

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

OfS Consultation on the Teaching Excellence Framework

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Section 1: Framework

Questions relating to Proposal 1: Provider-level, periodic ratings

QUESTION 1: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE WITH OUR PROPOSAL FOR PROVIDER-LEVEL, PERIODIC RATINGS?

Disagree

1. MillionPlus believes that the timeline of these periodic ratings should be planned so that they do not place unnecessary regulatory burden on providers alongside other regulatory commitments from the OfS, namely Access and Participation Plans. MillionPlus is concerned that the frequency that is being proposed here will place excessive bureaucratic burden on providers. We would advocate for a longer period of time between each periodic rating, but with the possibility of an interim review of a TEF rating. Under the proposals, the OfS reserves the right to revoke or downgrade an outcome mid-way through a periodic rating. It would not be fair that providers could be punished, but not rewarded for improvement in performance.

Questions relating to Proposal 2: Aspects and features of assessment

QUESTION 2: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE WITH OUR PROPOSAL FOR ASPECTS AND FEATURES OF ASSESSMENT?

Neither agree or disagree.

2. MillionPlus is supportive of the proposals that ensure that no more than half of the decision on a provider can be based on the metrics. It is important that this exercise is informed by quantitative data but not dominated by it.
3. In Annex B of the consultation document, definitions are established for "outstanding quality" and "very high quality". But within Table 4 of the document, "high quality" is not clearly defined. More information is needed to explain how this category relates to condition B3.

Questions relating to Proposal 3: Rating scheme

QUESTION 3: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE WITH OUR PROPOSAL FOR THE RATING SCHEME?

Disagree

4. The labels of Gold, Silver and Bronze are somewhat reductive of a highly diverse sector. But these should not be replaced by a set of categories that undermines the status of the third option i.e. Bronze, which by definition relates to high quality provision.

5. MillionPlus objects to the category "requires improvement", reasons for which are explained below in our answer to question 4. MillionPlus believes that the issues that are raised in the consultation document over the potential negative perceptions of the bronze category (paragraph 49) would be ameliorated by the alternative solution that we are proposing in question 4.

Questions relating to Proposal 4: Absence of excellence

QUESTION 4: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE WITH OUR PROPOSAL FOR WHERE THERE IS AN ABSENCE OF EXCELLENCE?

Strongly disagree

6. MillionPlus is opposed to the label "requires improvement" that is being proposed within the rating scheme. This will not be interpreted well within the sector and beyond, and will mislead. This does not seem a suitable description for provision that is being deemed satisfactory but below excellence. It also ignores the advice of the Independent Review of TEF, which suggested that this part of the rating scheme should be named "meets the UK quality requirements". MillionPlus believes it would be more appropriate to adopt this phrase or similar language such as "meets the quality threshold".

Section 2: Scope

Questions relating to Proposal 5: Provider eligibility

QUESTION 5: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE WITH OUR PROPOSAL FOR PROVIDER ELIGIBILITY?

Agree

7. It would be helpful to have more clarity on how the TEF will interact with quality and standards requirements of the devolved nations, namely those of the Scottish Funding Council. As noted in the consultation document, the quality assurance framework is under review at present, so this will have to be monitored. It would be useful for Scottish providers to have information published as and when this policy review develops so that they are clear on the OfS's expectations.

Questions relating to Proposal 6: Courses in scope

QUESTION 6: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE WITH OUR PROPOSAL FOR COURSES IN SCOPE?

Strongly disagree

8. MillionPlus objects to the inclusion of registered students in the scope of the TEF. The Teaching Excellence Framework is an exercise to assess teaching excellence. This is not just a question of semantics or reading too much into the name of the framework, which has been subject to changes over time. Fundamentally, the core purpose of the TEF is to identify excellence in provision in creating a learning environment and impact on students. MillionPlus does not therefore think it is fair to have registered students who are not taught at the provider within scope for this assessment. This would amount to a duplication of regulation at both the taught and registered provider in many cases, which is not in the interests of students as it will create excessive regulatory burden for the sector.
9. The OfS has argued that this proposal would create incentives for both the registered and taught providers to improve performance. But we would argue that there are already a number of incentives in

place that would drive this. The proposals listed in the consultation on the new approach to regulating outcomes (B3) would place heavy incentives on providers to improve performance for both taught and registered students. We think this would act as a sufficient driver of performance in the outcomes measures, and is more appropriately aligned to those which the registered provider has more direct control over and responsibility for. We do not think it is reasonable to assess some of the student experience metrics that are being proposed for registered students, as these correspond directly to the direct role of teaching played by the teaching provider.

10. MillionPlus believes that the inclusion of both taught and registered students within the scope of the TEF could disincentivise partnerships going forward, making many providers less willing and engaged in developing such arrangements. This is not in the interest of students, as it is likely to limit student choice.

Section 3: Evidence

Questions relating to Proposal 7: Provider submission

QUESTION 7: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE WITH OUR PROPOSAL FOR PROVIDER SUBMISSIONS?

Agree

11. MillionPlus is pleased to see that recommendations from the independent review of the TEF have been taken on board and shaped the content of this proposal.

Questions relating to Proposal 8: Student submission

QUESTION 8: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE WITH OUR PROPOSAL FOR STUDENT SUBMISSIONS?

Neither agree or disagree

12. MillionPlus has some concerns over how the student submission in the TEF might operate. In principle, MillionPlus is very supportive of incorporating the student voice into the process. It is important to remember that the purpose of this framework is to support excellence in provision for students. The logic for making the student submission voluntary is understandable, but this could lead to a significant split within the sector in respect to student submissions. Furthermore, there is also likely to be a significant variation in the detail and quality of submissions that are submitted. This is likely to reflect the size of the institution. Larger institutions, with more developed student infrastructure and larger/more organised student unions are likely to be those who have more time and resource to dedicate to this through their students.
13. As this is a voluntary exercise, we assume that this will function as a supplementary aspect of the evidence within the TEF. But it is unclear how submissions would be compared based on the presence of a student submission (or variation of quality between those where a student submission has been made). It would seem unfair that providers might be at a disadvantage for something that they have only limited control influencing. It is worth noting that the student voice is captured within the TEF through the NSS metrics that are being used as indicators for providers. This is arguably a more objective way of accounting for the student voice than the inclusion of a student submissions, which while of value, might display significant variation in style and form.

14. Furthermore, the timing of this submission as proposed in the document will make student engagement a challenge. This risks undermining the quality of submissions and the value of the exercise. Students will either be heavily focused on returning to their studies or acclimatising to the new environment of higher education within this short timeframe.

Questions relating to Proposal 9: Indicators

QUESTION 9: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE WITH OUR PROPOSAL FOR INDICATORS?

Agree

The indicators that have been selected from the NSS seem reasonable. The omission of LEO data as an input variable is to be welcomed. MillionPlus has commented on issues surrounding the progression measure in our response to the consultation on the new approach to regulating student outcomes. These are addressed in our responses to the other two consultations on regulating student outcomes (see question 6 in our submission to the consultation on a new approach to regulating outcomes, and questions 3, 22, 23 and 25 in our submission to constructing student outcome and experience indicators, for full details). But in principle, we do not object to the inclusion of some form of progression measure within the TEF.

Section 4: Assessment

Questions relating to Proposal 10: Expert review

QUESTION 10: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE WITH OUR PROPOSAL FOR EXPERT REVIEW?

Agree

Questions relating to Proposal 11: Assessment of evidence

QUESTION 11: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE WITH OUR PROPOSAL FOR THE ASSESSMENT OF EVIDENCE?

Neither agree or disagree

15. The principles of assessment here seem sound but it would be beneficial for providers to have a bit more information or clarity on the assessment process before any proposals are taken forward. The proposals suggest there will have to be some level of triangulation between the quantitative data that is offered through the OfS indicators on the one hand, and the provider submission on the other. This is no doubt a complex process. MillionPlus is not advocating a fully formulaic approach to the assessment process here, as this could have perverse consequences in a highly diverse higher education sector. However, it would be sensible to offer more insight into the process of assessment, and how panels members might weigh up the different evidence sources so that providers can effectively plan and ensure that nobody is at a disadvantage when the TEF is rolled out. Specifically we would like to see more information on the guidance that the panel may refer to as part of this process.

Section 5: Outcomes

Questions relating to Proposal 12: Published information

QUESTION 12: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE WITH OUR PROPOSAL FOR PUBLISHED INFORMATION?

Agree

16. Of the two options presented in paragraph 227, MillionPlus has a preference for option A, whereby a provider's award is shown as pending. This recognises where providers have engaged with the TEF and sends a clearer signal in terms of those who have not participated.

Questions relating to Proposal 13: Communication of ratings by providers

QUESTION 13: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE WITH OUR PROPOSAL FOR THE COMMUNICATION OF RATINGS BY PROVIDERS?

Agree

Section 6: Implementation

Questions relating to Proposal 14: Name of the scheme

QUESTION 14: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE WITH OUR PROPOSAL FOR THE NAME OF THE SCHEME?

Agree

Questions relating to Proposal 15: Timing of the next exercise

QUESTION 15: TO WHAT EXTENT DO YOU AGREE WITH OUR PROPOSAL FOR THE TIMING OF THE NEXT EXERCISE?

Strongly disagree

17. We do not think the timeline is practicable and may put undue stress on providers and the OfS in meeting this deadline. It would be more sensible to delay the implementation period and deadlines by a year to allow for sufficient time to ensure that the process can be carried out in a rigorous manner. One area of concern in particular would be the recruitment of panel members and making sure this was done in a way that could ensure that they reflect the diversity of institutions in the sector. It seems sensible to create some level of staggering of the implementation of the B3 proposals and the TEF for the benefit of the sector, particularly for smaller providers who do not have the same capacity to deal with such a great level of policy reform.
18. Related to our response to question 8, the timing being proposed for student submissions (September to November) is unrealistic. It may be wiser to align more with the timeline that was proposed in the Pearce Review (submission deadline mid to late January).