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Editors' Letter

The Government is introducing the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) with the aim to recognise and reward excellent learning and teaching (Department for Education, 2016). While much has been published to help outline the aims and processes of the TEF, many questions and concerns remain and thus continue to be critically debated in the sector. Some of these concerns focus around examining the viability of the TEF, specifically the suitability of criteria that will be used to measure teaching excellence - the National Student Survey (NSS), Non-continuation (HESA) and Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education (DLHE). Another point of tension is the unresolved dilemma surrounding the funding of Higher Education and how this is linked to tuition fees. The Government will shortly publish the outcomes of the TEF, which will inevitably focus institutions on responding to their Gold, Silver or Bronze rating. This special issue of *Compass* gives us the opportunity to look, in some depth, at the different angles and nuances of the Teaching Excellence Framework before discussion turns to concentrating on improving or maintaining the rating awarded.

We present a range of voices expressing their perspectives on the TEF. As might be expected in a collection of articles of this kind, and at this moment of transition, there is some overlap of views. This very fact, however, gives credence to the attitudes held about the TEF and indicates the strength of feeling across higher education. Reading these scholarly opinions confirms that academic practitioners are themselves already putting into place relevant self-critical measures to enhance learning and teaching, and that principles of collaboration, communities of practice and student/staff empowerment underpin their strategies. The metrics are examined, as is the TEF's very rationale, but the authors also seek positives, and show their genuine desire to raise the game of the entire sector in the UK.

Nick Hillman's reflection on the Teaching Excellence Framework, based on a lecture at the University of Greenwich in November 2016, begins by considering the 'progenitors' of the TEF. Hillman voices his concerns regarding the TEF including the possible link to fees. He also points to papers published by the Higher Education Policy Institute, by way of highlighting the efforts made to critically examine the TEF. However, Hillman notes that although the metrics used to measure excellence have caused much debate, it makes sense to start with existing metrics than wait for more suitable ones to arrive. Continuing this

balanced reflection, Hillman praises the Government's effort to focus on enhancing teaching and learning in HE.

In contrast, J M Moore takes issue with the metrics of student satisfaction, retention and graduate employment as true measures of the quality of learning and teaching in higher education. Pointing out that these re-emphasise existing social inequalities between students, militate against those who pose a risk of failure and favour institutions which recruit the most privileged, Moore makes the suggestions that universities should not be compared and that widening participation is what gives students real choice; further recommendations include the promotion of a critical pedagogy in the light of better awareness of the needs of students and a more courageous challenge by university leaders to flawed government policy. The TEF, which will happen, Moore says, will best be modified by the development of truly participatory learning communities based on social justice values.

Similarly targeting the metrics of retention, employment and student satisfaction, Chris Rust offers a rather different perspective of each. As for retention, Rust remarks that high-achieving, motivated students and those attending prestigious establishments tend not to drop out, even if the teaching quality is not first rate; additionally, there is plenty of research to support his view that students who do drop out do so because they see the course as not for them, rather than because of perceived shortcomings in the teaching. Excellent tuition may support employment prospects, but many other factors come into play; furthermore, Rust says, not all graduates share the same aspiration to hold 'graduate jobs'. Commenting on the use of NSS scores, he not only reminds us of the criticisms already levelled at those, but also adds that, if they are low, sometimes there are reasons other than teaching for that. The paper's final and main criticism of the TEF is that it is ultimately going to operate at institutional level.

A specific alternative to the TEF is offered in an opinion piece by Chrissi Nerantzi who is unconvinced that greater competitiveness generated between higher education institutions will produce improved quality of teaching and learning. Personal study and a body of supportive literature persuades Nerantzi that what will really help to achieve excellence in HE is cross-boundary collaboration in a diverse learning community, bringing together people from different cultures and backgrounds. By this means, best innovative practice, sector-wide, may be grown and disseminated and be underpinned by continuous professional development. Partnership between students and staff, and between academics and professionals outside HE, will place universities, Nerantzi says, 'at the heart of local and distributed communities and society'; the TEF, meanwhile, merely seeks 'to categorise, rank and compare'.

A very lively analysis of the TEF highlights the intrinsic potential flaws of this chosen method of measuring excellence. Whilst James Derounian welcomes parity of scrutiny of both teaching excellence and research excellence, he has reservations about the uncertainties lurking beneath the framework. A single award for an entire institution requires that, somehow, assessors will be able to make sense of, say, variable performance across subjects and disciplines – not easy! Derounian asks how prospective students will be able to deduce from the blunt instrument of the awarded institutional standard whether a particular course is the best choice, though does accept that a planned subsequent move to subject-level awards will be a positive step. However, Derounian sees the ‘student outcomes’ measure as very problematical, as many variables influence whether students do in fact get appropriate jobs; furthermore, a census at six months post-graduation may not fairly offer enough time for students to find employment. There may well be also some difficulty in squaring the gold standard of ‘consistently outstanding outcomes for students from all backgrounds’ with the reality of the very worthy and considerable ‘distance travelled’ by some students who do not make it to further study or graduate employment. As for student wellbeing, and universities’ role in the growth of ‘decent, compassionate, giving human beings’, the TEF seems not to have a view.

It is perhaps inevitable that criticism will be levelled at the TEF on the grounds of its rationale, which Graham Gibbs sees as deeply flawed; not only does he regard the proposed metrics as invalid, but is sceptical that fine judgements about institutional rankings on the basis of metrics will be achievable, as the very small differences in scores between institutions will defy discrimination. Ironically, Gibbs suggests, universities will renew their efforts to improve teaching and learning because they see a risk in not doing so, but any rise in quality won’t be because government policy is sound; evidence indicates no substantial problem in teaching quality anyway and low value for money ratings reflect perceived high cost, not poor teaching. The only hope is that positive new thinking will spring from a sense of the TEF’s inadequacies.

Since the 1997 Dearing Report into Higher Education, much time and effort has been expended, by first the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education and, latterly, the Higher Education Academy, on establishing a system for recognising and rewarding outstanding university teachers: the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS). Sally Brown, brings the weight of her NTF experience to bear upon the proxy metrics of the TEF. Brown’s preferred metrics focus on numbers of preferments, on the basis of teaching, to Reader or Professor, or on the proportions of staff achieving external recognition for their teaching, or on the evidence of successful staff completion of continuing professional

development activities: or, in a nutshell, on authenticated measures of the true value added by institutions to the student learning experience.

In a paper striking for its contrast to all the others in this issue, a powerful challenge to the TEF comes in the form of the carefully-structured argument that *Success as a Knowledge Economy* and the TEF will constitute ‘a set of mechanisms of perpetual pedagogical control’ instead of supporting practitioner improvement of teaching and learning or empowering both teachers and students. Placing relevant aspects of Gilles Deleuze’s *Postscript on the Societies of Control* in the context of Gary Hall’s ‘postwelfare capitalism’, Conor Heaney and Hollie Mackenzie explain how the logic of the TEF will lead inexorably to the regulation of pedagogy by market forces, with the blessing and, indeed, the active encouragement of the Government. Finally, Heaney and Mackenzie call upon their peers in the UK tertiary sector to question whether this process is one they really want and whether it should be resisted by means of alternative strategies.

It’s not surprising that the weight of academic experience in the higher education sector and in previous interventions into its provision would be brought to bear in addressing the perceived shortcomings of the TEF. Indeed, the Research Excellence Framework alone, from the point of view of Ian McNay, serves very well to model government intentions and failings. McNay uses the Department for Education’s own strategy regarding the TEF - ‘to trial and pilot changes’ – as evidence of yet another ‘trial-and-error’ approach: first, confusion and then greater and greater control, driving for compliance and conformity in a marketised environment, he sees as a process hardly likely to encourage development and diversity in learning and teaching, especially as power shifts from academic professionals to managers. Like other authors in this issue, McNay systematically criticises bad metrics, which will inevitably, he suggests, be gamed. McNay’s parting shot is that, in spite of his having used history to identify what is to be expected, academics might as well be ready, too, for the unexpected!

One succinct riposte to the TEF comes in the form of a higher education consultant’s focus on the Green Paper’s stated desire for the new framework to be less burdensome. As a National Teaching Fellow with the opportunity for objective observation of the impact on institutions and their people of gearing up for the TEF, Phil Race is able to confirm huge expenditure of academic staff effort and energy. Race’s focus is clear and direct: the commitment would be much better devoted, not to doing much the same thing as previously in the vain hope of different results, but to improving the central elements of assessment methods and academic feedback to students. These are clearly in need of an overhaul, Race says, and whilst methods of monitoring them properly should be developed, the TEF

'seems set to measure the wrong things', generating unnecessary and unhelpful competition instead of collaboration.

The notion of students as co-producers rather than consumers is taken up by Sam Grogan in an opinion piece which articulates the deleterious impact of the terms 'consumer' or 'customer' when applied to higher education students. These terms, Grogan argues, diminish what he says should be 'a genuinely humbling and transformative personal experience from which one emerges with horizons stretched' to a merely transactional arrangement. A clever and convincing analogy between students and members of a gym supports his view that if the context is right, students are 'consumer-producers' at least and may succeed in becoming co-producers, creating outcomes in a real partnership with the institution.

As one might expect, there is considerable critical reflection on the TEF expressed in these articles. These might amount to a case for the prosecution, but is there a case for the defence? The quest for teaching excellence and improving social mobility for students from disadvantaged backgrounds or with protected characteristics are laudable goals. The TEF is essentially about innovation and positioning UK HE within a global context. It focuses attention on teaching in Higher Education that is in step with the imperative to address societal needs. There is real value in developing a national quality benchmark that protects the reputation and brand of Higher Education UK plc by recognising the importance of excellent teaching and the value of professionalism. The TEF is a valiant attempt to reinvigorate higher education, breathe new life into programmes and link up teaching with research. In preparing for the TEF, institutions have already started to reconsider their priorities and resources, and have begun to look beyond teaching to the broader aspects of the learning environment to improve students' outcomes. One way in which this has been done is by engaging our students more deeply and dynamically as partners and change agents.

The TEF ratings will be published imminently, and we are expecting that more universities will be awarded bronze than gold (Bagshaw and Morris, 2016). However, there remain many unknowns and we are unsure yet what the consequences and implications will be for higher education providers. For example, will TEF move to subject level, will increases in fees be pegged to ratings, and how might the outcome of upcoming general election affect the Higher Education and Research Bill? Once TEF ratings are published there is likely to be a shift in the debate at institutional and sector level, but it's unclear what that shift will be.

We hope that you enjoy this issue and continue this debate concerning the Teaching Excellence Framework. We welcome letters which carry on the discussion about teaching excellence practice and policy further, and encourage our readers to comment or respond to the arguments raised in this special issue.

Simon Walker and Danielle Tran

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Is the TEF a good idea – and will it work?

Nick Hillman

This reflection piece is based on a lecture delivered at Greenwich in November 2016.

The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) is designed to evaluate the quality of teaching and learning in higher education and to reward or punish institutions accordingly. The idea of some sort of Teaching Excellence Framework is older than many people realise. It was floating around Whitehall before I left my role as special adviser to the Minister for Universities and Science in late 2013. At that time, we were vaguely thinking of a TREF: a Teaching and Research Excellence Framework that would be light touch and perhaps piggyback on the REF. But, in truth, our thinking had not gone very far.

There were three progenitors of the idea.

First, my then boss, David Willetts, was worried that measures of institutional performance flattered ancient research-intensive institutions but did the opposite for institutions focusing on great teaching. If those that focus on excellent research are applauded for it, it is surely only fair that those that focus on excellent teaching receive similar plaudits.

Second, when £9,000 tuition fees came in, ministers said universities would be much more responsive to their students. My job entails visiting around fifty higher education institutions each year and, as I travel around, I see that this has happened. But ministers lack hard supportive data and thus have been unable to prove unequivocally that teaching and learning have improved as a result of their reforms.

Third, we have to accept that not all students are as engaged as they should be. For example, our annual Student Academic Experience Survey, undertaken with the Higher Education Academy, shows that, on average, they work for only three-quarters of the time that the Quality Assurance Agency say they should.

So, I understand where the Government is coming from on the TEF, but I do worry about the statistical proxies by which university teaching is to be measured. I also worry about its implementation and structure. That explains why the Higher Education Policy Institute has published more detailed critiques of the TEF than anyone else, including, as well as various blogs on specific aspects, four lengthy papers:

1. In early 2016, we published Professor Graham Gibbs's critique of the higher education green paper. He argued for the TEF to be replaced with process measures focusing on student engagement: 'The Government must choose between obliging universities to give students what they say they want, even if it is counter-educational, and encouraging forms of provision which are known to be more educationally effective, whether students want them or not.'
2. We published a lecture by Andreas Schleicher, who is the OECD's Director of Education. He believes we should test students on what they know instead of using proxies. Only then would it be possible to compare the quality of, say, a Japanese Engineering student to a UK one. He argues we are much closer to being able to do this well than we were a few years ago and so the time has come to start measuring learning gain directly. That is a controversial proposal and difficult to do in practice, but measuring learning gain does have increasing appeal and HEFCE is now funding its own pilots on the idea.
3. We also published a paper by Louisa Darian that looks at whether there are lessons for the TEF from other sectors in receipt of public funding. She found some clear ones. For example, experience in healthcare shows that stability in the organisation delivering quality ratings is crucial to their success. Thought needs to be given to this, because the TEF is to be implemented alongside the abolition of the Higher Education for England and the establishment of the new Office for Students.
4. In autumn 2016, we published a polemical paper by Professor Paul Blackmore of King's College London, which argues that prestige comes from research and so the best way to put a new focus on teaching is to bring teaching and research closer together rather than to drive them apart. His paper argues that, because the TEF does nothing to integrate teaching with research, it could end up a sideshow to the REF. Instead, he called for more links between teaching and research at every level.

Despite the power of these critiques, it is important to be fair to the Government. For the TEF to happen quickly, you do need to use existing metrics rather than wait for better measures of teaching and learning to come along. We could wait for the data to be perfect but, if we do so, the chances are the TEF would never actually happen. Jo Johnson makes a valid point when he cautions against comparing the first iteration of the TEF to the latest REF.

Moreover, ministers have proved admirably flexible on the way the TEF will operate. For example, the original timetable has been extended, universities are able to submit qualitative

information to be assessed alongside their hard data and the TEF is, in due course, to shift to the basis of disciplines. Numerous tweaks have been made to the details as well.

It is a very different beast (in many ways, better) from the one Jo Johnson originally announced, even if it is bigger, bossier and more bureaucratic. We can still query the details – some people particularly dislike the Gold / Silver / Bronze hierarchy, which probably derives from the fact that 2016 was an Olympic year – but I do not think we can question the willingness of ministers or civil servants to alter their plans in response to valid concerns. My only hope is that they continue to be just as flexible in future as we learn from the process of rolling the TEF out.

There has been talk of a boycott of the TEF, particularly by older universities. I am sceptical that this will happen in any big way, because not all the sector is united against the TEF, universities want the fee increases that will come with success in the TEF and precedents suggest that those who stay out of sector-wide initiatives do not stay out for long. Perhaps, if the whole sector fiercely opposed the TEF and refused to play ball, they could kill it, but that is a battle that would have little public support at the very time when, post EU referendum, our universities are trying to show they are in close touch with the wider community.

I am also sceptical that the attempt by the National Union of Students to boycott the National Student Survey will have much impact. Even many student unions question whether it is the right approach and I do not see what incentive there is for students to hurt the reputation of their own universities in this way.

Overall, I think it is a good idea to respond to concerns about the quality of higher education by trying to assess the quality of teaching and learning. I think it is right to re-balance the incentives within universities to the benefit of teaching and learning. I also think the TEF results could prove useful to parents, teachers, advisers, applicants, students, graduates, staff and employers. Moreover, I believe none of us working in higher education should ever shy away from new information, however difficult. We should play with it, contextualise it, highlight its limits... and also learn from it.

However, I am uncomfortable about the link to fees, especially while the TEF is undertaken institutionally rather than at the level of disciplines: that seems to me to mix up ends and means and to focus debate on funding when it should be on pedagogy. I also worry that the TEF could hinder innovation in the classroom by encouraging safe rather than risky teaching. It would, for example, be a tragedy if the TEF meant difficult subjects were no longer taught or if it were to encourage spoon feeding at the expense of teaching designed to stretch students, develop their independent learning skills or help them to learn in

research-like ways. So, most importantly, we must all be discriminating enough to select from the rollout of the new assessment of teaching and learning what helps rather than hinders.

The TEF has encouraged lots of technocratic discussions about teaching and learning. As a former teacher, I want to end by noting something else. There is no feeling in life as rewarding as successfully imparting knowledge to others. It is therefore incumbent upon us all to ensure that the TEF does not erect a new barrier between the teachers and the taught.

Against the TEF: For Quality Learning

J M Moore

In this piece, I argue for reclaiming concepts like teaching excellence and quality and developing an alternative discourse to that of the fatally-flawed Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).

Keywords: Teaching Excellence Framework; TEF; Critical Pedagogy; Quality Learning.

In the 1930s Jawaharlal Nehru observed that the Indian Civil Service under British colonial rule was 'neither Indian nor civil nor a service'. Such a critique is equally appropriate to the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), which, despite its misleading title, makes no attempt to evaluate directly either teaching or students' learning experiences. The interaction between students and their tutors is outside its remit; instead, it seeks to evaluate through proxy metrics: student satisfaction, retention and graduate employment (Forstenzer, 2016).

Student satisfaction is to be measured through National Student Survey (NSS) scores. Even before being given this increased importance, the NSS has often been gamed and already distorts the focus of institutions: as Joanna Williams (2015) has highlighted, it has 'become detrimental to learning, teaching and higher education.' Students have different learning styles and increasingly complex lives. That a university course satisfies the aspirations of an eighteen-year-old, privately-educated student dripping in social capital is of little relevance to the working-class single mother returning to education in her thirties. The NSS and the league tables that flow from it operate on the presumption that not only is a university education a homogeneous product but also that it should be one.

The second indicator is to be retention rates. The selection of this depends on the premise that is always best for a student to complete her/his degree. However, for students on the wrong course, or at the wrong institution, or at university at the wrong time, this may not be true. The TEF's focus on retention also further incentivises institutions to maximise pass rates at a programme and module level (even at a cost to academic standards) and to guard against risky recruitment. Students who pose a high risk of failure – mature students, those with caring responsibilities, those with disabilities and those without traditional academic qualifications – will be weeded out.

The final metric is graduate employment. This is determined by several factors, many of which the quality of teaching can never influence. Social capital - connections available through family and former schools - are unevenly distributed across the university sector. This, like the other metrics, will perpetuate society's existing structural inequalities by rewarding the universities which recruit the most privileged students.

My critique of the TEF is hardly original (Patterson, 2015). However critique is not sufficient, we urgently need to imagine an alternative and develop a counter discourse, that reclaims concepts like educational 'quality', 'excellence' and 'value' for a democratic, participatory and critical pedagogy. To start a debate on what this might look like, may I make some provisional suggestions:

1. Firstly, we should reject the idea that different universities can be directly compared. Each university should have its own distinct mission, philosophy and purpose. Widening participation requires greater diversity within higher education so that we can cater for the full spectrum of students. It is diversity rather than league tables which will give real choices to students.
2. Universities and their staff need to learn about their students' lives. With the exception, perhaps, of those attending elite institutions, the lives of students are becoming increasingly complex, with consequent impact upon their ability to engage fully with academic life (Paired Peers Project, 2013). Knowing this, we should re-engineer how we deliver HE so that it is genuinely accessible all students, not just middle-class kids funded by the bank of mum and dad.
3. Within institutions and teaching teams, we should be more proactive in promoting a critical pedagogy, in order to enable quality learning. How we teach and how students learn should be negotiated with students. Students must realise that higher education should challenge them and teaching staff must sharpen their awareness of their students' learning needs. It is incumbent upon us to welcome the experiences our students bring with them and take seriously their critiques of the curriculum.
4. University leaders need courage. Increasingly, they have become willing agents of government policy. The limp acceptance of the Prevent agenda (which, as well as threatening the integrity of our relationship with Muslim students, curbs free speech and open debate), is sadly not an isolated example (Lister et al, 2015). Universities should be refocused to serve their communities, not the state.

The TEF will go ahead. Gold, Silver and Bronze status for teaching 'quality' will be allocated to those who play the game. These will reflect the existing higher education hierarchy and help perpetuate wider social inequalities. The 'better' universities will be rewarded by being allowed to increase their fees. The quality of teaching and learning, perverted to adapt to the new metrics, will decline. However, the TEF's hegemony need not be uncontested if we work with students to create genuinely participatory learning communities based on social justice values. To do this is to build a resistance to the TEF, based on an alternative discourse on what constitutes quality higher education learning.

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The Emperor has no clothes!

Chris Rust

Abstract

This piece argues that an opportunity has been wasted and the proposed metrics and methodology for the TEF will not validly assess teaching excellence.

Some years ago now, mid-afternoon in a workshop I was running for new academic staff in a research-intensive university, a reluctant participant said to me, “Well I can see why this would be important if you wanted to improve your teaching.” He, however, was one of many recently appointed for his research, hopefully to improve the institution’s RAE (Research Assessment Exercise) scores. He resented the fact that his contract required him to teach, let alone attend a whole-day workshop. Many of us who have worked in universities around the world, trying to improve the quality of teaching and learning, are all too familiar with the complaint from faculty that, despite the rhetoric of Vice-Chancellors, it’s research that’s important – not teaching. Research gets the promotions and the kudos: there is no parity of esteem. And this has been reinforced by the way the two have been treated. For research, there has been the carrot, with rewards (largely financial) for success; for teaching, there has been the stick – no money for doing well and negative publicity for doing badly.

So, when the TEF was first mooted, whilst having no delusions about the potential difficulties, I was enthusiastic about engaging with the idea and seeing how it might work and I urged others to do the same. Fulfilment of the intention - to create a similar, parallel framework to the REF, publicly to recognise centres of excellence, to encourage the pursuit of teaching excellence and to give teaching parity of esteem with research - is long overdue. However, what is now being implemented will do none of those things.

The White Paper (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2016) actually includes quite an enlightened definition of teaching excellence:

We take a broad view of teaching excellence, including the teaching itself, the learning environments in which it takes place, and the outcomes it delivers. We expect higher education to deliver well designed courses, robust standards, support for students, career readiness and an environment that develops the ‘soft skills’ that employers consistently say they need. These include capacity for critical thinking,

analysis and teamwork, along with the vital development of a student's ability to learn.

(Para 6, p. 43)

So how can anybody involved in writing that paragraph, or subscribing to what it says, end up with a framework fundamentally based on the three metrics of retention, employment (after six months) and student satisfaction. Let's consider the problems with these three in turn.

Whilst retention may well be improved by excellent teaching, if students are already high-achieving and motivated, they will almost certainly not drop out, even if the teaching is mediocre, and especially not, if attending an institution deemed to be prestigious. Repeated studies, such as Yorke and Langden (2004), have identified that the most common reason for dropping out is not, in fact, the teaching, but the course not having been what the student expected, and therefore considered as 'not right for me'.

There are similar problems with employment as a measure. Though excellent teaching may well contribute to a student's employment chances, there are numerous other factors which probably have even more influence (Blasko *et al*, 2002) – the student's cultural capital, the reputation of the particular university attended, the subject studied, the unemployment rate in the geographical location of the university (as many students like to stay in the area where they have studied) and the state of the general labour market at the time. Additionally, the rather bizarre six-month time limit takes no account of such situations as entry to accountancy and law, for which students have to engage in further professional/vocational courses. We should also note that not all students have the same ambitions and that some have aspirations other than finding traditional, so-called 'graduate jobs'.

Out of the three metrics, the NSS has probably the greatest claim to a link to the quality of teaching. There have been many criticisms of its focus on 'satisfaction' with, as a consequence, some very sensible recent moves to take 'student engagement' as a better indicator, but, in my experience, where a course has had a low NSS score, there has always been an issue that needed addressing – but not always the teaching and sometimes something beyond the course itself, a wider institutional problem.

However, by far the greatest flaw in what is being proposed is that it is going to operate at the level of the institution and, even though a move to assessments at subject/discipline level is intended, these will still be aggregated for the whole institution. This makes absolutely no sense at all. We know that, with NSS scores, there is a wider range of difference between different courses in the same institution than there is across different

institutions (SurrIDGE, 2009). So even if the metrics to be used were much better than those proposed and could claim to be able to assess validly the excellence of teaching, aggregating them for the whole institution would render them meaningless. Then, to reduce that to the designations of gold, silver or bronze is just crude and crass.

Given the arguments above, the claim in the White Paper to be applying “*sector-wide rigour to the assessment of teaching excellence*” (Para. 10, p. 44) can surely not be taken seriously? We should certainly benefit from a system that rigorously assessed teaching excellence – but this is not it! The emperor has no clothes and the stark reality must be made clear: the sector must have the courage to stand up, voice its concerns and demand a re-think, before more time and money is wasted. At the moment, the proposal is both embarrassing and foolish.

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Quality teaching through openness and collaboration – an alternative to the TEF?

Chrissi Nerantzi

Abstract

In this opinion piece, I offer an alternative vision to the TEF that positions universities at the heart of communities and society through greater collaboration among higher education institutions and involving the public. I argue that this approach is a rewarding way for academic staff to innovate and develop their teaching capabilities, so as to improve the student experience and outcomes at universities. This contrasts with a TEF model of measurement of indicators as proxies for teaching quality.

Boundary-crossing professional development

Learning and development should be lifelong, lifewide and lifedeeep (Bell, 2012) and universities and their people play a key role in modelling such ways of being and becoming (Barnett, 2007). We academic staff have a passion for experimenting, creating, debating and sharing ideas and knowledge that helps others, the community, and society more widely. It's vital that, now and in the future, we find imaginative ways to inspire staff and students to teach and learn within and across subject boundaries; perhaps only this inter-disciplinary collaboration will lead to those novel connections of ideas and people that generate discovery and drive innovation.

The UK HE system is already ahead of many other countries in recognising the importance of quality teaching: we have dedicated in-house teaching qualifications, nationally-recognised professional standards and institutional provision for initial and continuous professional development. To support these activities, most UK universities have an academic development unit. Even so, academic developers are often criticised for being slow both to embrace new pedagogies and technologies and to encourage in staff a willingness to share ideas, reflect, act upon insights and innovate (Education Technology Action Group, 2015). In this context, there is now greater pressure to raise the quality of teaching and achieve excellence, in the shape of formulae linked to financial incentives – something guaranteed to increase competition among HEIs (BIS, 2016a; 2016b). The TEF is a UK Government initiative that aims to achieve teaching excellence through published benchmarking of HEI with the added incentive of linking results to the opportunity to increase student fees. This has the potential for yet greater competition between universities. Just what will be the impact of such pressures upon students and staff in these institutions? And

upon the HE sector as a whole? Other voices need to be heard and alternative practices need to be considered.

My research is in the area of academic development through open, cross-institutional collaboration; as such, it constitutes an alternative voice. In a recent phenomenographic study, I explored the lived collaborative open-learner experience in openly-licensed cross-institutional and practitioner-driven academic development courses (Nerantzi, work-in-progress). These were the Flexible, Distance and Online Learning (FDOL132) and Creativity for Learning in HE (#creativeHE) courses; teachers in HE, students and members of the public from a range of backgrounds and cultures came together to discuss, debate and develop, both formally and informally within such cross-boundary communities, and both online and offline. These open courses have the characteristics of what Weller (2011) calls 'little' Open Educational Resources and utilise freely-available social media. Whilst the study had a focus on the UK, its open and collaborative nature meant that it extended beyond geographical, cultural and political borders. Collaboration and openness were explored as a means of breaking free from institutional walls and silos and of bringing individuals from different backgrounds and cultures together to develop HE teaching within diverse cross-boundary communities.

This developmental vehicle provided clear evidence of individual and collective growth; it strengthened relationships, brought together fresh ideas and perspectives that were valued by participants, kept them engaged and created a sense of belonging to a diverse learning community. This mixing of individuals makes a real difference to engagement in this type of academic professional development, as it is proactive and interest-driven; it brings together diverse perspectives, ideas and people who feel empowered to take risks and make innovative changes to their teaching practice. For example, academic staff found it particularly valuable to learn with individuals from outside HE, as they brought new perspectives and ideas; students developed confidence while working with academic staff and felt that they had contributed to co-shaping university teaching.

At the same time as the UK Government is rolling out the TEF, which seeks to categorise, rank and compare universities (with, inevitably, increased competition), there is a call for more openness and collaboration among HEIs, as it is recognised that such approaches enrich the student and staff experience (European Commission, 2013; European Commission, 2015; HEFCE, 2011); my own study also confirms this.

Food for thought

I am unconvinced that competitiveness is the way to achieve sector-wide teaching excellence or even that teaching excellence is the dream we should chase. My study shows that open, collaborative and cross-boundary approaches bring staff, students and the public together. Through these, we grow and spread innovative teaching practices underpinned by continuous professional development; we inspire staff and students as well as position universities at the heart of local and distributed communities and society. How, without further competitiveness, could we remodel the TEF to measure the quality of teaching and incorporate openness, cross-institutional collaboration, teacher development and innovation?

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TEF - Tiresomely Extraneous & Flawed?

James Derounian

The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) is incoming. National Teaching Fellow, JD, reads the runes.

As the *Times Higher Education* (2016) put it, the “teaching excellence framework will see the government monitoring and assessing the quality of teaching in England’s universities.” Good. It is high time that teaching excellence and research excellence were given parity of scrutiny, importance and reward. As I argued in 2015: “Let’s start with the bottom line – the money. What is it that contributes in the main to university coffers? *THE IMPACT OF UNIVERSITIES ON THE UK ECONOMY*, from Universities UK, elevates teaching income 2011–12 over that from research: with tuition fees, education grants and contracts accounting for 35% of university income, whilst research generated just 16%” (Derounian, 2015).

And the UK Government’s 2016 TEF Factsheet asserts, at the start: “Teaching excellence matters – not only for students and taxpayers, but also for social mobility – helping to address inequality by allowing students to fulfil their aspirations and progress onto their chosen careers.” Well said. And quite right that higher education providers should be accountable, to paying students and taxpayers. Quite right too, that qualifications should be available and attainable for individuals regardless of background; and lead them towards fulfilling lives and work.

But what lies beneath? And what we discover is a mass of uncertainties. This is even more concerning given that, apparently, the latest version of the TEF “reflects the decisions made by the Government in response to the Technical Consultation” (DfE, 2016: 5). What it all boils down to is that HE institutions will be initially rated - rather like the Olympics - Bronze, Silver and Gold. TEF assessors will be “either experts in teaching and learning in a higher education setting, or students. Their role is to assess TEF applications and agree provisional outcomes” (*ibid*, 2016: 52). It’s then down to a panel – similarly made up of teaching and learning experts, students and employers - to agree the final TEF ratings. English universities “achieving a rating of Bronze, Silver and Gold will receive the full inflationary uplift”: so, they will be able to charge tuition fees of £9,250 per head (*ibid*, 2016: 6). But how, with any certainty, can you rate an entire university – administration, admissions, student support, different departments and disciplines – and reduce it to a single word – Gold,

Frankincense, Silver or, heaven forfend, Bronze? Pity (all) universities with fantastic teaching departments (let's say Medicine, Earth Science), but also some middling ones (hypothetically, English and Sports Development) and bad bits (e.g. Biology and Economics) ... what does an overall medal for a 1st, 2nd or 3rd place signify? Yet Government sets down that assessors “will be looking for evidence of how far a provider demonstrates teaching and learning excellence across its entire provision.” (*ibid*, 2016: 36; my underlining). And how – in the first phase – will this blunt assessment “provide better information for students to support them in making informed choices”? Given an overall 'medal', how exactly will this help prospective students to choose where to study their particular preferred course?

There are positives, however, in terms of Government's recognising that a subsequent “move to subject level will be informed by a series of pilots in Year Three to test the assessment framework and process at subject level.” (*ibid*, 2016: 6). As with undergraduate dissertations, so with high policy: smaller-scale piloting and experimentation, accompanied by evaluation, potentially offers safer passage for whatever evolves. The TEF begins with undergraduate provision but will, from Year Four, take in postgraduate assessment as well. And (*ibid*, 2016: 37) – all to the good – “providers are encouraged to show how they have involved students in preparing the submission.” So, although I personally don't relish the prospect that “TEF awards given in Year Two will be valid for three years (subject to a provider continuing to meet eligibility requirements)”, this seems fair enough in terms of accountability, currency and enabling students to make better informed choices about universities, departments, and the quality of their provision. And I look forward with relish to HE sector institutional culture that “facilitates, recognises and rewards excellent teaching” (*ibid*, 2016: 21).

On the downside, the Framework links wonderful teaching to students' securing professional jobs. *Student Outcomes* is one of the measures set down in the TEF and, in particular, employment/further study data plus the more focused graduation into highly-skilled employment/further study (from DLHE, *Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education*, returns). But what planet is Government on, when the DLHE first destination job census takes place just six months post graduation? A year on would, surely, give graduates at least a fighting chance of moving into (meaningful) jobs? Furthermore, what has terrific teaching got to do with job attainment? We lecturers can give our students employability skills – priming them with quality teaching experiences, real-world learning, internships – but we cannot guarantee them decent jobs; there are too many other variables (such as individual personality, commitment, enthusiasm, aptitude) that will persuade an employer to employ a graduate... or not. And what about the general state of the (global) economy? If there is a recession, or jobs are scarce and Government is reducing state funding, then, with the best

will in the world, university teachers cannot conjure up “highly skilled employment” for graduates (*ibid*, 2016: 22). Gold, for example, requires that “the provider achieves consistently outstanding outcomes for its students from all backgrounds, in particular with regards to retention and progression to highly skilled employment and further study.” (*ibid*, 2016: 46). So, how does that square with the distance travelled by an individual? That is another TEF criterion. For example, an HND may be a tremendous outcome for a student and demonstrate impressive development and progress, but yet not lead to further study or professional employment. What then? Is that deemed a success, or a sub-degree failure? It’s hard to see how achievement of professional jobs (as one criterion) squares with another measure, namely learning “gain and distance-travelled by all students including those entering higher education part-way through their professional lives” (*ibid*, 2016: 39). It is also uncertain whether the institutional medal awards will run in parallel with subject medals, or whether the whole-university judgement will be superseded by course-level gongs. Interestingly, the “Devolved Administrations have confirmed they are content for providers in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland to take part in Year Two, should they wish to do so” (*ibid*, 2016: 18). What if they don’t “wish to do so”? Furthermore, how exactly does “a commitment to widening access and participation” link to teaching excellence (*ibid*, 2016: 12)?

And, taking a broader view, Dr. Joshua Forstenzer at the University of Sheffield rightly points out that the “TEF ought to reflect higher education’s full range of social purposes”. It’s not just about the economy, or material gain. Michael Oakeshott, (1950: 30) discussing *The idea of a university*, specifically warns that “a university needs to beware of the patronage of this world, or it will find that it has sold its birthright for a mess of potage”. Oakeshott continues, a “University will have ceased to exist when its learning has degenerated....and when those who came to be taught come, not in search of their intellectual fortune but....desire only a qualification for earning a living or a certificate to let them in on the exploitation of the world.” Where are student wellbeing and the idea of universities’ contributing to the growth of decent, compassionate, giving human beings?

So what lies beneath? Brexit, for example, represents something of an iceberg – large and still hidden in swirling mist, yet potentially damaging to UK student teaching and learning: departing the EU jeopardises a range of collaborations and research projects including the European Union’s Horizon 2020 programme and the ERASMUS student exchange scheme. Universities, unsurprisingly, are worried. (The Conversation, 2016 online).

Patrick McGhee, Assistant Vice Chancellor at the University of Bolton, brings this down to impacts on individual students and believes that “we can surely do better than finding the

best teaching, and then increasing the prospective debt of the young people who might benefit most from that teaching.”

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Evidence does not support the rationale of the TEF

Graham Gibbs

Abstract

The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) has evolved since it was first announced, and HEFCE guidance to institutions on its implementation reveals a number of significant concessions to evidence, common sense and fairness. Institutions may well implement useful teaching improvement mechanisms in response, as they have always done, regardless of the nature of external quality assurance demands. However, the rationale of the TEF remains – and it is deeply flawed. It is the rationale that this paper focuses on. It is argued here that its interpretation of evidence about educational quality, employability and value for money ratings, used to justify a TEF, are irrational and are not supported by evidence. Making fine judgements about institutional rankings (and hence fee levels) on the basis of metrics is likely to be thwarted by the very small differences in scores between institutions. Some of its proposed metrics are invalid. Its belief in the ability of a small panel of experts to make sound quality judgments is not well founded, given the poor record of past attempts to make such judgements about teaching quality in higher education. The higher education market is very complex and perhaps only a minority of institutions will be able to benefit in the way the TEF intends. The TEF seems unlikely to be perceived, by most, as rewarding.

The Teaching Excellence Framework's underlying assumptions

However unfit for purpose past teaching quality regimes have been, they have often resulted in institutions' putting more effort into improving teaching than previously, because the risks of not doing so have been perceived to be significant. Most institutions have markedly improved their National Student Survey (NSS) scores since the NSS and metric-based league tables were introduced, under a regime that has focused on quality assurance rather than on quality and under which fees have not been linked to quality. Institutions seem likely to take the TEF extremely seriously, whatever they think of it. The TEF is built on a number of explicit assumptions stated in the Green and then White papers. It is argued here that these assumptions are unfounded. If teaching quality does improve, and it might, it will not be because Government policy is soundly based.

Current teaching metrics do not indicate that there is a substantial teaching quality problem that needs an urgent solution

The government argues that the TEF is necessary because teaching quality is unacceptably low. However, the NSS, that provides one of the only ways currently to monitor quality over time, reveals a completely different picture. Levels of satisfaction and judgements about teaching are high and have gone up every year but one since it was introduced. Those scores that were initially lower (such as for assessment and feedback) have shown the largest improvements. The rate of improvement shows little sign of slowing even though there is a ceiling effect – the scores are often so high there is little room for further improvement. It is true that a few institutions (especially elite research universities such as Imperial College and the LSE) have performed less well recently. It is also true that students are very generous judges of teaching: about three quarters of all teachers are usually considered ‘above average’. The picture the NSS provides is probably too rosy. However, the overall trend is inescapable. A more credible interpretation of the available quality data is that existing teaching metrics, however flawed, have been surprisingly successful in leveraging institutional efforts to improve teaching quality, particularly outside the research elite, even in the absence of variable fees. It might be the case that collating the data differently (for example, not bundling together the top two ratings on rating scales, which tends to exaggerate how good things are) or adding new and more valid quality data (such as concerning students’ level of engagement) would provide even more effective leverage to institutional efforts to improve. But there is nothing in the existing evidence that points to the pressing need for varied fees as a lever on the grounds that otherwise institutions will do nothing to improve.

Poor ‘value for money’ is not caused by poor quality

It is argued that alarmingly low ‘value for money’ ratings justify a strong emphasis on improving teaching quality. But satisfaction and teaching quality ratings are very much higher than value for money ratings! Low value for money ratings are to do with high cost, not low quality. Whatever the level of quality, the cost of higher education is perceived as too high because the much cited ‘graduate premium’ (the additional income graduates can expect simply as a result of being a graduate) is unrealistic. It is based on historical data when there were fewer graduates, the economy was expanding and wages were higher in real terms. It is not at all clear that the current economy needs the current number of graduates each year and this is reflected in the proportion of graduates who, at least initially, undertake non-graduate-level jobs with low wages. The cause of perceived low value for money is that students, quite realistically, are worried that they may not be able to recover their very

substantial investment. The experience of the USA, with many graduates never repaying debts caused by ever-higher college tuition fees, provides a perfect example of how it can all go wrong. Higher fees reflect higher reputations, but, in the USA, reputation predicts almost nothing about teaching quality or student learning gains or the extent of use of educational practices known to improve student learning gains. High fees have become a proxy for high quality – but they are a thoroughly misleading proxy.

If ‘value for money’ is low, it makes no sense to put fees up

Faced with ample evidence of perceived poor value for money, the rational thing to do (if you are incapable of improving the economy and the employment market) is to lower the investment students need to make – to reduce fees. Instead the government say they will improve value for money by increasing fees, at least for most. This is *Alice in Wonderland* logic.

The higher education market does not work perfectly or uniformly

The TEF naïvely assumes a perfect and uniform market. It assumes that all institutions would seek to raise fees, and would raise them if they were allowed to, and that they would automatically benefit as a result; by doing so, they would increase both their attractiveness to consumers and their income. This ignores the reality that many institutions operate in local or not very flexible markets, in which prospective students may have little choice about where to study or much flexibility over how much they can afford to pay. There are already examples of institutions which have increased fees, to take advantage of excellent NSS scores, only to find that they cannot fill their places and have had to put their fees down again. Some institutions, even with comparatively low fee levels and/or perfectly respectable teaching quality metrics, are currently not filling their places. Those institutions that recruit nationally and internationally may benefit from an increase in perceived reputation that comes with higher fees and be able to exploit their market; many others cannot do so, however good they are at teaching. There are assumptions about the market that make some sense for the elite but not for others.

Increased income from raised fees may have little impact on teaching quality

There is an assumption that increased income from increased fees would be spent on further improving teaching. The overall evidence about the relationship between income and teaching quality suggests that the link is weak, at best. In the USA, tuition costs have doubled, and doubled again, with no improvement in class sizes or other valid teaching quality indicators, and current tuition costs are unconnected with educational quality. In the

UK, the comparatively richer Russell Group Universities actually have larger cohorts and larger classes than do poorer 'teaching-intensive' universities. Russell Group students experience a smaller proportion of academic-led small group teaching, because graduate teaching assistants are so often used to save academics' time for research activities. Cohort size, class size and the proportion of teaching undertaken by people other than academics are all good negative predictors of student learning. The research elite do not, in the main, spend their money on teaching students if they can help it and there seems little prospect of a change in their policy, wherever the money may come from.

Distinguishing appropriate fee levels for institutions is unreliable, and in the homogeneous middle range, impossible

There is an assumption that it is possible, safely and fairly, to make fine-grained distinctions between institutions, so that a range of fees can be fixed in precise relationship to a range of teaching quality. Three significant problems prevent this assumption from being remotely reasonable, the first two being associated with the two forms of evidence that will determine decisions: qualitative judgements by panels and quantitative metrics.

In the TEF's first stage, there are due to be qualitative judgements (basically a 'yes' or a 'no'), made by some kind of expert (or inexpert) panel, about whether institutions deserve to be allowed to put their fees up. Those who are as long in the tooth as I am will remember Teaching Quality Assessment. Every subject in every institution in England was allocated a score out of 24 as a result of qualitative judgements made by a large panel of 'subject experts'. The process involved visits, observation of teaching and meetings, often with teachers and students, and the collation and examination of truly vast piles of documentation. It took six years to implement. Despite the enormous cost in time and effort, the extensive evidence base, the visits, the training of assessors and so on, the outcomes were highly unreliable. Some subjects allocated much higher average scores than others, with no discernible justification. Later scores were higher than early scores. Most scores were so high as to be indistinguishable for the vast majority of institutions. But, more worryingly, there were substantial systematic biases. There was a strong positive correlation between research strengths and TQA scores, despite its being known that research strengths do not predict teaching quality. What is more, larger departments and institutions gained higher scores than did small ones, despite the fact that size was known to be a negative predictor of educational quality. It seems that assessment panels were dazzled by reputation and were incapable of making reliable judgements about teaching. The TEF's qualitative judgements are intended to be made extraordinarily quickly, by small panels without the benefit of visits, observation, meetings or even detailed evidence about

educational quality. Instead, they will largely be looking at a very short text prepared by institutions themselves. The chance of their making sound and precise judgements seems negligible; the chance of their being dazzled by reputation seems somewhat higher.

The second problem facing the TEF relates to attempts to make distinctions between institutions about what level of fees they will be allowed to charge, on the basis of teaching metrics. I can still visualise the graphs I was shown twenty-five years ago, when the Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) was first used in Australia to provide public comparative quality data about every subject in every university. The CEQ is (or at least was, until the Australian Government turned it into a 'happiness' questionnaire) a valid instrument for judging educational quality. It produces scores on a range of credible variables and is adequately reliable and valid. The graphs I saw took one scale on the questionnaire at a time (such as 'deep approach' – the extent to which students attempted to make sense of subject matter rather than only to memorise it) and ranked every department in the country in a particular subject. What was immediately clear was that a couple of departments were measurably worse than the rest at the bottom and a couple were measurably better at the top; everyone else was pretty much indistinguishable in the middle. This was true for every scale on the questionnaire, for every subject. Statistically, this is an inevitable consequence of the variable being measured being more or less normally distributed and with a small standard deviation - a phenomenon apparent for virtually every variable about quality one can think of when comparing institutions. With NSS scores, the same is true. If you look at national rankings for 'satisfaction', you find the vast majority of institutions in an indistinguishable middle, with adjacent institutions having almost identical scores, and even blocks of ten institutions not differing significantly from adjacent blocks of ten. No less than forty-three institutions shared NSS satisfaction scores of 85-87% in 2016. You can tell an institution ranked 120 from an institution ranked 20, but not one ranked 50 from one ranked 60. The differences are so small and so volatile from one year to the next, that overall rankings can change markedly, year on year, without any change in the underlying phenomenon. Such variations are picked up by 'The Times' and trumpeted in such emotive headlines as "*University X crashes down quality league*", when in fact the change in score has been random and statistically insignificant. It is rarely possible to distinguish one institution from the next in a reliable and safe way using such metrics because the differences are, in most cases, simply too small. Yet that is exactly what the TEF has to do – say that one institution deserves to charge higher fees whilst the next one down the rankings does not, even though they are statistically utterly indistinguishable. Adding scores together from a bunch of varied, and often invalid, metrics actually makes this problem worse and produces a grey muddle. The HECE guidelines now suggest that no more than 20% of

institutions might be identified at the top and bottom of rankings and distinguished from the middle-ranked institutions. But even that is bound to create unfairness for the institutions just below the boundaries that will be, in any statistical sense, indistinguishable from those just above the boundaries.

Institutional average scores on teaching metrics usually hide wide departmental differences

The third problem facing the TEF in making the required fine-grained distinctions is that it intends to rank and distinguish institutions. Institutions are made up of departments (or subjects) that very often differ widely from each other in terms of a whole range of metrics. These internal differences can be so large that an institution may have the top-ranked department in the country in one subject and the bottom-ranked department in a different subject. These departmental scores are then averaged and the institution as a whole might end up looking average (as most in fact do). This averaging of varied departments helps to produce the problem of lack of distinction between institutions highlighted above. Students need to know about the subject they are interested in and to be able to compare that subject across institutions. The current TEF mechanism will not allow them to do this - it could even trick them into paying a higher fee to study in a lower quality department. If students are interested in their likely employability, the problem is even more acute, as national differences between subjects are gross, and institutional employability averages are, at least in part, a consequence of their subject mix. If an institution taught just Nursing and Cultural Studies, then it might look average for employability, but comparatively bad for a student wishing to study Nursing and surprisingly good for a student wishing to study Cultural Studies. This problem would be partly solved if the TEF operated at the level of subjects (or departments) rather than institutions, which is a development being considered for the future.

But even then, there would be significant difficulties in identifying what a 'subject' is. I once helped a Sports Science department collect a good deal of data about students' experience of assessment, using the Assessment Experience Questionnaire (AEQ). There were seven degree programmes within 'Sports Science' and, in terms of students' experience, they differed from one another to a considerable extent, ranging from rather good to pretty awful. As there were no NSS categories to differentiate between these degree programmes, for NSS data collection and reporting purposes the seven were simply aggregated into a single undifferentiated muddle. Standard NSS subject categories might work for traditional academic departments with one degree programme and large cohort sizes, but they may be less than helpful as a means of distinguishing the more unconventional and varied subject

groupings usually found in modern teaching institutions. Again, this suits traditional research universities best.

Employability has little to do with teaching quality

There is a misinformed and confused conflation of employability with quality. Quality, according to the TEF, is apparently all about employability. Students don't think so. Those responding to a HEPI survey asking them what best indicated the quality of a course had some perhaps surprisingly conventional ideas about teachers and teaching; employability came nearly bottom in their reckoning in terms of telling them anything useful about quality.

If the government had bothered to look at national rankings of universities' teaching and employability performance, it would have discovered that its assumption is complete nonsense. The table below ranks institutions according to 2016 NSS scores.

Table 1: Institutional teaching and employability rankings

| Rank | NSS 2016 | Graduate employability Times, 2016 | NSS rank 2016 |
|-------------|----------------------------|---|--------------------------|
| 1 | Buckingham | Cambridge | 20 |
| 2 | University of Law | Oxford | 20 |
| 3 | St Marys College Belfast | LSE | 155 |
| 4 | Courtauld Institute of Art | Manchester | 87 |
| 5 | Keele | Imperial College | 116 |
| 6 | St Andrews | Kings College | 129 |
| 7 | Bishop Grossteste | Edinburgh | 145 |
| 8 | Harper Adams | University College | 102 |
| 9 | Liverpool Hope | London Business School | 155 |
| 10 | Aberystwyth | Bristol | 76 |

It will be noticed that most of the top ten institutions are neither prestigious nor research giants. The second set of rankings is from 'The Times' 2016 data collection about graduate employability. There is no overlap at all with the top ten for NSS satisfaction. The right-hand column lists the NSS rankings for the top ten institutions for employability. With the exception of Oxford and Cambridge, they are considered by students to be amongst the worst in the country. Imperial College led the clamour for higher fees; it is currently ranked 116th for student satisfaction and dropping like a stone, but its reputation guarantees effortlessly-high graduate employability metrics.

It took about ten minutes to compile this table from data easily available on the internet.

Employability is largely a product of reputation which follows research performance, overall income and visibility. Graduate employability has almost nothing to do with teaching quality

and most institutions are not in a position to do much about the employability of their students, which is largely determined by employers' notions about reputation and the employment market - often the local employment market. The government could do something about that, but not universities.

It is also the case that size helps visibility and reputation, and hence employability, but hinders teaching quality. It is rare in research literature about good teaching departments to discover one that is even medium-sized, let alone large. Top research universities are mainly large and tend to keep students' choice of courses down, so creating large cohorts and large classes in order to reduce teaching loads. The consequences are there for all to see.

The TEF's proposed teaching metrics have limited validity

The TEF rests on teaching metrics' being valid. If they are not, in the sense that they do not predict student learning, then orienting institutions to improving them may distract institutions from actual efforts to improve student learning. The government is fully aware of the contents of 'Dimensions of Quality' (Gibbs, 2010) and its identification of which metrics are valid and which are not, and so the proposals in the original Green Paper about the metrics the TEF would use were guaranteed to dismay. By the time details of the implementation of the TEF were made public, the situation had improved. Nevertheless, 'satisfaction' is not a valid measure of learning gains or of teaching quality. Outcome measures (including retention and employability) are significantly determined by student selectivity, and so indicate reputation rather than teaching quality, and reputation does not predict learning gains or the extent of use of pedagogic practices that lead to learning gains. The introduction of benchmarks that take the nature of student intake into account will help here, and 'The Times' modelling of institutional rankings based on benchmarked TEF metrics, using 2015 data, produced somewhat inverted rankings compared with the newspaper rankings we are used to seeing (that have been created by using almost entirely invalid metrics). This cannot have been what was originally intended. It is possible that the TEF's benchmarked metrics, even if some of them are invalid, will create quite a shock to the system. Increasing the role played by valid measures, such as of student engagement, will help in the future and it is to be hoped that there will continue to be pragmatic changes in implementation in the pursuit of validity and fairness. The first attempt to produce rankings and associated varied fee levels is unlikely to get it right and decisions about institutions' futures based on the current form of implementation are likely to be dangerously unsound. It would be prudent to wait until some of the problems identified above have been tackled more satisfactorily and to treat the rankings of the first year or two as a wake-up call. It is not as if students are impatiently pushing the government hard to increase fees.

The TEF is unlikely to be perceived by most as a reward

The government argues that, just as strong research performance is rewarded by the REF, strong teaching performance should be rewarded by the TEF. But the majority of institutions have seen their research income decline dramatically over several rounds of research selectivity. The REF and its predecessors were designed explicitly to allocate research funding to fewer institutions (and fewer researchers) and to take funding away altogether from most. Careers, working lives and institutional reputations have been blighted by the REF. For most, it has been experienced as a punishment. Similarly, the TEF is likely to be perceived as offering brickbats and an uncertain future to perhaps thirty institutions, and as damning by faint praise perhaps 100 more. Only those institutions that are allowed to charge top whack, and the sub-set of these for whom this is actually useful and welcome, are likely to feel rewarded: big sticks and small carrots, again.

Conclusion

A national policy with this degree of leverage over institutional behaviour risks causing damage if the assumptions on which is built are wrong and the measures it uses are invalid. Institutions may feel obliged to play the system and try to improve their metrics even if they do not believe in them and even if this has no useful impact on student learning. But perhaps institutions will become more sophisticated about using appropriate metrics in sensible ways. The demands of the TEF for evidence of 'impact' are already stimulating fresh thinking. If that prompts new evidence-based approaches to enhancement, then the TEF might even improve students' learning gains despite its rationale and design. As students will be paying even more for their education, let us hope so.

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Recognising and Rewarding Teaching Excellence: an argument for authentic metrics

Sally Brown

Who could argue with the basic premise of recognising and rewarding teaching excellence in higher education as is being planned within the UK in 2017? It is, for many, unquestionably a good idea for teaching and research in universities to be given parity of esteem. Indeed, following the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education in 1997, Lord Dearing proposed the setting up of an organisation to do exactly that (Dearing, 1997), in the form of the Institute for Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (ILTHE), which subsequently became part of the Higher Education Academy. Working within the ILTHE, I was charged with the task of setting up, in 2000, the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS) for England and Northern Ireland. Having first singled out the key features of teaching excellence, I set about putting into place a process by which to recognise and reward up to twenty university teachers a year - those who demonstrated what international research and parallel schemes in Australia, Canada, the USA and other nations had identified as the characteristics of outstanding university teachers.

Though the scheme and its criteria have been refined over the lifetime of the awards, the focus from the outset was on individuals nominated by their universities as demonstrating evidence of transforming and enhancing the student learning experience and supporting colleagues within and beyond their own institution. Their reflective claims must provide evidence of ongoing CPD and must be based on significantly more than mere assertion: it is the responsibility of the institution to provide endorsements that support the applicants' veracity and credibility, and testify to their impact.

Nationally, we have therefore seventeen years of experience of a system which has wide acceptance and high credibility across the UK (Wales is now within the scheme and a number of National Teaching Fellows (NTFs) have relocated to Scottish universities), but the Teaching Excellence Framework has no plans to take account of the scheme. With a community of more than 750 NTFs nowadays, represented by the Association of National Teaching Fellows (ANTF) that I chair, we are a vibrant and proactive network, overtly committed to sharing good practice and disseminating innovation across the higher education learning and teaching community in the UK and beyond.

The ANTF contributed fully to the consultations in advance of the introduction of the TEF and we were particularly keen that any metrics used to recognise excellent teaching should be

those which truly represented improvements to the student experience brought about by interactions between HEI teachers and students, rather than measures representing existing differences in the level of advantage in different university mission-groups. For example, if salaries on graduation are to be a metric, this clearly reflects existing advantage of university entrants, rather than any evident value added by the HEI. Some other proxy metrics, for example, contact hours for students on site, we regard as being less useful than metrics that focus on how committed universities are to foregrounding and improving the student learning experience.

Preferred metrics for us would be the relative number of promotions to Reader or Professor on the basis of teaching expertise, rather than research alone, or the relative proportion of staff who have achieved external recognition for their teaching, as measured by HEA Fellowships at Associate, Fellow, Senior Fellow or Principal Fellow, (HEA 2012), or by SEDA Fellowships at Fellow or Senior Fellow level, or, indeed, National Teaching Fellowships. Since most UK universities offer initial training programmes (often year-long, part-time and credit-bearing) for academic and learning support staff new to teaching in higher education, a further metric could be the proportion of staff who have successfully completed such programmes and who additionally commit annually to CPD.

Several consultation responses, including ours, suggested that impact studies could be used for the TEF as they have been for the REF. There are extant hundreds of successful applications for National Teaching Fellowships, HEA Senior Fellowships and Principal Fellowships which could provide, without any further work, case studies of excellent teaching and leadership for use by HEIs.

National Teaching Fellows are committed to fostering innovations in learning and teaching, disseminating good practice and ensuring that pedagogic change is soundly based on research-based scholarship. We are well represented on the panel of TEF assessors and as a group are active in championing a TEF process that uses authentic metrics. We argue that these should genuinely and validly gauge the value added by universities to the student learning experience. University teaching is too important for it to be allowed to become a means of gaming the system.

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The Teaching Excellence Framework: Perpetual Pedagogical Control in Postwelfare Capitalism

Conor Heaney, Hollie Mackenzie

Abstract

In this paper, we argue that *Success as a Knowledge Economy* and the *Teaching Excellence Framework* will constitute a set of mechanisms of *perpetual pedagogical control* in which *the market will become a regulator of pedagogical possibilities*. Rather than supporting pedagogical exploration or creating conditions for the empowerment of students and teachers, such policies support the precarisation and casualisation of both. We develop these claims through a reading of these policies alongside Gilles Deleuze's *Postscript on the Societies of Control*, and situating it in the context of what Gary Hall has termed *postwelfare capitalism*. We conclude by reaching out to others in the tertiary education sector and beyond to ask if this really is the direction we wish to take this sector in the UK.

Keywords: TEF, Deleuze, postwelfare capitalism, pedagogy, critical education policy studies

Introduction

The *Teaching Excellence Framework* (TEF) and the accompanying UK government White Paper, *Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility, and Student Choice* (Department for Business Innovation and Skills - BIS - 2016b), pose a number of challenges to those working in the contemporary university. In this paper, we articulate some of these challenges through a reading of Gilles Deleuze's *Postscript on the Societies of Control* (1992) alongside this White Paper. More specifically, our first claim, made through Deleuze, is that the TEF's implementation and enforcement – as well as many of the other measures outlined in the White Paper - will constitute a set of mechanisms of *perpetual pedagogical control* through which the concrete everyday relations of university life will be further subjected to processes of neoliberalisation, management, control, supervision, metricisation, marketisation, casualisation and precarisation (to name only some potential effects). By 'further', we here situate this research alongside the work of others who have developed research, criticism and resistance to the continuing neoliberalisation of the university in the UK and beyond (Brunskell-Evans, 2009, 2012; Harney and Morton, 2013; Heaney, 2015, 2016; Neary, 2015). The TEF is itself 'marketed' as a necessary corollary to

the Research Excellence Framework (REF) and as a policy mechanism which will ‘drive up the standard of teaching’, providing students (*in esse* and *in posse*), employers and other education providers with ‘powerful signals’ about how ‘excellent’ teaching is being produced across the higher education sector (2016b: 13). Against this, the second argument of this paper is that these incoming reforms of the UK’s tertiary education sector have little to do with improving teaching quality or enhancing student empowerment, but instead are indicative of the UK’s gradual move towards what Gary Hall (2016) has aptly termed *postwelfare capitalism*; these reforms, in other words, we situate as reforms which help enable a transition to a tertiary education sector befitting a postwelfare neoliberal state.¹

Success as a Knowledge Economy

Before making these arguments, however, we shall first devote our attention to the key claims we wish to focus on within the White Paper (the provisions from which are to be found in the *Higher Education and Research Bill*, which, at the time of writing, has gone through its second reading in the House of Lords and is awaiting its committee stage examination). The key claims on which we shall focus relate to (1) the White Paper’s extensive policy of marketising the tertiary education sector further, a policy which, it is argued, requires (2) so-called regulatory ‘simplification’, and (3) extensive ‘information provision’ for the apparent aim of ‘empowering student choice’ (BIS, 2016b: 10), to which the TEF is, in part, a response. We shall explore each of these points in turn.

i. (Neoliberal) Marketisation

The first point we wish to highlight is the extent to which the White Paper reifies, glorifies, and fetishises competition and marketisation. This, of course, is not in itself unique or surprising – *the Browne Report* (BIS, 2010) explicitly did this too - however, *Success as a Knowledge Economy*’s ambitions on this are extensive and explicitly claim to ‘go further’ than previous moves towards the marketisation of the tertiary education sector. Consider the following:

Competition between providers in any market incentivises them to raise their game, offering consumers a greater choice of more innovative and better quality products and services at a lower cost. Higher education is no exception [...] But we have not made a decisive enough move to open the higher education market (BIS, 2016b: 8-9, our emphasis).

¹ We would like to thank both anonymous peer reviewers and the copy-editor for both enriching and improving the clarity of this paper through their feedback.

The ‘decisive move’ the report envisages is one in which ‘market entry and exit’ – that is, the ability for new degree or ‘service’ providers to enter the higher education ‘market’ and acquire ‘Degree Awarding Powers’ (BIS, 2016b: 10), and the potential ‘exit’ of these providers from the market if business proves unprofitable or slow - is simplified through the reduction of ‘barriers to entry’ for new potential service providers. This ‘decisive move,’ the White Paper claims, will combat the market privilege enjoyed by long-standing institutions (or ‘incumbents’) whose privilege acts as a blockage to the competition the report glorifies. Indeed, easing ‘market entry and exit’ is envisaged almost as a silver bullet, as a mechanism which can simultaneously drive up teaching standards, economic growth and social mobility (BIS, 2016b: 9).

Opening the future of the tertiary education sector to further marketisation through the reduction of barriers to entry and exit, it must be noted, in effect means that the ‘failure’ and therefore ‘market exit’ of education providers is envisaged as a ‘natural part of a healthy, competitive, well-functioning, market’ which ‘the Government will not, as a matter of policy, seek to prevent [...] from happening’ (BIS, 2016b: 10). Such an implicit and explicit affirmation of a neoliberal market allows the White Paper to present the proposed reforms as inclusive of the notion that future ‘market exits’ indicate overall ‘market health.’ Although an extensive discussion of this point is not possible within the confines of this paper, it is worth noting how recent, contingent and contestable the dominance of this neoliberal market-oriented language is in the context of tertiary education (Barry, 2011; Canaan, 2013; Heaney, 2015).

ii. Regulation, Control

Returning to the logic of *Success as a Knowledge Economy* more closely, we move on to the second point from this document that we wish to highlight. In order to create the sort of competitive market environment envisaged, what is demanded, according to the White Paper, is regulatory ‘simplification’ or an ‘updating of the regulatory architecture.’ That is, in order for there to be a ‘natural’ and ‘healthy’ market, what is required is a large amount of regulatory intervention. [The capitalist coupling of deregulatory rhetoric with actual interventionism - a far cry from any putative claims of *laissez-faire* - has already been conceptually developed and empirically examined by, of course, Karl Polanyi (2001: 141-145) and Michel Foucault (2010: 145), amongst others.] Through such intervention, the hope the White Paper articulates is that more private firms will be able to enter the ‘higher education provision market’ more easily, offering ‘niche’ education provision to help plug ‘skills shortages’ (BIS, 2016b: 8). The creation of a single market regulator, the Office for Students (OfS), is central to this, a regulator that will be designed to be ‘explicitly pro-

competition and pro-student choice' (BIS, 2016b: 15), in part through adopting a 'risk-based approach to regulation' (BIS, 2016b: 21). As Bridget Hutter notes (2005: 2-3), the history of risk-based regulation in the UK is closely associated with the emergence of deregulatory rhetoric and policy in the 1980s and 1990s and the attendant growing prominence of private-sector styles of management. Hutter interestingly connects risk-based regulation with (1) Reagan-era US 'regulatory relief' (which was one of the four cornerstones of Reagan's economic programme) (2005: 2; also, see McGarity, 1986: 261) and (2) so-called 'new public management', a trend in public sector management focusing explicitly on performance indicators, hands-on management, continuous processes of 'modernisation' and 'rationalisation', amongst other things (Hood, 1991: 4-5).

The regulatory move towards 'risk-based approaches' entails, this is to say, a double-movement: a *decentring* of the state away from provision and ownership (first movement) towards *oversight and management* (second movement); or, what Hutter describes as 'a move from public ownership and centralised control to privatised institutions and new forms of state regulation' (2005: 3). This is a *decentring* in so far as the state moves away from its previous role as a (depending on the context) owner, provider or main funder of a service, towards an *overseer, supervisor, or manager* of the industry in question. In the White Paper's vision of the future UK tertiary education sector, the level and intensity of supervision and management proffered is connected to an institution's performance in regular data monitoring mechanisms (as is already in place in, for example, the REF). For example, and to return briefly to the question of 'market exit' which we noted above, whilst the White Paper does emphasise the need for 'student protection' in the event of 'market exit' (BIS, 2016b: 22) and does claim that any 'choice' to close a particular institution will be in the hands of the institution itself (BIS, 2016b: 38), it nonetheless does not explicitly exclude the possibility of the sector regulator's pushing particular institutions towards 'market exit.'² Instead of this, the White Paper affirms that the regulator will attempt to ensure the efficiency and swiftness of any institution-closure process (BIS, 2016b: 39) and, further, that institutions which give the regulator a 'cause for concern' (BIS, 2016b: 34), for example, will be subject to more regular and intensive reviews, whereas 'the highest quality providers will no longer be subject to controls' (BIS, 2016b: 27) - although all institutions are subject to data monitoring, of course. As part of this, the White Paper even envisages the creation of what is termed an 'enter and inspect' (BIS: 2016b: 35) piece of legislation which would enable, under certain conditions, either the sector regulator or Secretary of State to 'enter and inspect' a higher education provider. In short, the level and intensity of regulatory control of the sector will be explicitly connected to certain 'key indicators' (BIS: 2016b: 33) – for

² We thank one of the anonymous peer reviews for this astute point.

example, National Student Survey (NSS) scores, TEF rankings, graduate employment – indicators which function as epistemological tools which justify and enable high levels of individual intervention into particular institutions whose ‘performance’ does not meet, or is not compliant with, market demand. We shall now focus a little more closely on these epistemological tools and on the question of the ‘information provision’ of these ‘key indicators’ which the White Paper lauds for its potential for ‘empowering student choice’ (BIS, 2016b: 10). Our explicit focus here will be the TEF.

iii. Information Provision

The logic of the claims of *Success as a Knowledge Economy*, on the reading we are developing, is this: the tertiary education sector requires competition to flourish and grow; competition requires marketisation; marketisation requires reducing barriers to entry and a move to a risk-based regulatory framework; a move to risk-based regulatory framework requires oversight and management (i.e., further processes of intervention). Oversight and management, then, become the problems to be solved and these are immediately problems of *control* and *supervision*. Indeed, as Céline Baud and Eve Chiapello (2016) note, drawing on Michel Foucault (2010), and, as we have already suggested, the (decidedly neoliberal) move towards risk-based regulatory frameworks does not require ‘less’ intervention, but rather demands a multiplicity of new tactics of intervention, disciplinarianisation and control, such as the building of new institutional incentive structures through epistemological and calculative technologies, bureaucratic expansion and so on. Control and supervision are positioned as the explicit centre-point of both the REF and TEF. The TEF will provide information and ‘inform the competitive market’ (BIS, 2016b: 13) about which institutions have been most compliant with the incentive structures the TEF promotes (i.e., ‘teaching excellence’).

The White Paper notes that OfS ‘will be able to provide real-time analysis and information to the Secretary of State’ (BIS, 2016b: 66) of the higher education sector and individual institutions; furthermore, BIS’s ‘factsheet’ on the Higher Education and Research Bill even speaks of this as an ‘information revolution’ (2016a). More information provision, of course, means more intervention, supervision and control. The clearest mechanism of control and supervision, as well as one of the largest signals to the market and students, will be the establishment of TEF league tables which will grade and rank institutions. Noteworthy is the decidedly extensive nature of these mechanisms of measurement, justified by the, to say the least, difficult epistemological task of reducing a practice as broad as teaching to a single metric:

Measuring teaching quality is difficult. But it is not impossible. We define teaching broadly - including the teaching itself, the learning environments in which it takes place, and the outcomes it delivers. Such things can be measured: students assess their satisfaction with their courses, retention rates are a good proxy for student engagement, contact hours can be measured, employers choose to sponsor some courses, or work with some institutions, because of the industry-relevance of their offerings, and employment rates can be measured. Some of these metrics are of course proxies – but they directly measure some of the most important outcomes that students and taxpayers expect excellent teaching to deliver. And we recognise that metrics alone cannot tell the whole story; they must be benchmarked and contextualised, and considered alongside the additional narrative that can establish a provider’s case for excellence. Taken together, we can build a rounded picture of the teaching experience that we expect higher education to deliver to its stakeholders.

(BIS, 2016b: 46)

The more extensive the epistemological task, the White Paper argues, the more that aspects of the teacher-student relationship need to be measured, supervised and thereby controlled. Once teaching practices are metricised and ranked, higher rankings will enable institutions to charge higher tuition fees which, along with the REF (and the many other prominent league tables), will further reproduce and centralise a competitive and hierarchical reputational economy between universities built around a putative commitment to ‘student choice’. This is an effect the White Paper explicitly lauds (BIS: 2016b: 46); indeed, the continual establishment of hierarchies and short-term reputational competition between institutions, students and teachers is one of the explicit purposes of the TEF, rather than the sort of fundamental challenge to the privileged enjoyed by long-standing ‘incumbent’ institutions which we mentioned above. Competitive reputational economies, and hierarchies between institutions, students, and teachers, this is to say, constitute one of the key aims of information provision, and thus of the TEF.

Having outlined the components of the White Paper pertinent to our arguments in this paper, we shall now pivot to these two arguments themselves.

The TEF as a Mechanism of Control

Deleuze’s arguments in his *Postscript on the Societies of Control* will guide this section. What Deleuze called *societies of control*, which he claimed were emerging at the time of the paper’s publication, are distinguishable by their gradual move away from tactics of normalisation and discipline in ‘enclosed’ institutions such as the school, hospital, prison,

and so forth (the institutions so central to Foucault's *disciplinary societies*), and towards new modes of normalisation or *modulation* in 'open' environments. Of course, for Deleuze, enclosed institutions are not totally erased, and disciplinary power is not totally replaced, by the emergence of control societies. Further, as Bernard Stiegler notes, control societies cannot be disassociated from the emergence of contemporary digital technologies (2015: 49). Deleuze identifies some institutional shifts: *from* the hospital *to* more decentralised mechanisms of care (e.g. hospices and day care); *from* the factory (a key site of discipline) *to* the corporation (a key site of control). The factory/corporation distinction, here, is worth focusing on, as it is the emergence of the contemporary corporation which is vital in the emergence of new forms of educational institutions. The corporation operates in part, for Deleuze, through practices of modulation (as, for example, in differential salary structures), which affect each actor in the institution and which ensure *perpetual competition* between them:

*If the most idiotic television game shows are so successful, it's because they express the corporate situation with great precision [...] **the corporation constantly presents the brashest rivalry as a healthy form of emulation, an excellent motivational force that opposes individuals against one another and runs through each, dividing each within*** (Deleuze, 1992: 4-5, our emphasis).

Crucial for our purposes are Deleuze's reflections on educational institutions, the future of which he sees as a general merging with the corporation.

*Indeed, just as the corporation replaces the factory, **perpetual training** tends to replace the **school**, and continuous control to replace the examination. Which is the surest way of delivering the school over to the corporation. (*ibid*, 5)*

Whilst one 'exits' disciplinary institutions (usually to move on to another site of enclosure) – such as the exit of the 'reformed criminal' from prisons into factories – one, in effect, *never exits* control. Control is, for Deleuze, *perpetual*, limitlessly postponed from completion (*ibid*, 5), inciting continuous short-term competition for short-term accumulation and turnover, but whose general operation is in principle 'continuous and without limit' (*ibid*, 6).

A further aspect of control which is pertinent to this paper is that of how control *demand*s supervision and oversight. *Continuous and constant* supervision and oversight allows for incentive structures to be continuously changeable, for rewards and punishments to be always possible. This is the crux of Deleuze's claim that 'controls are a *modulation*' (*ibid*, 4): continuous and constant supervision – rendered possible by contemporary digital

technologies – allows for the continuous differentiation or modulation of the incentive structures that individuals face, how they are rewarded, punished, and so forth.

To sum the points we wish to extract from Deleuze: the move towards *societies of control* - as a move towards new modes of normalisation and modulation in 'open' environments - is constituted through (1) modulation and incessant competition; which is in principle (2) open, continuous, constant, and without pre-defined limits; which, in order to operate, requires (3) continuous and constant supervision and oversight. We do not presuppose any priority to these three components, nor do these three points exhaust Deleuze's claims, but they will suffice for our purposes.

Returning to *Success as a Knowledge Economy* and the TEF, let us revisit the rationale for further marketisation in the tertiary education sector. The White Paper, as we have already noted, reifies, glorifies, and fetishises competition and marketisation. The key condition for creating the institutional incentives for such behaviour (incessant competition and marketisation) is a vast set of epistemological mechanisms of supervision and control, mechanisms which *perpetually* modulate the behaviour of each individual actor insofar as the application of these epistemological mechanisms are, in principle, perpetual and unlimited and can be applied differentially; institutions which do *not* compliantly adapt to these incentive structures will face harsher and more radical interventions and, if necessary, the Government will 'assist' their market exit. The open-ended reputational economy which the TEF is presented as, for example, is an open mechanism of perpetual competition which is *never completed*. Teachers under the TEF, in this sense, will *always* be preparing for the next TEF and the next process of monitoring and are incentivised to adjust their behaviour according to these mechanisms of control. Institutions which do not compliantly adapt the behaviour incentivised by these incentives will not, the White Paper hopes, last long, evidenced especially in the White Paper's emphasis on and, indeed, support of, 'market exit' as an apparent sign of a healthy, competitive market (BIS, 2016b: 43; 49; 53).

Transforming the regulatory and incentive structure of the tertiary education sector through lowering barriers to market entry and exit and the generation of hierarchical and reputational economies with financial 'prizes' attached (such as the potential ability to raise tuition fees when an institution achieves high TEF rankings) is the White Paper's approach of *industry modulation*, that is, its method of *creating* a more thoroughly marketised sector and generating incessant competition. The TEF is envisaged as an *industry modulator*, a regulatory tool comprising informational flows and signals through which to *control* the sector. In addition, it is important to note that, since 'competition' and 'growth' are the explicit goals of all the policies suggested in *Success as a Knowledge Economy*, these goals are, of

course, *never* achieved ‘once and for all’. They are, in principle, *perpetual*, as Jo Johnson notes in the White Paper’s Foreword: ‘If we are to continue to succeed as a knowledge economy, however, we cannot stand still, nor take for granted our universities’ enviable global reputation’ (BIS, 2016: 5). The *risk-based* approach to regulation is perpetual, continuous, and without limit. The state’s role becomes, therefore, that of *enabling informational flow* and the *manipulation of incentive structures* through epistemological, calculative, and financial technologies; or, in other words, the state’s role becomes that of continuous and constant supervision of individual and institutional ‘performance’ and of the relations between students and teachers as such. Insofar as such supervision and oversight, as far as the TEF is concerned, is focused on teaching practices, but in a broad sense which encompasses teaching ‘environment’ and therefore the teacher/student relationship as such, our claim here is that the TEF is explicitly a mechanism of *perpetual pedagogical control*.

The University in Postwelfare Capitalism

In *The Uberfication of the University*, Gary Hall uses the term *postwelfare capitalism* as a broad indicator to denote the coalescence of two main socio-economic trends of recent years (here we are focusing specifically on the UK): (1) privatisation, deregulation, and austerity and (2) the growth of (profit-driven) so-called ‘sharing economies’, which rely on contemporary digital technologies - and which are part of the growth of ‘platform capitalism’ (Srnicsek, 2017). By way of concluding this paper, this section will offer a reading on this context of *postwelfare capitalism* by intersecting our reading of *Success as a Knowledge Economy*, alongside Deleuze, with the political-libidinal economy of the present.

Uberfication, broadly speaking, denotes the recent growth of these so-called ‘sharing economies’, which commodify human-human relations through digital sharing platforms built upon maximising the sense of consumer choice and convenience, usually through extensive rating systems for ‘service providers’ and rapid, digitally-enabled, service. Firms like (of course) Uber and AirBnB are treated as exemplars of this trend. An early point worth mentioning is that the majority of those who labour (and generate profit) for AirBnB, for example, are not AirBnB employees and thus do not have access to labour rights (Hall, 2016: 8-9). (It remains to be seen what effects the employment tribunal’s decision, in October 2016, on Uber’s losing the right to classify its drivers as self-employed in the UK will have). Nick Srnicsek notes that such firms adopt a ‘hyper-outsourced model’ (2017: 76) and are thereby able to side-step the provision of any economic security to their workers. This is indicative of the type of *casualisation of labour* – or *precarisation of labour* (Standing, 2011) - prominent in the ‘sharing’ or ‘gig economy (but which, of course, is not reducible to it), especially insofar as digital platforms allow ‘gigs’ to be arranged on an ad-hoc basis for the

consumer (and therefore on an insecure basis for the service provider). Casualisation also denotes flexibilisation. In flexible markets, as Hall notes, ‘employers want to be able to draw from a pool of part-time, hourly-paid, zero-hours and no-contract workers who are available ‘on tap’, often at extremely short notice’ (2016: 18). In their hiring practices, employers want to ensure further, we should add, that only the ‘most competitive’ employees are hired to satisfy ‘consumer demand’. Access to the relevant information, coupled with a *reputational economy*, helps employers and regulatory agencies generate such flexibilised labour conditions and produce certain incentive structures. The example of Uber is instructive here: both consumers and service-providers are subject to a ratings-based reputational economy. Microsoft-owned LinkedIn, too, performs a similar function in providing employers and potential employees with instant access to a large database of ‘trusted’ (through their gated-access approach) potential ‘networking’ and employment opportunities.

Hall does not explicitly discuss the White Paper, nor the *Teaching Excellence Framework*. Nonetheless, as he does note, levels of casualisation in the tertiary education sector are already considerable, noting University and College Union (UCU) research which found that, when ‘the use of atypical academic staff is factored in, 54% of all academic staff and 49% of all academic teaching staff are on insecure contracts’, concentrated on those who have the largest teaching loads (UCU, 2016). The White Paper’s measures of marketisation, including the function the TEF could feasibly play in such new conditions, we here argue must be considered alongside these tendencies towards precarisation in the tertiary education sector and, as such, within the UK economy more generally (Srnicek, 2017: 79). These measures of marketisation look set to open this sector to accelerated further processes of casualisation and precarisation. Under such increasingly precarious labour conditions, the reputational economy which the TEF seeks to become (BIS, 2016b: 49), the White Paper hopes, will acquire central importance in enabling ‘service-providers’ (teachers) teaching ‘gigs’ in a new education market - a shift which would be a continuation of processes of what Charmaine Brown (2013) has termed the ‘professionalisation agenda’ and which she has associated with a generalised deterioration of working conditions. The TEF’s reputational economy is argued for in terms of student choice and satisfaction - wherein satisfaction is instrumentally connected with ‘good outcomes’ or ‘employment outcomes’ (BIS, 2016b: 43) - but also in terms of *flexibility* and a commitment to part-time study (*ibid*, 52). In effect, the labour market that the White Paper envisages is explicitly precarious and insecure, which, the White Paper conjectures, is a condition for ‘teaching excellence’:

*[W]e want a higher education system which is **flexible** enough to cope with change [...] **A competitive and dynamic higher education sector needs students who actively and regularly challenge universities to provide teaching excellence***

and value for money. *It needs institutions with the right incentives to deliver for students, to innovate, and to grow. (ibid, 53, our emphasis)*

Flexible labour markets, of course, require flexible and precarious workers, or quite simply, *disposable* workers. Hall, in a related market (in his projection for the soon-to-be *uberfied* university sector), notes the following:

*Increasing numbers of university workers [...] will have little choice but to sell their cheap and easy-to-access courses to whoever is prepared to pay for them in the 'alternative' sharing economy education market created by platform capitalism [...] And as such, they will experience all the problems of deprofessionalization, precarity (in the sense of being unable to control or even anticipate their own future), and **continuous performance monitoring** by networked surveillance technologies that such an economy brings. (Hall, 2016: 21-22, our emphasis)*

In place of *continuous*, Hall could, of course, have also used the term *perpetual*. Recall the points we subtracted from Deleuze in the previous section: the move towards *societies of control* was positioned as a move constituted through (1) modulation and incessant competition; which is in principle (2) open, continuous, constant and without pre-defined limits; and which, in order to operate, requires (3) continuous and constant supervision and oversight. We treat Deleuze's claims here as instructive when considered in the light of our contemporary *postwelfare capitalism* and the proposed policies of the White Paper. We do so for two main reasons, which we shall now outline before concluding this paper.

First, it is of note how *modulation* and *incessant* competition is incentivised among individuals working in and between academic institutions through the pervasive rhetoric of *excellence* and the hierarchical and reputational economies generated through mechanisms of surveillance such as the REF (and soon, the TEF). Such incessant competition must be perpetual and open-ended, insofar as such open-endedness maintains an incentive structure by which academic staff 'are motivated to *continuously try to do better*' (Hall, 2016: 27). Achieving 'better' and producing 'excellence', in other words, become, in effect, about being *controlled* by short-term reputational metrics and targets - 'Control is short-term and of rapid rates of turnover, but also continuous and without limit' (Deleuze, 1992: 6). Similarly, as Srnicek notes, the reputation systems of firms such as Uber and AirBnB tend to transmit and exacerbate gendered and racialised biases (2017: 77): metrics of control are, in this sense, metrics of exclusion. In the context of postwelfare capitalism, the intensification of precarisation and reputationalism which the White Paper and the TEF seek to produce – that is, its aim of *perpetual pedagogical control* – looks set to transform teaching into a 'gig' to be competed for in the university-to-come. Such a transformation of the labour conditions in the

tertiary education sector, coupled with a framework of control based upon a notion of 'excellence', is well suited to weakening the possibilities of solidarity, of collective organisation and therefore of key potential avenues through which such trends could be resisted and/or confronted in creative and dynamic ways. Such solidaristic possibilities are attacked through incentive structures of incessant competition, the potential exacerbation of gendered and racialised privilege and accelerating processes of precarisation.

The second point we wish to make on this context of postwelfare capitalism relates to the putative commitments to 'student choice', 'student satisfaction' and 'teaching excellence', through which *Success as a Knowledge Economy* makes its claims. The White Paper envisages an education market which is hyper-responsive to 'student and employer demand' and which (they conjecture) is 'more satisfying' or 'more excellent' the smoother the transition from tertiary education to employment is for students (BIS, 2016b: 5, 8, 9, 13, 19, 46, 58). [It is also of note that TEF review boards will include 'employers', though this is not commented on in any detail (BIS, 2016b: 19, 40).] *Under perpetual pedagogical control, pedagogical exploration becomes totally subordinated to the production of satisfied and employable customers, as well as the transmission of hollow and dogmatic pedagogies* (MacKenzie and Mackenzie, 2014). As Hall notes:

Faced by such a situation [where metrics dominate and govern] [...] academics are likely to prefer to run courses in subjects that are perceived by student debtors-as-consumers as having the potential to help them gain a 'good' job with a decent salary. They will thus be involved mainly in producing the type of unthreatening, lower-level, vocational 'workers' that are needed by postwelfare capitalism (and which the current push on the part of many governments towards an 'employability agenda' for much of higher education seems determined to generate) rather than the kind of educated public citizens or creative critical thinkers who are capable of maintaining some control over their own work and futures (Hall, 2016: 31-32).

Teachers (and, of course, potential students) who do *not* adapt to these conditions face, in other words, even further economic insecurity in a context of precarisation. Following the White Paper's logic, we ought not to teach those subjects which do not satisfy consumer demand (which do not produce satisfaction and employability); nor ought, it follows, education providers (temporarily) employ those individual teachers who do not produce satisfied and employable graduates. The effects such incentive structures and mechanisms of control will have on what is pedagogically possible in the university-to-come cannot be fully predicted, of course. However, as Daniel Saunders notes, speaking here of the similar pervasiveness of 'excellence', competition and precarious labour conditions in the United

States tertiary education sector, excellence frameworks (such as the TEF and of course, the REF, which has been subject to similar criticism (Cabral and Huet, 2015)) are *grounded* on the reducibility, metrifiability and ranking of teaching practices and, as such:

Not only does this quantification necessarily challenge emancipatory educational practices that are built upon the recognition of students and faculty as nuanced, multidimensional people who are irreducible with one another (Freire, 2000; Illich, 1971), but it limits the potential for new, non-quantitatively based pedagogical practices and educational priorities. Such measurement and its corresponding closing off of alternative approaches is a foundation of the neoliberalization of postsecondary education, as everything within a neoliberal world is commensurable with one another and subject to quantitative measures (Brown, 2015). As such, to embrace the commitment to excellence is to naturalize and universalize the quantification of postsecondary education [...] Once excellence is accepted as a primary educational goal, institutions must ensure that the goal is met. To do so requires building upon the quantification of all education-related activities and placing them within assessment regimes (Saunders, 2015: 403).

One of the threats which Saunders gestures towards in his own context, and which we wish to emphasise by way of conclusion, is that the language of student choice and excellence functions in fact as a commitment to the ‘competitive market’ as the arbiter of excellence and, as such, the arbiter of what is *not* excellent, what is legitimate (profitable) to teach and what is not so. Or, in short, a (dogmatic and uncritical) commitment to the ‘competitive market’ becoming the regulator of pedagogical possibilities, to the normalisation of incessant and perpetual pedagogical supervision and control, and to intensifying processes of casualisation and precarisation. It is, to say the least, difficult to identify processes – which others have with some optimism in recent years (Birch, 2012) - which support student empowerment, explorative and deep pedagogies through which students and teachers might be able to co-create empowering environments together, or the long-term economic security of either students or teachers. *Success as a Knowledge Economy* and the TEF, we claim, have little to do with improving teaching quality or enhancing student empowerment, but instead are significant steps towards a more thoroughly marketised tertiary education system: a tertiary education sector befitting a postwelfare neoliberal state.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued that *Success as a Knowledge Economy* and the *Teaching Excellence Framework* will constitute a set of mechanisms of *perpetual pedagogical control*

in which *the market will become a regulator of pedagogical possibilities*. Rather than supporting pedagogical exploration and empowering students, such policies support precarisation and casualisation, and the subordination of pedagogy to market principles and truths.

We here have not suggested a particular course of action to take, in part owing to the fact that we do not wish perpetuate mechanisms of control over the myriad of as-yet unexplored possibilities of creative confrontation. Such a move would pre-emptively narrow what we cannot foresee. We understand that such confrontations could be actualised in a number of different ways and hope that the critique outlined in this paper will encourage or invite readers to carve out their own possible confrontations. Our own response, however, has already started to manifest itself in creative and experimental pedagogy: an avenue that we have been exploring through *workplayshops* (these explorations will be the subject of our following paper on these themes). Creatively confronting the conditions we face becomes, we suggest, a pedagogical task to be participated in and explored for those interested in transforming them. This paper ends with an open narrative rather than a closed one and with more questions than answers. Do we support conditions such as these in the tertiary sector? Is it not our task to confront them? How may we mutually empower each other and support inclusive and open educational practices rather than submitting to the exclusionary logic of the market?

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TEF: why and how? Ideological and operational imperatives driving policy

Ian McNay

This short piece attempts to identify the origins of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), to locate it within the wider framework of policy for higher education (HE) in the UK - more specifically England - to identify characteristics that will endure whatever tinkering at the edges happens as a result of the trial and error approach adopted towards many issues in contemporary politics, including the REF (McNay, 2016), which can be seen as a reference point for what we can anticipate. Government acknowledges that the approach will be applied to TEF: 'we will continue to trial and pilot changes to ensure that the framework continues to improve' (Department for Education, 2016, paragraph 7).

The basic principle is that HE is seen as a business, operating in a competitive market, with universities described as 'service delivery agents' by one senior civil servant, and students, as customers, put 'at the heart of the system'. Since government no longer funds teaching, except to top up costs of expensive essentials in STEM subjects, it is no longer a near monopoly client controlling through resource allocation policy, but has re-shaped itself as a students' champion, a blend of the Consumers' Association, sponsors of the *Which?* Guide to universities, and the Competition and Markets Authority, monitoring probity in provision and publicity. Its agent for this will be the new Office for Students, which at least is within the education ministry, not business, where research remains.

The secondary principles underpin traditional Conservative attitudes since the collapse of Butskellism:

- value for money – as in economy, efficiency, effectiveness, in that order;
- a belief, if applied to higher education, demonstrated to be mistaken by Gareth Williams as long ago as 1992, that competition enhances quality and reduces costs (Williams, 1992); that is also false for other sectors as currently evidenced by prisons, forensic services, energy companies and transport provision. So, Jo Johnson (DBIS, 2015) thinks that new providers should be able to award their own degrees as soon as they open their doors – the level playing field syndrome - because such [unproven] 'high quality challenger institutions... will add a positive competitive dynamic' to the sector (Havergal, 2016a). That was the argument behind the polytechnics, and later the Open University, but they had a much long probationary period – the OU had an academic advisory committee for 6 years before operating with full autonomy;

- a suspicion of professionals as autonomous 'experts', particularly those in public service, whose first loyalty should be to the state as employer, and compliance with its views, recently seen in attitudes to the judiciary supporting elective democracy within the Brexit process, and, ironically, 'service providers' in the central civil service and embassies world-wide.

Value for money promoting efficiency, and accountability, curbing autonomy, were the initial drivers behind what has become the REF, to monitor whether academic professionals in the universities of that era were doing what they were paid to do - research. Many were not. The RQA/RAE/REF then conditioned the award of funds for research and distorted strategic and resource support away from teaching, still the second main expenditure across the HE sector, after administration. Before fees were re-introduced (they existed when I was a student in the mid-1960s) only four HEIs out of nearly 150 got more money from government for research than for teaching. The dominant discourse later became that teaching in HE was of poor quality because of government emphasis on research, though that causal link was denied. The White Paper (BIS, 2015) expresses a 'concern that too often the incentive at an institutional and individual level skews activity away from teaching' – with no acceptance of government responsibility for setting those incentives. We are to blame for a negative policy impact I identified for HEFCE 20 years ago (McNay, 1997), and which it acknowledged then. Bahram Bekhradnia, formerly the boss of HEFCE - which funded HE and had a duty to ensure quality - was more generally critical in saying that universities are 'not very good at teaching'. He drew on various comparative projects across Europe and the wider world (Havergal, 2015). That may have been true in the Russell Group universities, as evidenced by a trial TEF run by *Times Higher Education (THE)*, which put none in the top ten (Havergal, 2016b) and had several well into the bottom half of the league table - Bristol, King's College, London (KCL), London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE), Goldsmiths, St. Andrews, Edinburgh were all ranked below Greenwich. Senior managers attributed this to the impact of REF – the Research Excellence Framework, a government policy, but with academics being blamed – and the solution seen as replicating that approach for assessing teaching excellence, when many academics believe that the REF and its antecedents have had significant negative impact (McNay, 1997, 2007, 2016) . The 2016 HEPI academic experience survey showed that student satisfaction is in decline and student assessment of value for money fell steeply, by 20 percentage points in England since fees were last trebled – another government policy (Neves and Hillman, 2016). It is worth noting that the *THE* survey of academic staff (Grove, 2017) showed that 39 per cent agreed that teaching was the most important function of a scholar, with only 24 per cent disagreeing. The same survey showed that 55 per cent of academic respondents believed

that research is valued more highly than teaching in their institution. So, leaders and managers are also culpable, but not the teachers now being frameworked.

The motivations driving entry to the REF were described by one of my favourite ex-vice-chancellors as ‘fame and fortune’ – esteem and funding, thereby combining intrinsic and extrinsic elements. This will also apply to TEF which will have a ranking and a reward. But, with a difference – politicians do learn, but slowly. The ranking will be initially at corporate level; and the reward will be paid by the students in even higher fees, or by teachers because managers will be allowed to increase student numbers. Recruitment of international students will also be conditional on a good grade. Those factors mean that 134 HEIs, mainly in England, where the policy operates, are taking part in year 2 of the exercise, despite staff attitudes, as Stuart Croft, VC of Warwick acknowledged in a letter to *THE* on 2 February, 2017, where his argument was simple: ‘the government has us over a barrel’. Officially, in England, there is no cap on numbers, but that may not last long when the size of the 18+age cohort expands rapidly soon after the start of the next decade. However, that will be balanced by leaving the EU and losing the obligation of give loans to people from 27 other countries, delighting the Thatcherites. Conditions of student financial support have become harsher and data on the ‘graduate premium’ suggest it is declining, also acknowledged by government (DBIS, 2015) so the calculation about whether to enter HE may change with the limit to numbers emerging from decisions by potential students.

The other value for money lesson learned from REF is about the cost of the evaluation exercise itself. There has long been pressure to reduce peer assessment in REF and use metrics as the dominant evidence base for quality. For TEF, the search was for existing metrics, because there is not a tradition of peer review within politicians’ living memories. Some of us may be nostalgic for the Council for National Academic Awards, which validated polytechnic degrees, with its formative, developmental approach. Even Teaching Quality Assessment, the last experiment in this field, involved visits, observation and discussion as well as rooms full of paperwork, but it cost a lot to find very, very little to criticise: not the government expectation, so it was abandoned.

Government acknowledges that there are no good metrics, but they are prepared to use bad ones, or proxies, to get something done, with, initially, little flexibility from a ‘one-size-fits-all’ core (Department for Education, 2016) beyond socio-economic background of students, and an institutional submission to stake a claim for excellence against institutional benchmarks. The chair of the TEF panel acknowledges that all data are flawed in some respect, especially those from the National Student Survey which are corrupted by student self-

interest in rating highly the quality of their university and where 25 student unions are committed to a boycott because of the impact on TEF ratings (Grove, 2017a).

There are some positives for universities that value teaching – greater parity of status between teaching and research careers, with explicit career paths and rewards for teaching, which may redress the distorting imbalance that has developed. The three main metrics concern teaching quality, learning environment, student outcomes and learning gains (DBIS, 2015, chapter 3). Teaching quality *will* use student satisfaction statistics, which risks popularity displacing quality, with negative effects. Learning gain is notoriously difficult to measure; some pilot, unpublished, work on this I did with John Pratt showed Oxbridge students had a learning loss, given that their high entry qualifications were not matched by high degree classification. Teaching excellence may be related to contact hours and student time spent studying as well as, possibly, the proportion of staff on permanent contracts. Study time depends on self-reporting, not a reliable process. Outcomes will use leaver destination statistics to measure high level skills development to promote social mobility and enhance productivity. The consultation showed only about 40 per cent of respondents supported several government proposals on this, but they will be retained despite that (Department of Education, 2016, paragraph 38). However, the quantifiable metric is salary, and recent HESA stats have shown that salaries in law are related to family background of students on entry. They will also vary by the differences between working in family law and corporate law, so skewing the advice given to students. HESA stats also show that the job market is institutionally racist and sexist, something often hidden by treating employment and further study as a single metric, when the second may be a fall-back after prejudiced decisions on the former. HEIs do, though, need to examine why black students on average gain lower final degree classifications than others with the same entry qualifications.

The report on responses to the consultation raises issues about ideological drivers for proposals to support new market entrants. There were responses from 132 'state' HEIs, of which 18 are quoted in the text; private alternative providers, including for profit organisations with foreign owners provided 21 responses with 8 quoted. In percentage terms, that is a quotation rate of 13 per cent and 38 per cent, three times as many for new entrants encouraged by government as for established HEIs. For student unions, representing those 'at the heart of the system', the rate is even worse: three quoted from 35 responses: 8.6 per cent. (Department of Education, 2016). In the end, only six alternative providers will take part in full this year (HEFCE, 2017), despite government sponsorship of them as high quality entrants.

The RAE/REF has shown that any metrics adopted will be 'gamed'. My work (McNay, 2016) has shown that research approaches become less innovative, more conformist to fit with perceived assessment panel prejudices. Hardly, then, an approach to encourage developments and diversity in teaching and learning: another unexpected negative consequence, moving authority to managers and away from academic professionals. The professionals do not think the TEF will achieve its aims. In the *THE* survey only four per cent of academics thought that the proposed framework will accurately assess teaching quality, with 75 per cent saying it will not. Similarly, 12 per cent believe it will improve quality, with 64 per cent saying it will not. Administrators were equally sceptical (Grove, 2017b). The record of institutional strategic leaders is not good: when high fees for taught courses came in, the extra funding was taken from teaching departments to spend on central marketing, and iconic buildings, not invested in the teaching process. Yet students' top priority for savings, if needed, is...buildings (HEA/HEPI, 2016; Jones *et al*, 2016). TEF may see a transfer of funds from teaching departments to internal employment agencies, given a racist employment market. I know of one HEI that reduced its intake of BME students, as part of a tactic of raising its UCAS entry tariff, so as to improve its league table position. TEF plans are to reward widening access to counteract that, as part of a wider aim to double numbers of disadvantaged entrants, but that is hardly an indicator of teaching excellence at that stage, and is not affected by the quality of teaching staff activity.

So, there is confusion, lack of clarity, but, as with research, emergent greater control. There is discontinuity built in: such uncertainty risks loss of innovation and creativity essential to quality improvement. As with the impact criterion for research quality, an aim of TEF is to change behaviour (DBIS, 2015). That change may be towards compliance, conformity and convergence to an isomorphic range of provision. At least we have been warned. I have tried to indicate what to expect, but, expect the unexpected as well. As one head of HEFCE said about the RAE: 'You never know how it will all turn out' (McNay, 1998).

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The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF): yet more competition – and on the wrong things!

Phil Race

When the UK Green Paper which heralded the TEF was released in 2015, it claimed that the aim was to introduce something much less burdensome than the Research Excellence Framework (REF). Working in higher education institutions (HEIs) as a consultant, I see that the 'less burdensome' intention is already clearly failing, with the energy of staff at all levels being sapped by numerous planning and strategy meetings as institutions gear themselves up for the inevitable competition and league-table fallout which will accompany the TEF.

Participating as a National Teaching Fellow in the various consultations preceding the present Higher Education bill, it was clear that there were problems with the three words involved in TEF. What are the best metrics to try to quantify '*teaching*'? In particular, what on earth might '*excellence*' in teaching be, and how could this possibly be measured in a valid or reliable way? And even the word '*framework*' implies a concept so complex that it could hardly be expected to be fair or productive.

So how can we enhance the student experience of higher education? Higher education institutions and practices tend to change very slowly. Einstein is reputed to have said 'it is sheer madness to keep doing the same thing, and to expect different results'. Therefore, if we want different and better results, we need to be doing different things, not just continuing to put the same old ways of doing things under spotlights, focusing on a few selected dimensions. Overburdened staff in HEIs are already burning themselves out, using traditional methods of assessment and feedback introduced long ago when student numbers were much smaller. Indeed, assessment and feedback take up far more time and energy than 'teaching' *per se* and additional TEF burdens may thus be a step too far.

There are numerous ways to try to teach well. Any attempt to highlight particular aspects of good teaching will exclude other equally worthy ways of giving students a good higher education experience. But perhaps the biggest problem is with the word 'excellence'. Rewarding excellence breeds competition and the losers, who will always be far more numerous than the winners, may well be disappointed and discouraged – and therefore less likely to try again to excel. Most of the benefits of collaboration may be lost when individuals, departments and institutions are made to compete.

It would be much wiser to redirect the energy currently being expended on TEF to reviewing the processes of assessment and feedback. Successful educational outcomes, including the now oft-cited 'longitudinal' ones, depend very strongly on the quality of the assessment and of the consequent feedback that students experience, (e.g. HEA, 2012). The higher education sector still over-uses some processes, including the much-criticised unseen written exams (which often continue to measure what is remembered rather than what is learned), and coursework essays (despite all the research which shows that we are poor as a sector at grading them fairly or reliably, and despite ever-increasing concerns about who actually wrote them). Essays remain a good way to get formative feedback to students on their thinking and writing, but assessing them fairly is fraught with difficulty.

Even though the National Student Survey, which feeds in to the TEF, has been adjusted for 2017 onwards and includes issues relating to the student experience of assessment and feedback, known as an aspect which students themselves find the least satisfactory, I would nevertheless argue that the TEF would do better to focus more on assessment rather than teaching. So, in short, the TEF seems set to measure the wrong things and to generate greater competition in a world which instead needs much more emphasis on collaboration. Rather than vain attempts to continue to do the same old things better, processes are needed to recognise and reward outstanding assessment and feedback practice, which itself needs to be better monitored, developed and changed to keep up with the present and future needs of our students, and of the world beyond HEIs.

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Students as consumers? There is a potential alternative...

Sam Grogan

Abstract

This paper offers a reconsideration of the student as consumer. Through playfully finding similarity between a university and a gym, students are recognised as creators, or co-creators, of their educational journey and therefore *producers*, rather than *consumers*.

Keywords: Consumerism, student experience, learning, co-creation

The well-worn creation of students as consumers and the debates and tensions within this problematic positioning are, given the wider landscape, perhaps more relevant than ever before.³ The shiny TEF badges provide us with a honed, contemporary resonance of elements within the 1997 Dearing report, in which the UK government identified students as ‘customers’. Similarly, the increased marketisation of UKHE, the commercially-centric stance of the CMA, which encourages a consumerist attitude in applicants and students, and the increase in tuition fees (themselves linked to institutional TEF ratings in the future) all serve to position the student as an increasingly value-driven customer.

However, the rise of the student-as-customer does not wholly emanate from the mechanisms of the HE sector and its governance. There is a wider picture to be drawn upon...

At root, the problem perhaps lies in the word ‘consumer’ or ‘customer’. For a moment, let us imagine the person who, in popular terms, might embody both of these words. Have a picture? We are drawn irrevocably to the idea of the shopper. Retail culture is intrinsic to the notion of customer. I would venture that this is also what our students imagine, embedded as they are in the popular culture of commercial consumption. And therein lies the crux of the issue. By and large, popular culture positions the consumer/ customer as a transactionalist; I go to Sainsbury’s (other brands are available), I buy my goods and I leave. I do not invest in

³ For instance, the nuanced complexity can be seen in; Kandiko, C. B. & Mawer, M. (2013). Student Expectations and Perceptions of Higher Education. London: King’s Learning Institute, or in Bunce, L, Baird, A and Jones S.E. (2016) ‘The Student-As-Consumer Approach In Higher Education And Its Effects On Academic Performance’ Studies in Higher Education [online].

Sainsbury's; I do not feel a sense of belonging or shared endeavour. It is a transactional engagement, however much the branding might suggest otherwise.

This is the cultural backdrop against which I think our students understand their position as consumer. Moreover, I think the genie is out of the lamp and will not be returned. As a passionate educationalist, I see this position at its most stark as devastating. It reduces the pursuit and acquisition of knowledge, skills and abilities to a shallow transaction: I pay for my degree and I leave. This commoditisation of knowledge destroys the potential for university education to be a genuinely humbling and transformative personal experience from which one emerges with horizons stretched; a sometimes messy, stumbling exploration for the student, in which becoming comfortable with being uncomfortable is crucial for developing a valuable personal resilience. Enough idealism; the genie is ready to wreak reductive havoc if we let it do so.

This is where the notion of the gym might enter; if one repositions the student-customer, not as a transactionalist, but as an engaged co-owner of the personally developmental experience, such as is found in the active gym member, one is able to re-imagine the student as consumer.

In the university-as-gym, it is the institutional job to provide good running machines, good classes, and a wider facilitative environment in which the staff can intelligently steer members towards co-defined fitness goals.

However, the burden of success does not lie solely with the gym and its staff, but also with its members. It is, emphatically, *not* the responsibility of the staff to exercise for their members; if, after missed training sessions and non-engagement with the self-directed diet and exercise plan, members were to complain that, despite being paying customers, they were neither thin nor fit, I should have to remind them of their side of the bargain.

This is a difficult but essential conversation. I find the gym analogy allows a way into territory wherein those students drawn to sitting in a consumer mindset can reimagine the customer role and recognise that, in the context of a successful university journey, they are not actually popular consumers at all, but rather consumer-producers. They do not really *consume* the facilities or the expertise at their disposal, but they do *produce* outcomes. More than this, at their most successful, students are co-producers, working in partnership with the

university towards co-creation of a better future self; jointly and equally responsible for the outcome.⁴

This is a continuous, iterative journey. Given the particular nature of the external landscape, it also presents a troublesome position to occupy successfully. However, I believe that meaningful co-creation is necessary to help our students move beyond being a consumer of knowledge-as-commodity, to being co-producers of knowledge as a lived experience that delivers deep, transformative growth.

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⁴ Last year, I was fortunate enough to meet Professor Tom Inns, Director of the Glasgow School of Art. He indicated that students there had rejected their role as consumers in favour of self-recognition as producers.

Contributors' Biographies

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Simon Walker is a National Teaching Fellow and Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy. He is the Head of Educational Development at the University of Greenwich, responsible for developing university policy and strategy on learning and teaching, and professional development for academic staff. Simon's research and publication lies mainly in the development and evaluation of learning design.

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Dr Danielle Tran joined the University of Greenwich in February 2016. She has previously worked at Brunel University as an Academic Skills Advisor. Before that, she was based at Middlesex University as a Lecturer in Academic Writing and Language. Her research interests include identity in HE, critical reflection, and reflective practice.

Nick Hillman

Nick Hillman has been the Director of HEPI since January 2014. He worked for the Rt Hon David Willetts MP, now Lord Willetts, the Minister for Universities and Science, from 2007 until the end of 2013, as Chief of Staff and then Special Adviser in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills.

J M Moore

Dr J M Moore is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at Newman University. From 1984 to 1990 Moore worked at Hargrave House, an ex-prisoners housing group set up by PROP, the prisoners' rights group. In 1990 he was the founding Director of Penrose Housing Association and where he developed a range of award-winning projects, including schemes for women ex-prisoners and mentally disordered offenders. Between 2000 and 2008 he worked as a freelance consultant for a range of voluntary sector, local government and criminal justice organisations and in various posts for the think tank Transform Drug Policy Foundation. Between 2008 and 2015 Moore worked at UWE Bristol, joining Newman in August 2015.

Chris Rust

Chris Rust is Emeritus Professor of Higher Education at Oxford Brookes where he worked for over 25 years. He was Head of the Oxford Centre for Staff and Learning Development, and Deputy Director of the Human Resource Directorate from 2001-2011. Between 2005-10 he was also Deputy Director for two Centres for Excellence in Teaching and Learning - ASKe (Assessment Standards Knowledge Exchange) and the Reinvention Centre for undergraduate research (led by Warwick University). For his last three years, he was Associate Dean (Academic Policy).

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Chrissi Nerantzi is a Principal Lecturer in Academic CPD in the Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching at Manchester Metropolitan University. She has worked as an academic developer at the University of Sunderland and the University of Salford before moving to Manchester Metropolitan University in 2013. Chrissi's research interests are around open and creative pedagogies.

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James Derounian is a Principal Lecturer in Applied Social Sciences at the University of Gloucestershire. He was awarded a National Teaching Fellowship in 2007. James has a 37-year career in community engagement and academia. His research, consultancy and teaching range across active and blended learning, community and rural development.

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Graham Gibbs is retired from his position as Professor and Director of the Oxford Learning Institute, University of Oxford. He is the author of 'Dimensions of Quality' that identifies valid teaching metrics, and which has informed government policy, institutional quality regimes, and 'The Times' metrics underlying world University rankings.

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Sally Brown enjoys life as an Independent Consultant and Emerita Professor at Leeds Beckett University. She is also Visiting Professor at the University of Plymouth, the University of South Wales and at Liverpool John Moores. She is a Principal Fellow of the Higher Education Academy, is a Staff and Educational Development Association Senior Fellow and a UK National Teaching Fellow.

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Hollie Mackenzie is a PhD candidate in Political & Social Thought at the University of Kent, Canterbury. Her research is focused on practicing a non-totalitarian relationship between art and politics through feminist and poststructuralist perspectives (Deleuze, Guattari and Irigaray). Weaving together artistic practice, scholarly work and political engagement, she aims to both practice and explore a feminist philosophy of labial art - politics.

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Professor Ian McNay is a Professor Emeritus for Higher Education and Management in the Department of Education & Community Studies at the University of Greenwich. His career has included posts at four other UK universities and in Barcelona and Brussels, and he has taught in over twenty countries around the world.

Phil Race

Professor Phil Race is an Emeritus Professor at Leeds Beckett University, and a Visiting Professor at Plymouth University. He writes publishes on assessment, feedback and learning, his best known recent books being the 3rd edition of 'Making Learning Happen' (2014, London: Sage) and the 4th edition of 'The Lecturer's Toolkit' (2015, London: Routledge). He continues to present conference keynotes and workshops on learning, assessment and feedback throughout the UK and abroad.

Sam Grogan

Following an early career in performance, Dr Sam Grogan has worked in higher education for 13 years. Coming from a background in teaching and learning, Sam is Pro-Vice Chancellor Student Experience at the University of Salford. His interests include experiential pedagogies, and play in learning. He is also Director of the newly formed Teaching Excellence Alliance for the University Alliance.

