# Teaching Excellence Framework Technical Consultation

# Response by

# University of Oxford

# July 2016

**Question 1 (Chapter 1)**
**Do you agree with the criteria proposed in Figure 4?**

Yes

The University of Oxford fully supports the government's wish to raise the profile and standing of teaching in higher education. We agree that it is in the interests of students, employers and the taxpayer to promote the highest standards of teaching across the sector, whatever the mission of the provider or profile of its students.

The University has always placed the quality of its teaching at the heart of what it does. We believe that an Oxford education, characterised by close and personalised teaching, intellectual rigour and critical inquiry, and extensive academic and pastoral support, demonstrates key aspects of teaching excellence.

However, the University of Oxford continues to have reservations about the value of the TEF as currently constructed, and would welcome the opportunity to continue to participate in its recasting as it evolves. We are not convinced that, as currently conceived, the TEF will improve the quality of teaching across the sector, or that it will deliver more genuinely informed student choice.

We recognise that it is difficult to measure teaching quality in a consistent and transparent way, given the variety of forms that teaching takes, and the different approaches, missions and profiles of individual providers. However, we continue to have concerns about the core metrics to be used to assess teaching quality, which we see as limited and incomplete. We are therefore glad that the metrics analysis will be supplemented by a provider statement that will enable individual providers to explain particular aspects of their performance and/or to highlight particular features of good practice or diversity of approach. We also welcome the adjustments proposed to the timetable for implementation to allow more time for piloting and consultation.

We agree that the three aspects and supporting criteria generally represent appropriate characteristics of excellent learning and teaching provision. However, much will depend on how these supporting criteria are interpreted in the assessment process. It will be therefore important for the assessment process to be as transparent as possible.

We also note that the quality of teaching on relevant courses is already subject to scrutiny by Professional, Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) as part of the cycle of accreditation and review.

**Question 2 (Chapter 3)**
**A) How should we include a highly skilled employment metric as part of the TEF?**

We continue to have a general concern about the use of employment destinations data to measure teaching quality. However, we can see some advantage for students in a more fine grained analysis of destinations that distinguishes between general employment and graduate level or professional employment.

**B) If included as a core metric, should we adopt employment in Standard Occupational Classification (SOC) groups 1-3 as a measure of graduates entering highly skilled jobs?**

Yes

**C) Do you agree with our proposal to include all graduates in the calculation of the employment/destination metrics?**

No

We do not support the proposal to include graduates who are in ill health, taking time out to travel or fulfilling caring responsibilities in the proposed employment metrics. This would cause an unnecessary and unhelpful mismatch between the well-understood and widely-used current presentation of employment data (as in the UK PIs and institutional analyses) and the figures used in the TEF.

**Question 3 (Chapter 3)**
**A) Do you agree with the proposed approach for setting benchmarks?**

Yes

**B) Do you agree with the proposed approach for flagging significant differences between indicator and benchmark (where differences exceed 2 standard deviations and 2 percentage points)?**

Yes

**Question 4 (Chapter 3)**
**Do you agree that TEF metrics should be averaged over the most recent three years of available data?**

Yes

**Question 5 (Chapter 3)**

**Do you agree the metrics should be split by the characteristics proposed above?**

Not sure

As stated above, the University does not believe that the proposed core metrics are appropriate or reliable indicators of teaching quality. If these metrics are to be used, it is essential that important differences in institutional character and student profile should be recognised to enable more valid comparisons to be made.

We agree that the metrics should be split by the characteristics proposed. However, we are concerned that splitting data in this way may not always allow statistically significant conclusions to be drawn.

**Question 6 (Chapter 3)**
**Do you agree with the contextual information that will be used to support TEF assessments proposed above?**

Yes

**Question 7 (Chapter 3)**
**A) Do you agree with the proposed approach for the provider submission?**

Yes

We support the proposal to enable an institution to provide additional evidence or commentary, to complement the metrics analysis.

We also believe that institutions should be encouraged in the provider submission to demonstrate how they engage with those processes that research has shown to be major factors in enabling teaching excellence, notably frequent contact with academics in and out of the class, cooperation and collaboration with other students, active involvement of students in thinking and learning, and timely, specific feedback.

**B) Do you agree with the proposed 15 page limit?**

Not sure

We can see the value of setting a limit to the amount of additional evidence to be supplied. We have no strong view as to whether that limit should be 15 pages.

**Question 8 (Chapter 3)**
**Without the list becoming exhaustive or prescriptive, we are keen to ensure that the examples of additional evidence included in Figure 6 reflect a diversity of approaches to delivery. Do you agree with the examples?**

Not sure

We agree that it is helpful to provide an indicative list. But we see a tension between some of the examples that encourage evidence of particular initiatives and the general advice (in paragraph 101) to avoid focussing on localised features of good practice.

Also, core elements of the UK Quality Code (e.g. impact and effectiveness of external examining under Teaching Quality) are judged in the quality assessment cycle and are a baseline requirement for entry to the TEF. It is not clear why such information should be repeated in the TEF submission.

We also consider that information as to 'how the provider is successfully identifying, addressing and preventing grade inflation' relates more to academic standards than to teaching quality.

**Question 9 (Chapter 4)**
**A) Do you think the TEF should issue commendations?**

No

We believe it is important that the assessments should be open, fair and transparent and should command the confidence of the sector. We believe that it would be very difficult for the panel to reach robust decisions on a very limited number of commendations (whatever categories are chosen), especially in the early days of the new system. We think it would put undue pressure on the assessors and panel, and could open the process even more to challenge.

**B) If so, do you agree with the areas identified above?**

Not applicable

**Question 10 (Chapter 4)**
**Do you agree with the assessment process proposed?**

Yes

We broadly support the assessment process, and welcome the inclusion of students as assessors. However, as previously stated, it will be critical that assessments are seen to be fair and defensible. It will be very important that panel members and assessors are carefully chosen, and properly trained and supported throughout the assessment process. It will also be very important, for the credibility of the whole assessment process, that the panel should comprise academic staff from a variety of subject backgrounds who have experience and expertise in both teaching and the management of the delivery of teaching.

**Question 11 (Chapter 4)**
**Do you agree that in the case of providers with less than three years of core metrics, the duration of the award should reflect the number of years of core metrics available?**

Yes

We agree in relation to new entrants to the sector. However, it might be necessary to revisit this requirement in the event that an external event, e.g. an NSS boycott by students, were to lead to a break in the availability of three years' consecutive data for established providers.

**Question 12 (Chapter 5)**
**Do you agree with the descriptions of the different TEF ratings proposed in Figure 9?**

No

We consider that the descriptions of the different ratings lack precision and are insufficient to guide either providers or assessors. We would expect to see a clearer statement of the criteria to be met for the different levels of assessment.

We are also concerned that it appears to be the intention that a given percentage of institutions will fall into each of the three ratings. This approach would seem to be in direct conflict with the aims of the White Paper to raise the quality of teaching across the sector.