There is currently an inquiry into both the ways that the quality of our education is assessed and into a new measure called the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). CUSU wants to respond to this, and would like guidance from elected representatives on this.

CUSU responded to a previous consultation on the future of quality assessment with input from Faculty Reps, stressing the need to involve students at every level, and as such these changes are not focussed on here.

**WHAT IS THE TEACHING EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK?**

The TEF appeared as a pledge in the Conservative Party manifesto for the 2015 general election and since then Minister for Universities and Science, Jo Johnson, has stressed that he views the TEF as something which will ensure universities ‘devote as much attention to the quality of teaching as fee-paying students and prospective employers have a right to expect’, and spoke of creating incentives for universities to do so.¹ Johnson has then positioned the TEF as a way of ensuring that students’ expectations about university are met and that the skills the economy needs are being developed.

A system like the TEF, which bears nominal resemblance to the REF (Research Excellence Framework), could be seen as rebalancing the relationship between teaching and research in higher education.

Johnson’s aims for the TEF are:

- to ensure all students receive an excellent teaching experience that encourages original thinking, drives up engagement and prepares them for the world of work
- to build a culture where teaching has equal status with research, with great teachers enjoying the same professional recognition and opportunities for career and pay progression as great researchers
- to stimulate a diverse HE market and provide students with the information they need to judge teaching quality - in the same way they can already compare a faculty’s research rating
- to recognise those institutions that do the most to welcome students from a range of backgrounds and support their retention and progression to further study or a graduate job²

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills plans to publish a Green Paper in the autumn which will include more details about the TEF, but there has not yet been any sign of this.

HOW WILL IT WORK?

The TEF is likely to be metric-based. Graduate leavers’ destination data is likely to be included, although many believe that this is going to be a problematic metric given that not all graduates go into graduate level employment, and that high graduate starting salaries do not necessarily result from excellent teaching.

Johnson has also spoken of the system being underpinned by an external assessment process undertaken by an independent body.

Based on other statements made by Johnson it seems that the TEF is likely to include ‘incentives which reward institutions who do best at retention and progression of disadvantaged students’. In addition to this the TEF may include incentives for tackling ‘degree inflation’ and for introducing a grading system ‘which does more to motivate and engage students throughout their course’. It is likely that this is a reference to the Grade Point Average (GPA) system.

WHAT ARE THE LINKS TO FEES?

In his Budget speech the Chancellor of the Exchequer set out his intention ‘to link the student fee cap to inflation for those institutions that can show they offer high-quality teaching’. Additionally the Government’s Productivity Plan sets out that ‘the government will allow institutions offering high quality teaching to increase their tuition fees in line with inflation from 2017-18’.

WHAT ARE WE BEING ASKED TO COMMENT ON?

Below are the questions that CUSU will be answering, and some bullet points for discussion.

1. What issues with quality assessment in Higher Education was the Higher Education Funding Council for England’s (HEFCE) Quality Assurance review seeking to address?
   - the diversity of the higher education sector
   - the fact that institutions should work on an enhancement basis rather than merely a compliance one
   - the changing nature of higher education

2. Will the proposed changes to the quality assurance process in universities, as outlined by HEFCE in its consultation, improve quality in Higher Education?

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3 https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/teaching-at-the-heart-of-the-system
4 https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/teaching-at-the-heart-of-the-system
• it is not yet clear how students’ voices will be protected and enshrined in the new framework

• further details are needed on how the external review process are going to be effective

3. **What should be the objectives of a Teaching Excellence Framework (‘TEF’)?**

• How should a TEF benefit students? Academics? Universities?

• What are the institutional behaviours a TEF should drive? How can a system be designed to avoid unintended consequences?

• How should the effectiveness of the TEF be judged? What will make it work well for students and academics?

4. **How should the proposed TEF and new quality assurance regime fit together?**

5. **What do you think will be the main challenges in implementing a TEF?**

• How could it be for students in its first instance, and how will institutions be convinced to buy in to the process?

6. **How should the proposed connection between fee level and teaching quality be managed?**

• Should excellent institutions be allowed to charge higher fees?

• What effects could this have on student recruitment?

• What are the benefits or risks of this approach to setting fees?