%	19%	<1%	0%	<b>20%</b>
Increased demands on teaching staff to support students, with no reduction in other demands	30%	4%	31%	22%	9%	<b>62%</b>	28%	23%	4%	<1%	<b>28%</b>
<b>Teaching Practices</b>											
Decreased teaching staff morale	60%	4%	16%	8%	2%	<b>25%</b>	5%	10%	5%	<1%	<b>15%</b>
Improved teaching staff morale	44%	10%	18%	16%	6%	<b>40%</b>	24%	9%	1%	0%	<b>10%</b>
Increase in staff teaching qualification training and/or participation in schemes	28%	11%	17%	24%	20%	<b>60%</b>	34%	21%	3%	0%	<b>24%</b>
Enhanced training and support for staff to help them to deliver positive student experiences	17%	7%	25%	36%	14%	<b>75%</b>	51%	21%	2%	0%	<b>23%</b>
Increased sharing of best practice across and/or within departments	16%	3%	32%	33%	16%	<b>81%</b>	59%	20%	1%	0%	<b>21%</b>
Developing initiatives to improve the standards of teaching	15%	7%	32%	26%	18%	<b>77%</b>	53%	21%	2%	0%	<b>24%</b>
<b>Prospective Students</b>											
A decline in institutional reputation amongst potential applicants	74%	4%	7%	2%	0%	<b>9%</b>	1%	3%	1%	1%	<b>5%</b>
Different types of applicants interested in or applying	52%	10%	14%	11%	3%	<b>29%</b>	22%	6%	<1%	0%	<b>6%</b>
Institution provided more support to applicants in course selection	39%	3%	25%	22%	6%	<b>53%</b>	40%	10%	0%	<1%	<b>11%</b>
Improved institutional reputation among potential applicants	37%	9%	22%	14%	7%	<b>43%</b>	27%	12%	2%	0%	<b>14%</b>
<b>Wider impacts</b>											
Decreased reputation of institution within the HE sector	76%	6%	3%	3%	1%	<b>8%</b>	1%	3%	1%	1%	<b>4%</b>

Closure of courses or departments that underperform in TEF-related metrics	75%	10%	7%	4%	1%	<b>12%</b>	2%	5%	3%	0%	<b>8%</b>
Increased competition between departments/programmes within the provider	67%	7%	16%	3%	2%	<b>21%</b>	6%	8%	3%	<1%	<b>11%</b>
Less co-operation and/or increased competition with peer institutions	66%	7%	10%	10%	5%	<b>24%</b>	8%	9%	5%	<1%	<b>14%</b>
Increased administration costs and burdens on time resulting in a sustained deprioritisation of research activities	65%	5%	11%	6%	4%	<b>21%</b>	4%	9%	4%	3%	<b>15%</b>
Increased administration costs and burdens on time resulting in a sustained deprioritisation of other teaching activities	40%	6%	25%	15%	10%	<b>50%</b>	9%	20%	13%	4%	<b>38%</b>
Increased reputation of institution within the HE sector	40%	7%	20%	17%	9%	<b>47%</b>	19%	18%	6%	0%	<b>23%</b>
Greater investment in monitoring of TEF-related metrics	21%	5%	17%	30%	26%	<b>74%</b>	11%	20%	25%	16%	<b>61%</b>

*Percentages within the 'change' columns do not add to 100% as 'Don't know' responses have been excluded from the table.*

*Percentages within the 'impact' columns do not add to 100% as 'Don't know' responses have been excluded from the table, as well as those reporting 'No change', or 'Change anticipated'. The base in these columns is still 'All TEF Contacts' (n=157)*

*In the 'impact' columns the 'Would have occurred anyway' and 'Any change due to TEF' figures should sum to the 'Any change' figures. Where they do not this is due to 'Don't know' responses being excluded, and rounding errors.*

*<1% refers to figures greater than 0% but less than 0.5%.*



**Table B.2 Institutional change and impact of the TEF in the last two years according to Academic Contacts**

Specific change	No change	Change anticipated	Small change	Moderate change	Large change	ANY CHANGE	Would have occurred anyway	Partially due to TEF	Mostly due to TEF	Wholly due to TEF	ANY CHANGE DUE TO TEF
<i>Base: All Academic Contacts (154)</i>											
<b>Student Experience</b>											
Enhanced interventions for improving student retention	15%	7%	13%	36%	27%	<b>76%</b>	32%	23%	9%	2%	<b>34%</b>
Changes in course content, delivery or assessment with an aim to improve student satisfaction	15%	7%	17%	41%	19%	<b>77%</b>	43%	24%	4%	2%	<b>30%</b>
An increased emphasis on closing the attainment gap	16%	6%	15%	34%	24%	<b>73%</b>	31%	22%	8%	2%	<b>30%</b>
An increased emphasis on teaching quality/learning environment	15%	4%	17%	32%	31%	<b>79%</b>	32%	33%	9%	3%	<b>45%</b>
More focus on improving experience for cohorts with negative flags	13%	10%	12%	34%	22%	<b>68%</b>	23%	24%	14%	4%	<b>42%</b>
An increased emphasis on student outcomes	14%	5%	11%	33%	35%	<b>79%</b>	29%	28%	11%	5%	<b>45%</b>
<b>Student Employability</b>											
More difficulty for the institution in attracting local employer partners	59%	3%	10%	5%	2%	<b>17%</b>	2%	4%	1%	0%	<b>5%</b>
More difficulty for students in securing employment	65%	3%	8%	4%	2%	<b>13%</b>	5%	2%	1%	1%	<b>3%</b>
Communication with students earlier in their degree about career aspirations	11%	7%	21%	43%	18%	<b>81%</b>	36%	30%	7%	0%	<b>37%</b>
Developments in careers services to aid student employability outcomes	19%	6%	22%	24%	26%	<b>72%</b>	35%	20%	8%	3%	<b>30%</b>
Enhanced or additional partnerships with employers	12%	9%	21%	27%	25%	<b>72%</b>	44%	14%	5%	1%	<b>19%</b>
Increased student exposure to opportunities to develop and build employability	12%	3%	18%	40%	26%	<b>84%</b>	47%	25%	7%	1%	<b>33%</b>

<b>Teaching Staff</b>											
Reduction of research-only contracts	64%	3%	4%	1%	5%	<b>10%</b>	7%	1%	0%	0%	<b>1%</b>
Increased teaching staff resignations	57%	3%	7%	15%	4%	<b>26%</b>	16%	3%	0%	0%	<b>4%</b>
Greater difficulty in recruiting teaching staff	48%	6%	13%	13%	6%	<b>33%</b>	8%	6%	3%	0%	<b>9%</b>
Increased use of industry experts to raise sector-specific knowledge	31%	11%	21%	24%	8%	<b>53%</b>	23%	19%	6%	0%	<b>25%</b>
Increased emphasis in recruitment on acquiring teaching staff with appropriate teaching competencies and skills	35%	7%	15%	27%	14%	<b>55%</b>	20%	22%	8%	1%	<b>32%</b>
Increased demands on teaching staff to support students, with no reduction in other demands	21%	4%	26%	22%	25%	<b>73%</b>	24%	34%	7%	4%	<b>44%</b>
<b>Teaching Practices</b>											
Decreased teaching staff morale	47%	2%	16%	16%	7%	<b>39%</b>	11%	16%	2%	1%	<b>20%</b>
Improved teaching staff morale	52%	5%	14%	15%	8%	<b>37%</b>	12%	14%	4%	0%	<b>18%</b>
Increase in staff teaching qualification training and/or participation in schemes	26%	8%	19%	18%	28%	<b>65%</b>	17%	26%	15%	4%	<b>45%</b>
Enhanced training and support for staff to help them to deliver positive student experiences	14%	7%	29%	28%	20%	<b>78%</b>	36%	27%	3%	4%	<b>33%</b>
Increased sharing of best practice across and/or within departments	15%	4%	20%	35%	25%	<b>80%</b>	37%	30%	7%	<1%	<b>37%</b>
Developing initiatives to improve the standards of teaching	9%	11%	29%	26%	24%	<b>79%</b>	33%	34%	8%	1%	<b>42%</b>
<b>Prospective Students</b>											
A decline in institutional reputation amongst potential applicants	74%	1%	7%	1%	<1%	<b>9%</b>	1%	3%	1%	0%	<b>4%</b>
Different types of applicants interested in or applying	43%	8%	19%	10%	9%	<b>38%</b>	25%	7%	2%	1%	<b>10%</b>
Institution provided more support to applicants in course selection	41%	7%	16%	18%	15%	<b>48%</b>	26%	15%	1%	0%	<b>16%</b>
Improved institutional reputation among potential applicants	30%	9%	14%	25%	14%	<b>53%</b>	25%	18%	1%	<1%	<b>20%</b>
<b>Wider impacts</b>											
Decreased reputation of institution within the HE sector	71%	3%	8%	2%	<1%	<b>10%</b>	1%	4%	1%	<1%	<b>5%</b>
Closure of courses or departments that underperform in TEF-related metrics	65%	10%	4%	4%	2%	<b>10%</b>	2%	3%	2%	2%	<b>7%</b>

Increased competition between departments/programmes within the provider	60%	9%	14%	7%	2%	<b>23%</b>	66%	7%	2%	3%	<b>12%</b>
Less co-operation and/or increased competition with peer institutions	60%	11%	10%	6%	3%	<b>19%</b>	3%	7%	3%	<1%	<b>10%</b>
Increased administration costs and burdens on time resulting in a sustained deprioritisation of research activities	39%	4%	14%	10%	8%	<b>31%</b>	2%	18%	7%	<1%	<b>25%</b>
Increased administration costs and burdens on time resulting in a sustained deprioritisation of other teaching activities	27%	7%	19%	16%	10%	<b>45%</b>	4%	22%	14%	3%	<b>39%</b>
Increased reputation of institution within the HE sector	35%	12%	22%	12%	8%	<b>43%</b>	13%	21%	2%	3%	<b>26%</b>
Greater investment in monitoring of TEF-related metrics	17%	5%	16%	24%	27%	<b>67%</b>	4%	15%	19%	25%	<b>58%</b>

*Percentages within the 'change' columns do not add to 100% as 'Don't know' responses have been excluded from the table.*

*Percentages within the 'impact' columns do not add to 100% as 'Don't know' responses have been excluded from the table, as well as those reporting 'No change', or 'Change anticipated'. The base in these columns is still 'All Academic Contacts' (n=154)*

*In the 'impact' columns the 'Would have occurred anyway' and 'Any change due to TEF' figures should sum to the 'Any change' figures. Where they do not this is due to 'Don't know' responses being excluded, and rounding errors.*

*<1% refers to figures greater than 0% but less than 0.5%.*

**Table B.3 Institutional change in the last two years as a result of the TEF by TEF award**

	Gold	Silver	Bronze	Provisional	No award	ANY award
<i>Base (Unweighted): All providers</i>	58	111	45	37	60	251
Greater investment in monitoring of TEF-related metrics	59%	73%*	(79%)*	(57%)	47%	68%
An increased emphasis on student outcomes	49%	46%	(71%)*	(37%)	22%*	49%
Increased administration costs and burdens on time resulting in a sustained deprioritisation of other teaching activities	39%	34%	(54%)*	(43%)	33%	41%
More resources or focus on improving student experience for cohorts with negative flags	29%	44%*	(51%)*	(31%)	24%*	40%
Increased demands on teaching staff to support students, with no reduction in other demands	30%	40%	(46%)	(40%)	25%*	39%
An increased emphasis on teaching quality and learning environment	37%	35%	(43%)	(32%)	24%	37%
Increase in staff teaching qualification training and/or participation in schemes	36%	33%	(54%)*	(26%)	22%	36%
An increased emphasis on closing the attainment gap	39%	32%	(45%)*	(29%)	22%	35%
Developing initiatives to improve the standards of teaching	37%	31%	(47%)*	(30%)	20%*	35%
Enhanced training and support for staff to help them to deliver positive student experiences	38%*	26%	(49%)*	(34%)	12%*	34%
Enhanced interventions for improving student retention	21%	28%	(51%)*	(30%)	17%*	31%
Changes in course content, delivery or assessment processes with an aim to improve student satisfaction	29%	33%*	(38%)*	(23%)	13%*	31%
Increased sharing of best practice across and/or within departments	33%	31%	(39%)*	(15%)	19%	30%
Increased reputation of institution within the HE sector	56%*	32%*	(15%)	(16%)	11%*	30%
Increased student exposure to opportunities to develop and build employability	24%	33%	(36%)	(19%)	20%	29%
Developments in careers services to aid student employability outcomes	29%	33%*	(27%)	(17%)	13%*	28%
Communication with students earlier in their degree about career aspirations	33%	26%	(25%)	(20%)	21%	26%
Increased emphasis in recruitment on acquiring teaching staff with appropriate teaching competencies and skills	33%	19%	(28%)	(24%)	19%	25%
Increased administration costs and burdens on time resulting in a sustained deprioritisation of research activities	21%	16%	(31%)*	(22%)	15%	21%
Improved institutional reputation among potential applicants	43%*	23%*	(0%)*	(16%)	6%*	21%
Decreased teaching staff morale	15%	20%	(40%)*	(4%)*	13%	19%
Enhanced or additional partnerships with employers	18%	21%	(22%)	(5%)	11%	17%
Less co-operation and/or increased competition with peer institutions	22%	15%	(25%)*	(8%)	9%	17%
Improved teaching staff morale	29%*	12%	(11%)	(18%)	8%	17%
Increased use of industry experts to raise sector-specific knowledge	24%	16%	(21%)	(5%)	12%	16%
Institution has provided more support to applicants to ensure they select the right course	24%*	16%	(10%)	(10%)	6%*	15%
Increased competition between departments/programmes within the provider	8%	17%*	(27%)*	(9%)	4%*	15%

Different types of applicants interested in or applying to the institution	22%*	5%	(3%)	(10%)	4%	9%
Closure of courses or departments that underperform in TEF-related metrics	5%	8%	(22%)*	(0%)	8%	8%
A decline in institutional reputation amongst potential applicants	0%	3%	(25%)*	(11%)	0%*	8%
Decreased reputation of institution within the HE sector	0%	5%	(24%)*	(3%)	2%	7%
Greater difficulty in recruiting teaching staff	1%	7%	(7%)	(1%)	3%	4%
Increased teaching staff resignations	1%	6%	(6%)	(3%)	2%	4%
More difficulty for students in securing employment	3%	3%	(6%)*	(0%)	0%	3%
More difficulty for the institution in attracting local employer partners	3%	<1%*	(3%)	(0%)	8%*	1%
Reduction of research-only contracts	0%	1%	(1%)	(0%)	0%	1%

\* denotes statistically different to average.

( ) denotes base size between 25 and 49 (figure still included).

**Table B.4 Chi-square results on ‘Use of TEF’**

<b>Dependent variable</b>	<b>Base (All applicants with known detail)*</b>	<b>Chi X<sup>2</sup> Value</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Association (Cramer V/Phi)</b>	<b>p-value</b>
TEF Award of first choice HE provider	2,687	161.736	4	0.245	<0.001
Age	2,753	24.389	3	0.094	<0.001
Country	2,708	23.093	3	0.092	<0.001
Domicile	2,734	12.392	2	0.067	0.002
Gender	2,284	6.744	1	0.055	0.009
Degree Type	2,756	6.768	1	0.049	0.009
Ethnicity	2,302	9.717	4	0.065	0.045
Mode of study	2,742	3.657	1	0.036	0.056
HEI Tariff	2,613	5.116	2	0.044	0.077
Subject of study	2,705	9.921	6	0.061	0.128
Disability	2,221	2.089	1	0.031	0.148
HEP Type	2,704	2.658	2	0.031	0.265
SEN	2,228	0.859	1	0.02	0.354
POLAR4 Quintile	1,037	1.255	4	0.035	0.869
Whether parents have a degree	2,616	0.021	1	0.003	0.884

\* Applicants who preferred not to disclose this information were not included in the chi-square test

## Appendix C: Regression Analysis Methodology and Results

In Section 4i, the findings of a regression analysis are presented, determining the relative importance of 16 information items in driving a) applicants' satisfaction with the sufficiency of information they used to make their choices and b) applicants' confidence with their choice of universities, colleges or other HE providers. This appendix outlines the methodology for this regression analysis, the rationale for choice of this method, and the results of the regression.

### Objectives

The main objective of the regression analysis was: to assess the extent to which information items applicants used to inform their choice of institution serve as predictors for their satisfaction of the information that they used to inform their decision making, and confidence with their choice of HE providers in their application. Use/importance of the TEF in decision making was included within our model, and thus the methodology implemented allowed for assessment of whether the TEF acted as a predictor to student satisfaction and confidence and its relative importance in comparison with other information items involved in student decision making.

### Methodology

Correlated Component Regression (CCR) was the regression technique used for this analysis. This is a form of regularised regression, designed to stabilise regression coefficients in the presence of many, highly correlated variables. This method is similar to the more widely known Partial Least Squares (PLS) Regression algorithm, although it has been shown to outperform this method in validation samples<sup>39</sup>.

CCR and PLS Regression are both component-based forms of regularised regression. To stabilise prediction, linear composite components are created from the individual predictors which are then used as composite predictors in the model.

The use of components reduces noise in the model, which is particularly problematic with many highly correlated predictors and / or small samples. Using this method has been demonstrated to reduce over-fitting and thus produce better predictions of a hold-out sample.

As with Principal Component Regression, the coefficients can be decomposed back into those for the original underlying predictors. However, both PLS and CCR are superior to

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<sup>39</sup> Magidson, J. (2010). Correlated Component Regression: A Prediction/Classification Methodology for Possibly Many Features. Proceedings of the American Statistical Association.

Principal Component Regression as the components are optimised to predict the dependent variable, rather than the underlying predictors which is consummate with the goal of regression.

The main advantage of CCR over PLS is that the components are allowed to correlate with each other, which produces better predictions of a hold-out sample<sup>40</sup>. Unlike PLS, CCR is a scale invariant method i.e. transforming the measurement scale does not affect the performance of the model.

The Johnson's Relative Weights is the best assessment of the unique contribution to the model taking account of their effect sizes, overall correlation with the dependent variable and correlation with each other<sup>41</sup>.

Tables C.1 and C.2 show the sixteen information items used as predictors in the model. Shown alongside each information item is:

- the unstandardized effect size – the change in the dependent variable resulting from a one unit change in each predictor scale
- the correlation of each predictor with the dependent variable: satisfaction with information / confidence in choice
- Johnson's Relative Weight – the proportionate contribution each predictor makes to  $R^2$ .

There are no associated p-values and significance levels for predictors as the model does not make the typical large-sample assumption of the standard, unregularised regression algorithm. For linear regression the specification is selected which maximises the Cross-Validation R-squared, maximising the model's ability to predict new cases. An efficient crossvalidation process is repeated over many iterations which ensures that all sample is used as both training and validation sample across all iterations.

Table C.1 shows the outputted model of the relevant importance of the sixteen information items as predictors for applicants' satisfaction with information used in decision making.

Table C.2 shows the outputted model of the relevant importance of the sixteen information items as predictors for applicants' confidence with their HE provider choices.

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<sup>40</sup> Magidson J. (2013) Correlated Component Regression: Re-thinking Regression in the Presence of Near Collinearity.

<sup>41</sup> Johnson, J. (2000). A Heuristic Method for Estimating the Relative Weight of Predictor Variables in Multiple Regression. *Multivariate Behavioral Research*.



The results below show findings of the regression model run using a composite variable of scores given by applicants for each information item in questions D2 (use of information items) and D3 (importance of information items) of the questionnaire.

The composite variable was created by multiplying scores given by applicants for amount of use of each information item (D2 - not used at all = 0, used a little = 1, used a moderate amount = 2, used quite a lot = 3) with scores given by applicants for importance of each information item (D3 – Not important at all = 1, quite important = 2, moderately important = 3, very important = 4; 'unsure' responses were substituted with the mean response as a value). For each information item, the value of the composite variable was therefore between 0 and 12 (no value to high value).

The rationale behind use of a composite variable in the regression analysis rather than solely running the regression on singular variables of importance and use, was that importance alone cannot be a predictor for satisfaction/confidence if the variable has not been used. It also accounts for the possibility that whereas an important choice variable, *used widely*, may be hypothesised to be most effective in predicting applicant satisfaction/confidence with choice, an important choice variable that is used *by limited applicants* to make final decisions may be equally effective in predicting applicant satisfaction/confidence with choice. The composite 'value' variable therefore conceptually can be viewed as the importance of the variable, weighted by its use, in order to give a more rounded understanding of whether the selected information items act as predictors for satisfaction of information used and confidence in HEP selection.

Whilst the regression analysis was also run using only the singular variables, given that  $R^2$  values for all models produced was very low (as noted in Section 4i), and no information items (including TEF award) served as predictors for satisfaction with the information used to decide where to study or confidence in choice of HE providers, the results of the models using the singular variables have been excluded from this appendix.

## Results

**Table C.1 Regression coefficients and Johnson's Relative Weights for sixteen information items in student decision making, in relation to satisfaction with information use (Combined use/ importance variable) – R<sup>2</sup> value – 2.7%**

Information item	Coefficient	Correlation	Johnson's Relative Weight
The course content and how it is delivered (e.g. lectures, labs, seminars, online etc.)	0.0916	0.1451	26%
The quality of teaching	0.0523	0.1291	14%
The quality of research	0.0621	0.1227	14%
Feedback from students (including satisfaction scores from the National Student Survey (NSS))	0.0512	0.1036	9%
Links with employers and industry	0.0470	0.1042	8%
Whether I felt I would fit in	0.0392	0.0832	7%
Funding available to cover course fees and living costs (loans, bursaries, financial incentives)	-0.0603	-0.0426	6%
Facilities e.g. lecture theatres, sports facilities, social areas, childcare	0.0205	0.0794	5%
Fee levels of course	-0.0315	-0.0138	3%
Job prospects and/or salary after graduating	-0.0003	0.0536	2%
Reputation of university or college	-0.0040	0.0549	1%
Type and/or cost of accommodation	-0.0267	-0.0016	1%
Location of university or college	-0.0275	-0.0160	1%
The entry requirements	0.0202	0.0431	1%
Ranking in league tables	-0.0300	0.0073	1%
The university or college's TEF award	-0.0017	0.0281	1%

**Table C.2 Regression coefficients and Johnson's Relative Weights for sixteen information items in student decision making, in relation to confidence in HEP choices (Combined use/ importance variable) – R<sup>2</sup> value – 5.1%**

Information item	Coefficient	Correlation	Johnson's relative weight
The quality of teaching	0.1020	0.1844	22%
The course content and how it is delivered (e.g. lectures, labs, seminars, online etc.)	0.0734	0.1523	18%
The quality of research	0.0806	0.1568	15%
Facilities e.g. lecture theatres, sports facilities, social areas, childcare	0.0754	0.1471	14%
Links with employers and industry	0.0551	0.1315	9%
Location of university or college	0.0485	0.0771	5%
Whether I felt I would fit in	0.0220	0.0775	3%
Ranking in league tables	-0.0553	-0.0166	3%
Job prospects and/or salary after graduating	0.0042	0.0746	2%
Type and/or cost of accommodation	-0.0479	-0.0165	2%
The entry requirements	-0.0380	-0.0178	2%
Reputation of university or college	-0.0048	0.0644	1%
Feedback from students (including satisfaction scores from the National Student Survey (NSS))	-0.0061	0.0609	1%
Fee levels of course	-0.0196	0.0112	1%
The university or college's TEF award	-0.0056	0.0285	0%
Funding available to cover course fees and living costs (loans, bursaries, financial incentives)	-0.0039	0.0324	0%

## Appendix D: Applicant segmentation

### Purpose and principles of segmentation approach for this research

A recent research review of information use behaviour for making decisions of where to apply to HE, suggests there are groups of applicants who use HE provider information in different ways to make their decisions<sup>42</sup>. To identify different groups of applicants in this research, a Latent Class Analysis (LCA) was conducted using the amount of use of the 16 information items in decision making. Groups were identified where applicants' patterns of use were statistically similar. The resulting groups of applicant 'information users'<sup>43</sup> (applicant 'types' or 'segments') were then analysed further to identify associated levels of awareness and use of TEF.

Segmentation methods are common practice within Social Research, including that sponsored by Government Departments. By grouping subjects into broad category types it helps to generate richer insight than if the population as a whole was used or by simply relying on headline descriptive statistics. It aims to bring a more sociological perspective to understanding statistical or economic phenomena.

For the TEF research, LCA was the selected method for carrying out the segmentation. LCA is a cluster analysis based on probability modelling so is considered more robust than other segmentation methods that use, for example, groupings of indicator variables that correlate. It provides statistical modelling to assess goodness of fit between the model and the data, so selecting a final model is more robust and individual respondents can be classified to each latent class.

A total of 6 models were generated, with a range of between 4 and 8 segments in each model. The 5-segment model selected for the segmentation analysis returned the highest R-squared coverage of all models, (accounting for the greatest degree of variance between segments) and the second highest best fit between the model and the data, with no single segment containing less than 1% of the sample.

These segmentation findings are presented first, before addressing each segment's relationship with the TEF.

**It should be borne in mind that this type of model provides a useful way to consider information use, but inevitably groups will be broad and will simplify the**

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<sup>42</sup> <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/cfe-research-2018-student-information-use-and-behaviour.pdf>

<sup>43</sup> Note the segmentation categories are identified based on use of information items specific to this research and may not be generalisable to other applicant populations

heterogeneity that can exist within a large population, thus, care should be taken not to over interpret their findings.

## Information items used by segment

The selected model shows there are 5 distinct types of information users<sup>44</sup>, using information in different ways to make their decisions about which HE providers to apply for<sup>45</sup>. The 5 information users are as follows, with full details of how the segments map to use of specific information items<sup>46</sup> in Tables D.3 and D.4 at the end of the Appendix.

- **Segment 1 - 'Educationalists' - 30% of total sample**

Information priorities: course content and delivery, quality of teaching, location of HE provider, University facilities and whether they felt they would fit in.

- **Segment 2 - 'Cost conscious' - 27% of total sample**

Information priorities: the entry requirements, funding available to cover course fees and living costs, location of HE provider, fee levels of course and type/cost of accommodation.

- **Segment 3 - 'Investigators' - 22% of total sample**

Information priorities: the quality of teaching, reputation of the HE provider, the course content and how it is delivered, the quality of research and links with employers and industry. High usage across all information sources.

- **Segment 4 - 'Traditional' - 16% of total sample**

Information priorities: location of HE provider, entry requirements, reputation of HE provider and ranking in league tables.

- **Segment 5 - 'Light touch' - 5% of total sample**

Information priorities: funding available to cover course fees and living costs. Low usage across all information sources.

For the segment analysis, use of information is reported using the mean score of all applicants in the segment, where 1 is not used at all, 4 is used a lot. Comparisons of use are made between each segment and the total sample (the 'applicant average') for ease of understanding and consistency. Differences are only reported where they are statistically significant, when the response of applicants in one segment was tested against the combined response of all other applicants. Differences are cited using the

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<sup>44</sup> Groups have been named subjectively based on the type of information most used.

<sup>45</sup> The previous OfS research cited identifies two dimensions of information use behaviour. Amount of information use and the type of information used. The segments identified in this research represent a blend of both dimensions.

<sup>46</sup> These information items incorporate factors relating to teaching quality, learning environment, and student outcomes, as well as other information items individuals look to during the decision-making process

proportion reporting that they used each factor at least 'a moderate amount' (answers of 3 or 4 out of 4).

### **Educationalists Segment 1**

- Course content and delivery (3.40), HE provider location (3.35), and quality of teaching (3.19) were the three most used information items in decision making for this segment.
- Applicants in this segment were more likely than the applicant average to use information regarding the course content and delivery (87% vs 79%), quality of teaching (87% vs 83%), location (82% vs 78%), whether they felt they would 'fit in' (73% vs 64%) and facilities (72% vs 64%).
- Applicants in this segment were less likely than the applicant average to use information regarding the quality of research (44% vs 56%), ranking in league tables (40% vs 58%), job prospects/salary (54% vs 68%), , funding available to cover course fees (27% vs 49%), and fee levels of course (6% vs 31%) in comparison with the applicant average.

### **Cost conscious Segment 2**

- The entry requirements (3.40), funding available (3.21) and HE provider location (3.13) were the most used information items in decision making for this segment.
- Applicants in this segment were more likely than the applicant average to use information regarding the tuition fee of the provider (70% vs 31%), the funding available to cover course fees and living costs (81% vs 49%) the type/cost of accommodation (64% vs 46%) and entry requirements (85% vs 81%).
- Applicants in this segment were less likely to use nearly all other sources of information in comparison with the applicant average, as shown in Table D.4.

### **Investigators Segment 3**

- The quality of teaching (3.88), reputation of an HE provider (3.78) and course content and delivery (3.69) were the most used information items in decision making for this segment.
- Applicants in this segment were much more likely to use all information in comparison with the applicant average, with the exception of location of the HE provider, entry requirements and fee levels of course.
- The largest relative differences with the applicant average were for use of the TEF award (26% vs 15%), quality of research (90% vs 60%) and links with employers and industry (89%% vs 61%).

## Traditional Segment 4

- Reputation of an HE provider (3.90), ranking in league tables (3.72) and entry requirements (3.48) were the most used information items in decision making for this segment.
- Applicants in this segment were more likely than applicants in all other segments to use league tables in their decision making (99% vs 59% of average applicants).
- Applicants in this segment were more likely than the applicant average to use information regarding the reputation of a university of college (100% vs 81% applicant average) and entry requirements (87% vs 81%).
- They were less likely to use information around course content (62% vs 79%), facilities (49% vs 64%), type/cost of accommodation (35% vs 46%), available funding (29% vs 49%) or tuition fees (13% vs 31%), in comparison with the applicant average.

## Light touch Segment 5

- HE Provider location (3.11), entry requirements (2.91) and funding available (2.19) were the most used information items in decision making for this segment.
- Applicants in this segment were much less likely to use all information to inform their decision making compared to applicant average, with the exception of the location of the HE provider, which was the same as the applicant average (78%), as shown in Table D.4.
- Only 5% used information about quality of teaching at least a moderate amount in their decision making in comparison with the applicant average of 83%.

## Relationship between segments and TEF survey figures

There were various differences by segment, relating to familiarity with, and use of the TEF, as Table D.1 below shows. In summary:

- Investigators and Traditional applicants were more likely than the applicant average to have selected a Gold awarded HE provider as their first choice. In contrast, Educationalists were slightly more likely to select an HE provider with a Bronze award, and both Cost conscious and Light touch applicants were more likely than the average applicant to select an HE provider with no TEF award<sup>47</sup>.

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<sup>47</sup> As Figure D.4 shows, Cost conscious applicants were more likely to apply to HE providers outside England, which are less likely to hold TEF awards, which might explain (some of) this difference. Awareness and knowledge of the TEF was also much lower amongst both Cost conscious and Light touch applicants.

- Awareness of the TEF was generally higher among Educationalists and Investigators, and much lower among Cost conscious and Light touch applicants .
- Investigators were most likely to make use of the TEF in their decision making, while usage was generally uncommon among Light touch applicants. Investigators were also most likely to make changes to their choices as a result of the TEF award (although Cost-conscious applicants were most likely to make changes as a result of the TEF award, if they were aware of the TEF award of any of their chosen providers at time of application – there is no evidence to suggest this ties into a misconception among some that the TEF is linked to fees).

**Table D.1 Key TEF measures by segment**

	Applicant average	Educationalists	Cost conscious	Investigators	Traditional	Light touch
<i>Base (Unweighted): All applicants</i>	2,838	873	702	625	542	96
<b>TEF award of first choice HE Provider</b>						
Gold	32%	32%	24%*	40%*	39%*	19%*
Silver	42%	44%	41%	40%	41%	46%
Bronze	10%	12%*	10%	8%	7%*	8%
Provisional	<1%	1%	<1%	<1%	<1%	1%
No award	12%	10%*	17%*	9%*	10%*	24%*
<b>Awareness and knowledge of TEF</b>						
Heard of TEF	63%	69%*	53%*	67%*	66%	46%*
Aware of TEF at time of application	43%	50%*	28%*	51%*	49%*	20%*
Have at least some knowledge TEF at time of application	32%	40%*	18%*	42%*	35%	12%*
Correct knowledge of TEF award of first choice HE provider ( <i>base: applicants who had heard of TEF at the time of application, n=1,332</i> )	50%	52%	45%	55%	49%	25% <sup>1</sup>
Correct knowledge of TEF award of first choice HE provider ( <i>base: all applicants, n=2,838</i> )	25%	30%*	15%*	31%*	27%	9%*
<b>Use of TEF</b>						
Use of TEF ( <i>base: applicants who were aware of TEF at the time of application, n=1,332</i> )	34%	27%*	30%	47%*	34%	6% <sup>1</sup>
Use of TEF ( <i>base: all applicants, n=2,838</i> )	15%	14%	9%*	24%*	17%	2%*
<b>Impact of TEF</b>						
Made any change to their HE provider choice as a result of the TEF award ( <i>base: applicants who had heard of TEF at time of application and aware of TEF awards for any of their chosen HE providers, n=1,098</i> )	27%	20%*	36%*	33%*	24%	37% <sup>2</sup>
Made any change to their HE provider choice as a result of the TEF award ( <i>base: all applicants, n=2,838</i> )	11%	10%	10%	16%*	10%	5%

\* Denotes significant differences to the combined responses of applicants in all other segments

<sup>1</sup> Unweighted base is 21

<sup>2</sup> Unweighted base is 15



Table D.2 below shows how satisfaction with the information used to make choices, and confidence with final choices made, differs between information user segments.

**Table D.2 Satisfaction and confidence by segment**

	Applicant average	Educationalists	Cost conscious	Investigators	Traditional	Light touch
<i>Base (Unweighted): All applicants</i>	2,838	873	702	625	542	96
<b>Satisfaction with information used to make choices</b>						
Satisfied	<b>72%</b>	77%*	65%*	82%*	68%*	52%*
Neutral	<b>20%</b>	19%	22%	14%*	25%*	23%
Dissatisfied	<b>7%</b>	3%*	12%*	4%*	7%	19%*
<b>Confidence with final HE provider choices</b>						
Confident	<b>73%</b>	77%*	67%*	82%*	67%*	54%*
Neutral	<b>20%</b>	19%	22%	13%*	25%*	23%
Not confident	<b>7%</b>	4%*	10%*	4%*	8%	22%*

*\* Denotes significant difference to the combined responses of applicants in all other segments*

The scores for satisfaction and confidence were similar within each segment, as they also were for the applicant average. Investigators had the highest scores for both satisfaction with information and confidence with choices (respectively 10% and 9% higher than the applicant average). These scores were closely followed by the Educationalists (respectively 5% and 4% higher than the applicant average). Satisfaction and confidence for both Educationalists and Investigators were significantly higher than other segments. Light touch applicants' scores for satisfaction and confidence were the lowest (respectively 20% and 19% lower than the applicant average) and significantly lower than all other segments.

Table D.3 Index of mean use of decision making information items by segment

When considering which university or college to apply to, how much did you use information about the following factors in your decision making?

	30%	27%	22%	16%	5%		30%	27%	22%	16%	5%
Total	Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3	Segment 4	Segment 5		Segment 1	Segment 2	Segment 3	Segment 4	Segment 5

1= Not used at all, 4=Used a lot

Under-indexes total

Over-indexes total

The entry requirements		<b>3.29</b>	3.16	3.40	3.27	3.48	2.91		-0.13	0.11	-0.03	0.19	-0.38
Location of university or college		<b>3.23</b>	3.35	3.13	3.22	3.21	3.11		0.12	-0.1	-0.01	-0.02	-0.12
Reputation of university or college		<b>3.21</b>	2.83	2.96	3.78	3.90	1.86		-0.38	-0.25	0.57	0.69	-1.34
The quality of teaching		<b>3.21</b>	3.19	3.10	3.88	3.00	1.47		-0.02	-0.11	0.68	-0.21	-1.73
The course content and how it is delivered		<b>3.19</b>	3.40	3.02	3.69	2.78	1.91		0.21	-0.17	0.5	-0.42	-1.28
Job prospects and/or salary after graduating		<b>2.91</b>	2.56	2.96	3.51	2.89	1.93		-0.34	0.05	0.61	-0.02	-0.98
Whether I felt I would fit in		<b>2.84</b>	3.10	2.57	3.13	2.67	1.89		0.27	-0.27	0.3	-0.17	-0.94
Facilities		<b>2.81</b>	2.98	2.71	3.23	2.50	1.42		0.17	-0.1	0.42	-0.32	-1.39
Links with employers and industry		<b>2.74</b>	2.61	2.58	3.48	2.53	1.62		-0.13	-0.15	0.75	-0.21	-1.12
Ranking in league tables		<b>2.72</b>	2.25	2.43	3.25	3.72	1.41		-0.47	-0.29	0.52	0.99	-1.31
Feedback from students (including satisfaction scores from the NSS)		<b>2.63</b>	2.66	2.48	3.16	2.45	1.38		0.03	-0.15	0.53	-0.17	-1.25
The quality of research		<b>2.59</b>	2.33	2.49	3.37	2.49	1.46		-0.26	-0.1	0.77	-0.1	-1.13
Funding available to cover course fees and living costs		<b>2.51</b>	2.05	3.21	2.68	2.03	2.19		-0.46	0.7	0.17	-0.48	-0.31
Type and/or cost of accommodation		<b>2.39</b>	2.23	2.79	2.42	2.15	1.72		-0.16	0.4	0.03	-0.24	-0.66
Fee levels of course		<b>2.03</b>	1.41	2.96	2.13	1.56	1.63		-0.62	0.94	0.1	-0.47	-0.4
The university or college's TEF award		<b>1.59</b>	1.56	1.48	1.85	1.59	1.18		-0.03	-0.11	0.26	0	-0.41

**Table D.4 'At least moderate' use of decision making information items by segment**

Information items	Educationalists	Cost conscious	Investigators	Traditional	Light touch	Total	Associated mean
<i>Base (Unweighted)</i>	873	702	625	542	96	2,838	2,838
The quality of teaching	*87%	*81%	*100%	*80%	*5%	<b>83%</b>	3.21
Reputation of university or college	*73%	*75%	*100%	*100%	*15%	<b>81%</b>	3.21
The entry requirements	*76%	*85%	81%	*87%	*63%	<b>81%</b>	3.29
The course content and how it is delivered (e.g. lectures, labs, seminars, online etc.)	*87%	*74%	*95%	*62%	*31%	<b>79%</b>	3.19
Location of university or college	*82%	*75%	78%	79%	78%	<b>78%</b>	3.23
Job prospects and/or starting salary after graduating	*54%	69%	*92%	68%	*28%	<b>68%</b>	2.91
Whether I felt I would fit in	*73%	*53%	*78%	*58%	*24%	<b>64%</b>	2.84
Facilities e.g. lecture theatres, sports facilities, social areas, childcare	*72%	*59%	*81%	*49%	*8%	<b>64%</b>	2.81
Links with employers and industry	*55%	*56%	*89%	*53%	*13%	<b>61%</b>	2.74
Ranking in league tables	*40%	*47%	*81%	*99%	*12%	<b>59%</b>	2.72
Feedback from students (including satisfaction scores from the NSS)	58%	*48%	*78%	*46%	*9%	<b>56%</b>	2.63
The quality of research	*44%	*52%	*90%	*50%	*5%	<b>56%</b>	2.59
Funding available to cover course fees and living costs (loans, bursaries, financial incentives)	*27%	*81%	*55%	*29%	*39%	<b>49%</b>	2.51
Type and/or cost of accommodation	*38%	*64%	48%	*35%	*19%	<b>46%</b>	2.39
Fee levels of course	*6%	*70%	34%	*13%	*18%	<b>31%</b>	2.03
The university or college's TEF award	*13%	*11%	*26%	15%	*5%	<b>15%</b>	1.59

\* Denotes significant difference to the combined responses of applicants in all other segments

## TEF, HE provision and applicant differences between segments

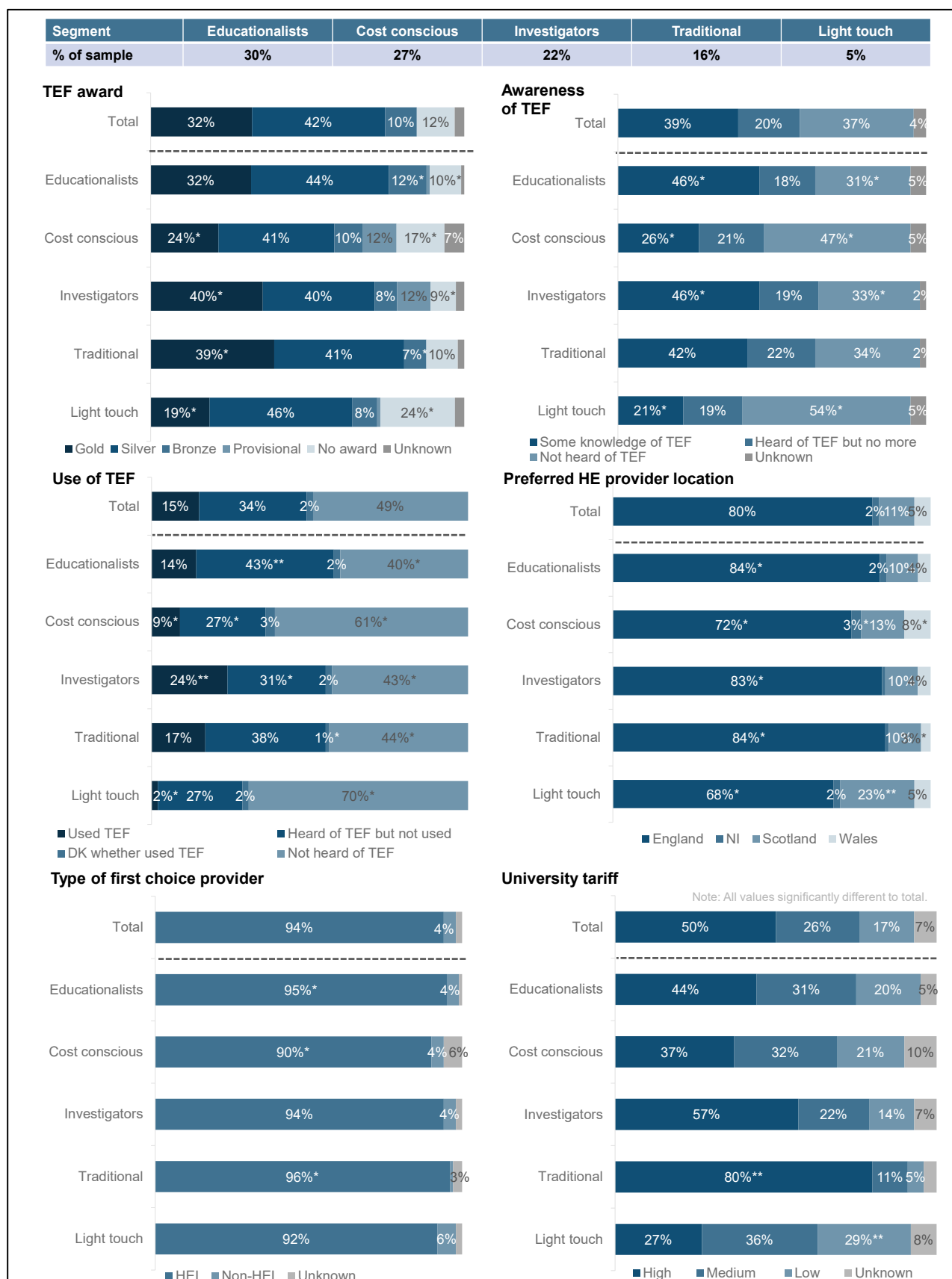
TEF, HE provision and applicant differences between the five information user segments are explored in Figures D.1-D.3, where significant differences between the segments are highlighted and presented in a series of charts.

These Figures have been included for completeness and transparency. They come with a number of caveats that are associated with the methodology and interpretation of the findings, and should be viewed with the following considerations:

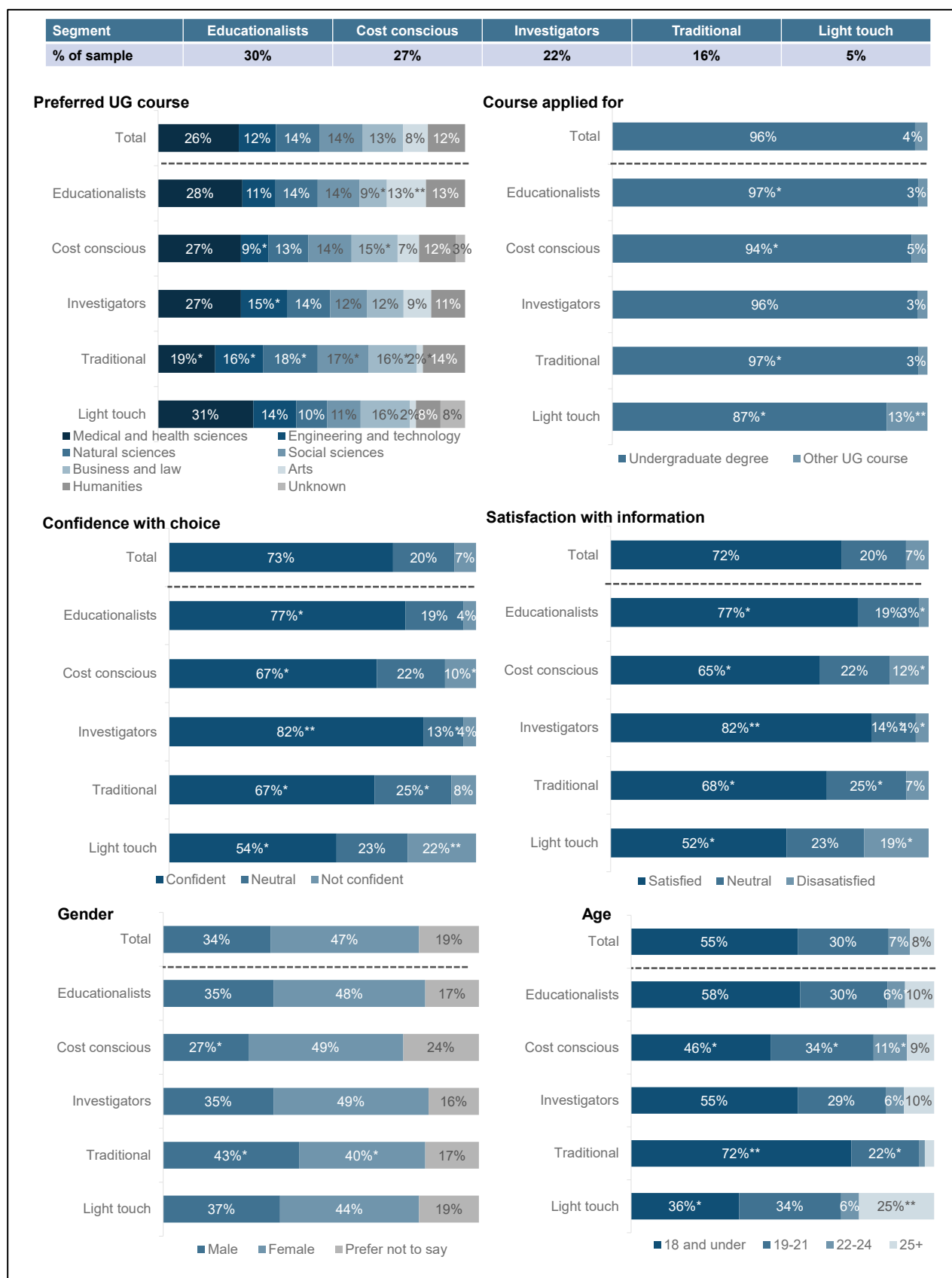
- The segmentation categories are identified based on information use. The research did not test whether the segments identified were driven by TEF, HE provision or applicant demographics. As such, no causality between these and the information use or segments themselves can be inferred.
- Segment associations with TEF, HE provision and applicant demographics should be interpreted with caution, as whilst the differences between the segments are statistically significant, they are also quite small in the vast majority of cases. Also, whilst particular items may be slightly different between segments, it does not necessarily mean that that characteristic is dominant in that segment over other characteristics.
- Care should be taken not to collate the demographics to create a single segment typology based on applicant characteristics where only minimal differences between segments exist and which could be indirectly discriminatory.
- The segmentation categories and associated TEF, HE provision and applicant differences identified are based on use of information items specific to this research and the population for the research. They may therefore not be generalisable to other applicant populations.

Throughout these figures, single asterisks ‘\*’ denote where a finding in one segment is significantly different to the combined responses of applicants in all other segments. Double asterisks ‘\*\*’ denote where a finding is significantly different to each segment. Statistical differences are closely tied to sample sizes. As the Light touch segment is relatively small, differences are less likely to be marked as statistically significant.

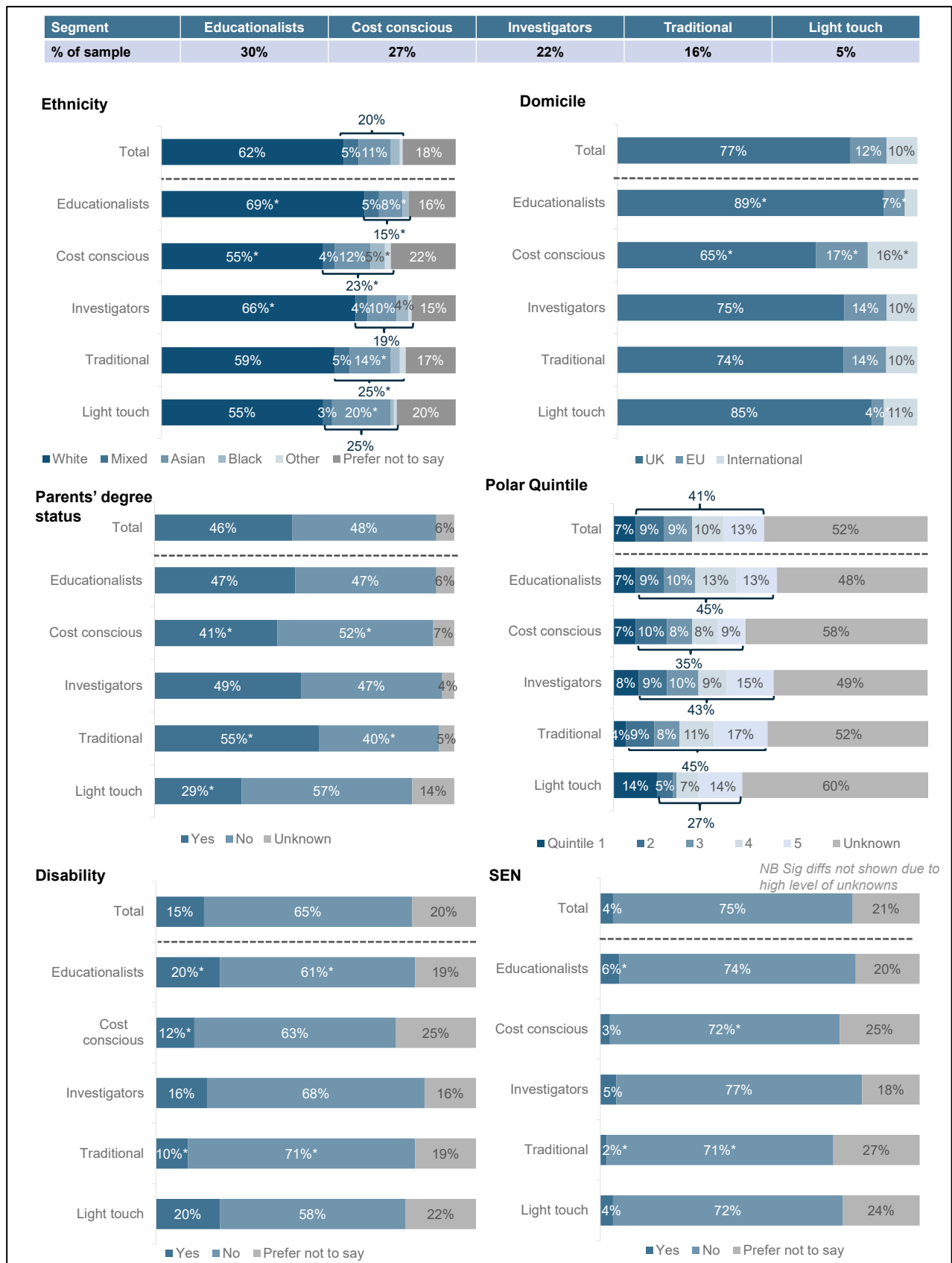
**Figure D.1 TEF, HE provision and Applicant differences (1)**



**Figure D.2 TEF, HE provision and Applicant differences (2)**



**Figure D.3 TEF, HE provision and Applicant differences (3)**



## Glossary

Term	Definition
Academic Contact	Academic Contacts, mostly subject leaders, or heads of faculty/department, typically assisted the TEF submission process at their provider. They were included in the research as it was anticipated they would experience the impacts of the TEF more than most at their provider.
AP	APs (Alternative Providers) are any provider of Higher Education courses who are not in direct receipt of recurrent funding from the Office for Students (OfS) or from equivalent funding bodies in the Devolved Administrations; or do not receive direct recurrent public funding (for example, from a local authority, or the Secretary of State for Education); and is not a Further Education College.
BAME	Black Asian and Minority Ethnicity
Benchmarking	A unique benchmark is calculated for each TEF metric, for each provider. The benchmark is a weighted sector average where weightings are based on the characteristics of the students covered by that metric. The benchmarking methodology used in TEF means that a provider is not being compared with a pre-set group of providers, such as a specific subset of other universities or other FECs. Instead, the outcomes for its students are compared with similar students across the entirety of the Higher Education sector. The outcomes for students in an individual subject are compared only with similar students across the sector studying the same subject. The benchmarking information items selected comprise only those characteristics that are not within the provider's control. They include: subject, entry qualifications, age, ethnicity, sex, disability, educational disadvantage (POLAR), level of study, and year.
DLHE	The DLHE (Destinations for Leavers from Higher Education) survey collects information on what leavers from Higher Education programmes are doing six months after qualifying from their course. TEF uses DLHE data to create a metric measuring employment outcomes of graduates.
FEC	FECs (Further Education Colleges) provide technical and professional education and training, including courses leading to a Higher Education degree. Some FECs also offer undergraduate Higher Education courses and are therefore eligible to participate in TEF.
First Choice provider	Applicants' first choice of Higher Education provider.



Term	Definition
HEI	HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) are grant-funded providers that award degrees at undergraduate and postgraduate level; most usually they have a university title.
HE providers	Higher Education providers is a term covering HEIs, APs, and FECs.
HESA	HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) is the official agency for the collection, analysis and dissemination of quantitative information about Higher Education in the United Kingdom.
ILR	The ILR (Individualised Learner Record) is a primary data collection source capturing details on students at FECs. The TEF uses ILR data as the basis for some of its metrics.
LEO	LEO (Longitudinal Education Outcomes) data contains statistics employment and earnings of Higher Education graduates using matched data from different government departments. The TEF uses LEO data as the basis for some of its metrics.
NSS	The NSS (National Student Survey) is a UK survey for final year, undergraduate students to give feedback on their Higher Education experience. The TEF uses NSS data as the basis for some of its metrics.
OfS	OfS (Office for Students) is a non-departmental public body of the Department for Education, acting as the regulator and competition authority for the Higher Education sector in England. The TEF process is managed by the OfS.
POLAR Quintile	Participation of Local Areas (POLAR) is a measure of educational disadvantage. Specifically, it measures the proportion of young people who enter Higher Education aged 18 or 19, assigning precise geographical areas to 5 quintiles accordingly. POLAR quintile 1 indicates areas with the lowest levels of participation in Higher Education.
Provider submission	The provider submission is a detailed written statement that supports an HE provider's 'case for excellence' in teaching and is used by the panel of assessors alongside the TEF metrics. Submissions are limited to a 15-page document.
TEF	The TEF (Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework) is a national framework, introduced by the government in England to recognise and encourage excellent teaching and student outcomes in universities, colleges and other providers of Higher Education. It is intended to help students choose where to study, by providing clear information about teaching provision and student outcomes. The first awards were released in 2017.

Term	Definition
TEF awards	<p><b>Gold:</b> Awarded for delivering consistently outstanding teaching, learning and outcomes for students.</p> <p><b>Silver:</b> Awarded for delivering high quality teaching, learning and outcomes for students, consistently exceeding rigorous national quality requirements for UK Higher Education</p> <p><b>Bronze:</b> Awarded for delivering teaching, learning and outcomes for students that meet rigorous national quality requirements for UK Higher Education.</p> <p><b>Provisional:</b> Awarded to participating providers that meet national quality requirements, but do not yet have sufficient data to be fully assessed.</p> <p><b>No award:</b> The TEF is currently voluntary. If a provider has no TEF award, it may have decided not to take part or it may not be eligible. To be eligible to take part in TEF, a provider must meet national quality requirements and teach at undergraduate level. Full descriptors of each award can be found here:  <a href="https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-excellence-and-student-outcomes-framework-specification">https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/teaching-excellence-and-student-outcomes-framework-specification</a></p>
TEF Contact	TEF Contacts are HE staff who coordinated their provider's participation in the TEF. Typically, they are staff responsible for learning, teaching and/or quality within their provider, and may be Vice Principals or Chancellors in smaller providers or Directors of Higher Education at larger providers.
TEF Metrics	The TEF metrics are a set of measures that are produced consistently for all providers, specifically for the TEF. They are used to help assess performance in relation to each of the aspects of teaching excellence. They cover: Teaching Quality (TQ), Learning Environment (LE), and Student Outcomes and Learning Gain (SO), and use data from the NSS, HESA and ILR data, DLHE and LEO.
UCAS Tariff	'High tariff providers' are defined as those with the highest (top third) average UCAS tariff entry requirement, 'medium tariff providers' are those in the middle third, and 'low tariff providers' are defined as those in the bottom third. In this report they apply only to HEIs.



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