

# Expression of interest

# Title: Student TEF choices: The usability of subject level classifications and teaching quality factors, to inform development of the Teaching Excellence Framework

**Project reference: 2017**

**Deadline for expressions of interest: 17:00, 1st September 2017**

### Summary

Expressions of interest are sought to undertake a two-part research project supporting the further development of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). Expressions of Interest are invited for any combination of Part 1, Part 2, or both.

Part 1 of the research focuses on the way subject-level TEF information is most practically delivered to students, testing the usability of three subject-level classifications. This will require primary research, ideally in the form of quasi-experimental user-testing of the three classification systems with potential undergraduate student applicants, along with some questions about institutional-level TEF use.

Part 2 of the research considers the broad factors conceptualised as making up assessment of teaching quality (in its broadest sense), and how relevant and important they are to students in terms of their selection of HE provider and the quality of their undergraduate student experience. This is likely to involve primary research in the form of a questionnaire for undergraduate applicants and first-year students.

### Background

The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) was introduced by the Government in the Higher Education and Research Act (2017) to measure the teaching quality of Higher Education providers in the UK, as a way of:

1. Better informing students’ choices about what and where to study.
2. Raising esteem for teaching.
3. Recognising and rewarding excellent teaching.
4. Better meeting the needs of employers, business, industry and the professions.

The teaching quality of Higher Education providers is assessed by a set of performance metrics and a contextual submission by the provider. The overall assessment of both of these sets of information results in award of a Gold, Silver or Bronze TEF Award for the provider, indicative of the standard of teaching they deliver.

The institutional level TEF has been developed and rolled out across the HE sector on a voluntary basis. The first award levels for institutional level assessments of HE providers were published in June 2017. For TEF Year 3 (2017-18) and 4 (2018/19) the assessment will remain at provider level, however, for subsequent years, the Government has set out its intention to move to a subject level TEF. In order to inform this development, the Government will run two pilot years in 2017-18 and 2018-19, and will enable providers to work with HEFCE and DfE to help evolve subject-level TEF.

Alongside this, the Government wishes to understand how subject level TEF can best support student decision making. In particular, it wishes to commission research to explore two aspects of design:

1. *Usability of different course categorisation*

Given that there are presently 30,000 to 40,000 undergraduate courses available in the UK, TEF assessment at individual course level is not practical. Courses will therefore be grouped into subject level classifications to make the data manageable, however, it will be necessary to ensure sufficient granularity to support informed student choices.

Currently the subject-level classification being considered is Level 2 of the Common Aggregation Hierarchy (CAH2), which classifies courses into 35 subjects. Testing the usability of this classification system against alternatives forms the first part of this research.

1. *Student views on TEF teaching quality factors*

While TEF development has been subject to significant development with input from the sector, including student representatives, the teaching quality factors for the institutional level TEF now need to be tested more systematically with students themselves to establish; a. the importance of each factor as an indicator of the overall student experience and b. for value in making decisions about HE course and institution for undergraduate study. The factors to be tested will include those already in TEF as metrics (such as the provider’s approach to giving feedback to students), those which could be used in future metrics (such as earnings and teaching intensity) and those in TEF as part of the qualitative submission by the HE provider (such as resources available to students).Students will also be invited to add and to rate additional teaching quality factors they may identify themselves, if they feel these are factors not yet represented.

The results of this research will inform the design of the TEF subject level pilots in 2018-19.

### Research aims

This research project looks to answer:

* What is the best subject-level classification that allows students to most effectively identify subject-specific TEF information for course/s they want to study?
* What teaching quality information is important to students, and might inform TEF development?
* What is the relative importance of TEF-related factors for students’ choice of HE provider and the quality of student experience?

Key Research Questions

Part 1: The first part of this research aims to identify which of three potential TEF subject-level classifications can be recommended as the most useable by students, by testing the classifications with undergraduate university applicants.

1a) Can participants use the classifications to quickly and correctly identify which subject category their preferred course falls under?

1b) Which subject classification is preferred?

1c) For the Common Aggregation Hierarchy 35-level classification, are there any subject classifications that could be improved?

1d) Are students aware of and using institution-level TEF, and is subject-level TEF preferable to institution-level TEF?

Part 2: The second part of the research aims to understand students’ views on which institution and subject level factors relating to ‘teaching quality’ in its broadest sense are important to students in terms of:

2a) selecting an HE provider

2b) the quality of their undergraduate student experience

## Methodology

This section sets out the detailed research aims for each part of the research.

A proposed methodology and related sampling for each part of the research is included. However, resopndents to the EOI are welcome to suggest alternative methodologies to fully meet the project’s research aims, although they should indicate why they believe these could be superior. A broad outline of the proposed approach is acceptable for the EOI, with the approach fully developed for the Invitation to Tender.

### Part 1: Testing Subject Level Classifications

A bespoke online survey incorporating user testing, or an alternative methodology can be proposed.

This is likely to include:-

* Student applicants being asked how aware they are of TEF, if they have seen the institution level TEF awards and if they have used them to inform their choices of HE provider.
* Student applicants identifying up to three courses that they have or will be applying for and identifying which subject group within each of the three classifications their courses fall into.
* Measures of accuracy and difficulty in correctly placing the course within the different category options to be tested.
* Analysis of how accuracy and ease of correct identification change by:
* the three classifications,
* the complexity of the courses (e.g ‘simple’ or ‘complex’ e.g. joint honours, modular courses, specialised courses - levels to be defined);
* applicant experience (e.g whether or not the applicant had submitted an undergraduate application yet); and
* other relevant applicant characteristics.
* Asking student applicants about their preference for the classifications, how useful they think they will find them for making university comparisons, and how useful they would be when compared to institution level TEF.
* Student applicants being asked if any of the subject groups in the CAH 35-level classification was difficult to interpret or use, and if so, what would they change.

#### Sample

A sample estimated at approximately 1800 students, split by 900 planning to apply and 900 having already applied for a UK undergraduate course by January 2018 for the 2018/19 undergraduate intake.

The sample will need to achieve good representation of prospective student characteristics and course options in order to support the drawing of statistically robust results.

### Part 2: Understanding the Importance of Teaching Quality

The second part of the research will involve a survey which aims to assess the strength of student opinion and the relative importance of a set of identified teaching quality factors.

 This is likely to include:

* Ratings of approximately 20 institutional and subject-level teaching quality factors currently assessed (or proposed to be assessed) as part of TEF.
* For applicants, the perceived importance of each factor for the decision to select an HE provider.
* For undergraduate students, the extent to which they consider each teaching quality factor to be reflective of the overall quality of their undergraduate student experience.
* Respondents identifying, outlining and rating any other factors they think are important to teaching quality which are not currently covered in the study, and their relative importance in terms of student experience and selecting an HE provider impact of teaching quality.
* Student applicants being asked how aware they are of TEF, if they have seen the institution level TEF awards, and if they have used them to inform their choices of HE provider.

#### Sample

A representative sample of around 1,000 applicants for UK HE in 2017/18 and 1,000 UK undergraduates who will have taken up their course in 2017/18.

### Timing

* Expression of Interest August-September 2017
* Invitation to Tender September 2017
* Contract awarded/project start Early October 2017
* Fieldwork October-November 2017
* Draft report December 2017
* Proposed end date January 2018

### Assessment criteria

Expressions of interest will be assessed against the following criteria:

* Experience of research topics to be covered
* Experience of research methodologies to be used
* Experience of research with higher education students and higher education institutions
* Capacity and capability to deliver the project in the timescales indicated

Please indicate whether your expression of interest is for Part 1 only, Part 2 only, or both Part 1 and Part 2.

The Parts will be separately assessed. Please limit your wordcount to 750 words (including weblinks) for each Part you wish to bid for. Anything longer will be disregarded.

| **Closing date for EOIs: 17.00, 1st September 2017** **Send your EOI form to: Janette.Davis@education.gov.uk** |
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## How to submit an expressions of interest

You must submit an expression of interest (EOI) in order to be considered to be invited to tender. To do so, please complete the Expression of Interest Research template found on the Department’s research website. A submission of an EOI does not guarantee an invitation to tender and the Department does not routinely advise organisations that they have not been successful in being invited to tender. Feedback is however available on request.

In order to express an interest you must be registered with us and you will need your ID number. If you need to register then please do so using the online supplier registration form. If you have already registered and have forgotten your ID number, please send an email to Enquiries.RBU@education.gov.uk

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