



Independent Review of the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF): Terms of reference

Background on TEF

The Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework was proposed in the Higher Education: Success as a knowledge economy White Paper, published in May 2016. Its purpose is to recognise excellence in teaching and student outcomes at higher education providers, and in particular aims to achieve the following objectives:

- To better inform students' choices about what and where to study;
- To raise esteem for teaching;
- To recognise and reward excellent teaching; and
- To better meet the needs of employers, business, industry and the professions.

The TEF rates providers Gold, Silver or Bronze for the quality of their teaching, learning environment and graduate outcomes. Institutions eligible for TEF, but which do not have sufficient metrics, can be given a one year Provisional award.

The first assessment outcomes were published in June 2017, with a further round of assessments published in June 2018. Participation in TEF has been voluntary to date, but from academic year 2019/20, it will be mandatory for providers registered with the Office for Students (OfS) which have more than 500 students. At the present time, 296 providers have TEF ratings.

In January 2018, the OfS formally adopted the TEF as its rating system for quality, as provided for under Section 25 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA).

The Independent Review

Section 26 of HERA requires the Secretary of State for Education to appoint a suitable independent person within an "initial period". This period is defined as the period of one year from the commencement of Section 25 of HERA on 1 January 2018. The Reviewer is required to prepare a report on the operation of TEF and submit it to the Secretary of State as soon as possible after the end of the "initial period", which expires on 1 January 2019.

As set out in HERA, this Independent Review needs to report on the following:

1. The process by which ratings are determined under the scheme and the sources of statistical information used in that process;
2. Whether that process, and those sources of statistical information, are fit for use for the purpose of determining ratings under the scheme;
3. The names of the ratings under the scheme and whether those names are appropriate;
4. The impact of the scheme on the ability of higher education providers to which the scheme applies to carry out their functions (including in particular their functions relating to teaching and research);

5. An assessment of whether the scheme is in the public interest; and
6. Any other matters that the appointed person considers relevant.

The Reviewer

Under HERA, the Secretary of State for Education is required to appoint an Independent Reviewer who (a) has experience of providing higher education on behalf of, or being responsible for the provision of HE by, a HE provider and (b) appears to the Secretary of State to be someone who would command the confidence of registered HE providers.

The Secretary of State has appointed Dame Shirley Pearce to be the Independent Reviewer.

Dame Shirley is currently Chair of Court and Council at the London School of Economics and Political Science, a member of the Higher Education Quality Assurance Panel for the Ministry of Education in Singapore, and a Member of the Committee on Standards in Public Life.

She was the former Vice-Chancellor of Loughborough University, a recent trustee and Council member at the University of Cambridge, and the inaugural Chair of the College of Policing.

Dame Shirley will be given administrative support by the Department for Education in her role as the Reviewer. She will also establish a small advisory group comprising relevant experts to provide advice and help inform her Review.

Interaction with other TEF developments

The Independent Review will have no impact on the current round of provider-level TEF, launched in October 2018. This round of TEF, for academic year 2018/19 (also known as TEF Year Four) will see a further set of provider-level outcomes published by the OfS in June 2019. The Review will be able to make recommendations in relation to the system for subsequent provider-level ratings.

The Independent Review will be developing its recommendations at the same time as the second year of pilots for subject-level TEF. The pilot findings will be available by summer 2019 and will then influence the design of the final version of subject-level TEF.

The recommendations of the Independent Review should also be available at that time, and influence the TEF's final design.

The OfS is planning to move to full implementation of subject-level TEF in academic year 2019/20 (TEF Year Five). The application window for subject-level TEF will open in academic year 2019/20 with the assessment process running through to academic year 2020/21. The OfS expect to publish the first outcomes of subject-level TEF in spring 2021.

Devolved administrations

Providers in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland may opt to participate in the TEF on a voluntary basis, with the consent of the Welsh and Scottish Governments and the Department for the Economy in Northern Ireland. The Reviewer will therefore ensure she engages the Devolved Administrations in the Review process appropriately.