The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF)

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This talk will aim to answer the following questions

TEF – what’s it all about?
Why?
Does it matter?
What does the future hold?
TEF – some history

• Jo Johnson is the Minister for Universities and Science

• He declared (on the basis of anecdotes) that much of the teaching in UK Higher Education was “lamentable” and needed to be improved

• So he wanted to measure the quality of teaching and publish the results
  • to help students decide where to go
  • to determine which HE institutions should be allowed to increase their fees
Why are current league tables etc. not adequate for this?

• (1) They are based on other factors as well (e.g. reputation, research)

• (2) (most importantly) they are not “benchmarked” (see later)
  • The type of intake varies a lot between Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)
  • Thus differences in outcomes may not have much to do with the quality of education
Thus the TEF was born

• Aiming to assess all HEIs according to:
  • Teaching Quality
  • Learning Environment
  • Student Outcomes

• TEF Year 1 was a bit of a non-event
  • everybody passed!

• TEF 2 would be a bit more demanding
  • Institutions to be rated Gold, Silver or Bronze
  • Voluntary to take part (but see later)
  • Original idea – need Gold or Silver to be allowed to raise fees for UK/EU students
How to measure these things?

• Teaching Quality
• Learning Environment
• Student Outcomes

• Very difficult!
• Proxy “metrics” were used that:
  • Were readily available
  • Bore at least some relation to the three aspects
• HEIs allowed to write a 15-page document to supplement metrics
The metrics used

• Teaching Quality
  • National Student Survey (NSS) scores for “the teaching on my course”
  • NSS scores for “assessment and feedback”

• Learning Environment
  • NSS scores for “academic support”
  • Non-continuation rates between year 1 and year 2

• Student Outcomes
  • Rates of employment or further study (6 months after graduation)
  • Rates of highly skilled employment or further study (as above)

• HEI documents allowed to mention other things
  • But expected to provide firm evidence of impact
Benchmarking

• All metrics benchmarked

• i.e. compared with what would be expected on average given the intake
  • Entry grades
  • Age profile
  • Whether from low-participation neighbourhoods
  • Full-time / part-time mix
  • Ethnic mix

• Final judgments to be made by experts
  • Based on metrics and the 15-page documents
Reaction of HEIs

• Everyone agreed this was all a bit crude
• Some complained
  • Because they thought they wouldn't do very well
• Others didn’t
  • Because they thought they would do well
• However ....... eventually almost every non-Scottish UK HEI took part
  • Scots have a different funding system
  • Outside Scotland, it wouldn’t look good for just a few HEIs not to take part
    • When everyone else was doing so
Results of TEF 2

• To be published on June 14\textsuperscript{th}
  • HEIs’ documents will also be publicly available

• Expect some big divergences from League Tables

• Will the results mean anything important?
  • Perhaps – but just one of many things important for student choice
    • Other assessments of quality
    • Details of degree course
    • Location
    • City or campus
    • Impressions from Open Days
    • Etc.

• My personal view?
  • Gold will mean pretty good
  • But bronze won’t necessarily mean no good
    • Given the highly approximate nature of the exercise
Effect on fees?

• Scrapped
  • Or at least postponed

• For now, all HEIs will be allowed to put up their fees in line with inflation
The future of TEF

• Uncertain
  • Depends on other events happening today!
  • But uncertain anyway
    • Very few in government seem to be interested in higher education

• Current plan
  • TEF Year 3 to be a repeat year
    • For those who want to improve their rating
    • Otherwise the rating will stay as in Year 2
  • TEF Year 4 to be “Subject-level TEF”
    • Aiming to measure teaching quality not only for institutions, but also separately for different subject groupings
    • Unclear how, or even if, this could work at all
  • Later still
    • Apply to postgraduate education
    • perhaps