



# Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework: Subject-level - Government consultation response

## Briefing – November 2018

In October 2018, the Government published a [response](#) to the [Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework \(TEF\): subject-level consultation](#), which sought views on the design of subject-level TEF proposals. The Council provided a [response](#) to this consultation earlier this year. As well as this consultation, the Government has also published [findings](#) from the Office for Students' (OfS) first year of subject-level pilots and a [research project](#) on TEF and student choice undertaken by the Department for Education (DfE).

## Summary

### Subject classification system

The Government has decided to use level 2 of the Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH2) to define subjects for assessment and ratings in subject-level TEF. This has 35 subject groupings. The OfS will test a refined version of CAH2 in the second year of subject-level pilots, so there may be some minor changes to this classification before implementation. For example, the 'nursing' subject may be renamed 'nursing and midwifery'. This is something that the Council called for to raise the visibility of the full range of professions in this subject classification. The plan to make HEIs provide written submissions under seven broad subject groups will not be taken forward.

### Duration and re-application periods

TEF awards will have an extended duration period. However, the final decision about the maximum length will be made after the outcome of this year's subject-level pilots and the independent review into TEF, which is taking place this academic year. The assessment process for subject-level TEF will take place every two years. Re-application will follow the assessment cycle, so the duration period will have to be an even number. It is therefore likely that the duration of awards will be four years.

### TEF framework and models of assessment

The Government will continue to retain the existing elements of the provider-level TEF framework at subject-level. This will include the criteria, metrics, benchmarking, submissions, independent panels and rating system. Several refinements will be tested in the second year of subject-level pilots.

A key question for the consultation centred on which model of assessment to introduce. Model A was a 'by exception' model, which was linked heavily to the provider level rating. Model B was a 'bottom up' model, which assessed all subjects. The Government has decided to combine features from both Model A and Model B to create a revised model. This revised model will include: provider-level assessment, subject-level assessment with metrics, submissions and ratings for each CAH2 subject, and a relationship between provider and subject level assessment that relies on the judgement of the TEF panel.

## LEO data

LEO data was an area of contention in the consultation. The Government has decided to retain the two LEO metrics. The OfS will use the second year of subject-level pilots to test bringing these into the core metrics, as opposed to being used as supplementary information. The response addresses concerns about this salary metric, by stating that it does recognise graduate jobs with high public value but low private returns, such as nursing. The metric measures the proportion of students earning over a threshold salary, which is based on the median salary for 25-29 year olds and is below the starting salary of professional, socially valuable graduate jobs such as nursing, midwifery or teaching. Hence, all careers where earnings are above the threshold should be treated equally by this metric.

## Grade inflation metric

A grade inflation metric will continue to be used as supplementary data, but only at provider-level. It will not be introduced at subject-level. The OfS will use the second-year pilot to test refinements to this metric. Grade inflation is a key issue for the OfS, as one of its four regulatory purposes is for 'qualifications to hold their value over time'. It is likely that it will require HEIs to show they are achieving this goal outside of the TEF framework.

## Distribution of subject ratings

The optimal distribution of subject ratings was a key matter for the consultation. The Government was concerned that certain subjects may cluster around very high or low absolute values and that this would reduce the variation and utility of subject ratings. The Government intends to continue with its proposed approach of allowing a natural variation in the distribution of ratings. Very high and low absolute values are to be identified at subject-level, using the same thresholds as at provider-level.

## Non-reportable metrics

Subject-level assessment means that many providers may not have all the core reportable metrics to go forward in the TEF assessment process. 24 providers do not have core reportable metrics for the subject of nursing. 69 providers do not have the full scope of information for subjects allied to medicine, which includes allied health professions.

The issue of non-reportable metrics will be tested further in the second year of subject-level pilots, which will assess if a subject meets reportability criteria. The subject must have reportable metrics for at least two metric types. These can include: NSS, continuation, and employment outcome data. An assessability requirement will also be trialed. The OfS will test a cohort threshold of 20, whereby a subject will need to

have more than 20 students to be assessed. Additionally, the OfS will explore how to improve subject assessment to better accommodate small subject provision, including using metrics data at the lower confidence level of 90% and assisting providers with submissions for small cohort subjects.

### Additional evidence

The Government will continue with its approach of allowing providers to choose what additional information they present beyond their submissions, including at subject-level. This will allow for evidence of professional statutory and regulatory body (PSRB) accreditation and performance against QAA Subject Benchmark Statements. Healthcare higher education is of course regulated by healthcare professional regulators, such as the Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC) and Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC). Students were found to place increased importance on courses leading to professional accreditation. Out of twenty factors, this was the third most important to current students and the fifth most important to applicants.<sup>1</sup>

### Teaching Intensity

The Government has confirmed that a teaching intensity metric will not be taken forward within TEF. The consultation response stated that measuring teaching intensity was strongly opposed by stakeholders across the sector, including students. The findings from the student research study also suggested that teaching intensity factors are of lower importance to students when compared to other factors such as employability and access to learning resources. Separately, the OfS will explore how students should be provided with more direct information about the amount and type of teaching within their chosen course.

## Next steps

The second year of subject-level pilots is taking place in the academic year 2018/19. This will test refinements to the TEF framework and revised model of assessment, CAH2 classifications, the grade inflation metric and interdisciplinary provision. The independent review of TEF will run alongside the second-year subject-level pilots. Shirley Pearce, Chair of Governors at LSE, will report in 2019.

The final design of subject-level TEF that will be implemented in 2019/20 and will be subject to the findings of both the independent review and second year of subject-level pilots. The OfS will also undertake specific research with applicants and students to understand how TEF ratings should be presented to ensure they are more meaningful to prospective students.

## For more information contact:

Anji Kadam, Policy Officer, Council of Deans of Health, [Anji.kadam@cod-health.ac.uk](mailto:Anji.kadam@cod-health.ac.uk)

---

<sup>1</sup>[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)