

Key points

TEF:

- The TEF will use measures include NSS data; student retention rates and graduate employment. The Green Paper mentions a series of criteria which are important to students, including “**providing better learning facilities**” (pg 11), but suggests there is little information available to students on these at present. It links the TEF to widening participation objectives and suggests that having an Access Agreement may be a pre-requisite. FE colleges and higher apprenticeships may be included in the TEF.
- Which metrics are used will be the subject of **a technical consultation in 2016**. The same metrics will be used for the TEF and for the QA process. It suggests that account will be taken of whether students come from disadvantaged background or hard to reach groups. Further detail on government thinking on metrics is on page 32-36 of the Paper.
- In year one of the TEF, universities which achieve the “first level” in the TEF will be allowed to increase fees in line with inflation from 2017-18. This means that any institution with a successful QA Review assessment published by the end of February 2016 will qualify. This assessment may last up to three years, meaning effectively that, across the sector, fees will rise by inflation over the next three years.
- From year two (2018/19), there will be higher levels (possibly four) for the TEF, beyond the “first level” mentioned above, and for “financial incentives” (maximum fees) to be differentiated according to the level awarded for an institution. The Green Paper asks whether, in time, the TEF should apply at discipline level or not – the government’s preference is for this to be the case. It isn’t clear how discipline-level TEF assessments would be aggregated to institutional level.
- It also asks whether there should be an automatic 3 or 5 year cycle to review the TEF, or whether institutions should be able to apply for assessment under the TEF, or both.
- Assessments will be made by panels made up of academic experts in teaching and learning, students and employers. Visits to assess the TEF may be made, but it suggests that they will not be mandatory.
- The paper suggests that some universities are breaking competition law by not providing clarity on additional costs of courses. **The paper does not mention library fines in this context** but of course these may be considered during the consultation. The paper does mention “setting terms and conditions” that student may be bound by (page 21).

Degree classifications

- The paper suggests that degree inflation is an issue across the sector and states that “we want to see greater assurance ... that the class of degree awarded Is consistent across the sector. (Pg 13)”.

Key points

- The government will encourage the use of a grade point average system, based on a 13 point scale, to supplement the current degree classification system. This will also be considered as part of the 2016 technical consultation, as will the issue of grade inflation.

Fees

- The paper appears to give the Secretary of State, rather than Parliament, control over setting the maximum tuition fees that universities can charge.

HEFCE

- HEFCE and OFFA are to be merged and will be given a primary objectives of promoting the student interest. It will be called the Office for Students (OfS). It will adopt a risk-based approach to regulation and will have responsibility for access agreements, teaching funding, TEF and quality assurance. A list of its responsibilities is available on page 58 and proposed statutory duties on page 62.
- The paper asks whether the OfS or BIS should be responsible for allocating teaching grant.

Research

- The OfS would not have a role in grant allocation for research. The paper gives little attention to what the new arrangements would be, but does suggest that this may include the establishment of a new body to replace HEFCE's role, or a single overarching body bringing this together with the Research Council functions (pg 71).
- The next REF will be held "by 2021" and the paper proposes the use of data and metrics, but again no real detail is included.

New entrants

- There will be a faster process for new bodies to become universities and for the granting of degree-awarding powers. No cap on students numbers will be applied. If an institution fails, there will be safeguards for students on fees and on continuing their education – providers will be required to have contingency arrangements in place.
- The paper expresses concern that current validation arrangements for degrees may be a barrier to entry to new providers and the power to validate degrees may pass to the OfS (pg 49)

Key points

Widening participation

- The Director of Fair Access (within the OfS) will look at the outcomes for under-represented groups as well as recruitment.
- A UUK Social Mobility Advisory Group has been set up to advise the Secretary of State which will deliver an interim report in December this year.
- UCAS is consulting on the introduction of “name blind” applications to HE from September 2017.
- The Green Paper floats the possibility that the OfS could set targets for providers on widening participation.

Freedom of Information Act

- Universities may be given exemption from Freedom of Information requirements.