

The Teaching Excellence Framework 2023 – Evaluation report

A report by IFF Research for the Office for Students

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Contents

1	Executive summary	4
	Introduction	4
	Overall views of the TEF 2023 exercise	4
	Effectiveness of the TEF 2023 guidance and support	4
	Experience of participating in the TEF 2023 exercise	5
	Driving continuous improvement and excellence in student experience and outcomes	7
2	Introduction	9
	Overview of the Teaching Excellence Framework	9
	Evaluation objectives	10
	Report structure	13
3	Methodology	15
	Realist evaluation approach	15
	Scoping	15
	Qualitative interviews	15
	Provider survey	16
	Coverage of providers within the research	17
	Analysis and reporting	18
4	Overall views of the TEF 2023 exercise	19
	Summary	19
	Overall impacts of the TEF 2023 exercise on providers	19
5	Effectiveness of the TEF 2023 guidance and support	21
	Summary	21
	Providers' experiences of guidance and support	21
	Student representative experiences of guidance and support	25
6	Experience of participating in the TEF 2023 exercise	26
	Summary	26
	Factors affecting provider perception of submission quality	27
	Perceptions of burden	29
	Experiences of engaging with the data dashboards	31
	Empowering the student voice	33
	Perceptions of panel decision credibility	36
	Appropriateness of the TEF scheme for the assessment of student experience and outcomes	38
	Views on the representation process	38
	Reasons why voluntary providers chose to take part in the TEF 2023 exercise	39

Reasons why voluntary providers chose not to take part in the TEF 2023 exercise	40
7 Making excellent student experience and outcomes matter to providers	42
Summary	42
Whether providers care about the reputational and financial outcomes of TEF	42
Prioritising student experience and outcomes	44
8 Driving continuous improvement and excellence in student experience and outcomes	47
Summary	47
Driving understanding of performance	47
Views on TEF panel statements being fit for purpose	50
Views on engaging with TEF 2023 processes leading to sharing of good practice	51
Planning interventions, use of evidence, and evaluation of their outcomes	52
Actions taken because of the TEF 2023	55
Other consequences	58
9 Conclusions	60
What are the overall views about the TEF 2023 exercise?	60
How effective is TEF guidance and support?	60
How did provider staff and students find the process of participating in the TEF 2023 exercise?	60
Is the TEF making excellent student experience and outcomes matter to providers?	62
What is the role of the TEF in driving continuous improvement and excellence in student experience and outcomes?	63
Overall conclusions	64
10 Appendices	65
Appendix A: Glossary	65
Appendix B: Theory of Change	70
Appendix C: Methodological Detail	72
Realist evaluation approach	72
Qualitative interviews	72
Online survey	74
Appendix D: Provider survey	77

1 Executive summary

Introduction

This report is the result of an evaluation of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023, conducted by IFF Research for the Office for Students (OfS) in 2024-2025.

The TEF is a national scheme that is run by the OfS, the independent regulator of higher education in England. The TEF assesses and rates providers for excellence above the minimum requirements for quality and standards that all providers registered with the OfS are required to meet. The core aspects of assessment relate to student experience and student outcomes. Outcomes for providers that participate in the TEF are decided by the TEF panel, which is a committee of the OfS made up of independent members, and is comprised of academics and students who are experts in learning and teaching. This evaluation report focuses upon the 2023 iteration of the TEF.

The findings in this report are built primarily on research and evaluation activities conducted with staff and student representatives that took part in the TEF 2023 exercise and student representatives that have come into post since the exercise, as well as with staff at providers who did not participate in the TEF 2023 exercise.

The report presents findings from a process and early impact evaluation of the TEF 2023 exercise, covering how effectively TEF processes are running, whether, how and why the TEF is making excellent student experience and outcomes matter to providers, and what the role of the TEF is in driving continuous improvement and excellence in these areas.

Overall views of the TEF 2023 exercise

Overall views of the TEF 2023 exercise were usually positive or neutral. As shown in the survey, a majority of providers were positive about the overall impacts of the TEF 2023 on their provider (58% positive), with only a small minority being negative (4%). A third of providers felt that impacts had been neither positive nor negative for their provider (33%).

Positivity was particularly driven by providers feeling that the exercise had encouraged greater use of data and evidence in decision making. More negative views tended to focus on the idea that the impacts driven by the TEF 2023 were fairly negligible for an exercise that required a relatively large input from providers, rather than it causing any directly negative impacts in and of itself.

Student representatives were broadly positive about the TEF 2023 exercise.

Most felt that the impacts had been limited but positive, encouraging closer collaboration with students, an increase in the use of data in decision making, and some direct changes being made due to the TEF 2023 exercise.

Effectiveness of the TEF 2023 guidance and support

Staff and students generally spoke positively about the effectiveness of TEF guidance and support. While the support and guidance, including supporting materials and webinars, were valued, they could have included more detail on what to include in submissions, more prescriptive templates, and examples of good practice.

The inclusion of educational gains in the assessment framework was appreciated by providers, although some felt it was ill-defined within the guidance and support provided by the OfS.

Experience of participating in the TEF 2023 exercise

The biggest obstacle that providers faced in producing submissions that they felt effectively reflected their own performance was staff capacity to dedicate the required time to the submission. Staff and student representatives both reported that TEF submissions take a lot of time and can be difficult to factor into existing workload challenges. More advanced warning of timetables from the OfS would be appreciated.

Ensuring that students had adequately contributed to TEF provider submissions or produced student submissions was another challenge during the TEF process. The timescales and timeframes involved were also problematic relating to student involvement in TEF submissions, particularly for sabbatical officers who were often new in post at the time of producing a student submission or contributing to a provider submission. These challenges were reported by both provider staff and student representatives.

In terms of working with internal datasets and finding data to support their provider submissions, **some staff reported difficulties in knowing where to access useful data, how to present it, and which data would be beneficial to incorporate into submissions.**

Data dashboards produced by the OfS for the purposes of the TEF 2023 exercise were generally received fairly positively, with staff feeling that they offered value. Those that reported the greatest value in terms of using the dashboards during the provider submission process tended to incorporate the data within their own systems and analytical frameworks. When views of the data dashboards were more mixed, this generally related to a sense that they were challenging to use, not user-friendly, or slow to load, with appreciation shown by provider staff for the fact that this was driven by the wealth of data contained within them. This overall relatively positive picture was true for the use of data dashboards in producing submissions and, as will be established, in their use to drive understanding of performance and in continuous improvement.

When providers were asked what they perceived as enablers of a strong provider submission, a number of providers noted being able to dedicate the requisite time, resource and attention to the process, having submitted to the TEF in the past, and being able to use external agents, contractors or consultants who were literate in terms of using data.

Staff and students generally reported that the TEF is burdensome. The production of both provider and student submissions was seen to be a relatively large drain on staff and student resource. **However, providers and students generally felt that the TEF is worth the burden required.**

There was a roughly equal split between provider staff that felt that the TEF 2023 processes empowered the student voice and those that did not feel that it had. Larger institutions or higher tariff institutions reported that they already have student feedback mechanisms in place, and felt that the TEF largely replicated pre-existing work, while specialist, smaller and lower tariff institutions were more likely to find it useful in empowering the student voice.

The 20 student representatives who were interviewed generally felt that the TEF 2023 exercise had empowered the student voice in a limited way although this was

not universal. Positivity generally related to the way that the process had given student representatives greater involvement in their provider's quality systems. A couple of representatives felt that it may have been somewhat of a wake-up call that helped to incentivise accessing the student voice and listening to students. A few student representatives did not feel that the student voice had been empowered by the TEF 2023 exercise in any meaningful way.

There were no concerns around the timing of the delivery of outcomes, except for one provider that made a representation feeling that their outcome being 'pending' at the time of publication had negative connotations.

Perceptions of panel credibility were broadly linked to provider satisfaction with the outcomes that institutions received. For example, those that were disappointed with their overall outcome sometimes felt that the reasons for judgements made were not transparent or applied consistently. **Overall, although panel credibility was felt to be good and its membership to reflect a broad swathe of the sector, some criticism was levelled at the transparency of the assessing process and perceived lack of consistency in decision making for different providers.**

Provider views on the TEF framework generally showed an appreciation that it was an appropriate way to assess student experience and outcomes at a provider.

Amongst providers that made a representation, most found the process to be relatively positive and straightforward. There was a mixture of satisfaction with the outcome received after a representation, and a couple of provider staff felt that the reasoning for the outcome was not well articulated.

Providers that participated in the TEF 2023 exercise, but for whom participation was voluntary, tended to explain that they had participated for reasons relating to a focus on improving their offerings and provision, to share good practice across the sector, and for reputational reasons.

Amongst providers that decided not to participate in the TEF, the main reason was that they did not feel that the workload required, within the timescales involved, was possible for their provider.

Making excellent student experience and outcomes matter to providers

The TEF seeks to incentivise providers to deliver an excellent student experience and student outcomes. For it to do this, providers need to care about the reputational or financial outcomes of doing well or badly in the TEF, the implication being that if they care they will give greater focus to areas covered by the framework.

Most providers considered the reputational impact of the TEF of greater importance than the financial, but their view of reputational impact often extended to the potential impact on student recruitment and therefore indirectly to financial impact.

Access to the tuition fee uplift was a concern for a minority of providers, as most were confident of receiving a Bronze or higher overall rating. In a few cases, the tuition fee uplift was a primary reason voluntary providers chose to take part in the TEF.

Views about whether the TEF 2023 exercise had raised the value of student experience and outcomes for providers were mixed, including its standing relative to other priorities for providers. The most common view was that it had complemented existing pushes towards improving student experience and outcomes, rather than acting as the main incentive for excellent delivery. A few provider staff felt

that they had seen little impact from the TEF 2023 exercise in this regard. Most student representatives had seen delivery of excellent student experience and outcomes given higher priority since the TEF 2023, although it was difficult for most respondents to attribute this to the TEF.

Reviews of previous TEF exercises showed that other iterations of the TEF had been successful, at least to some extent, in making excellent student experience and outcomes matter to providers. This may mean there was more limited scope for the TEF 2023 to have an impact in this area.

Driving continuous improvement and excellence in student experience and outcomes

Staff at participating providers were mixed in their views of the role of the TEF 2023 exercise in driving continuous improvement and excellence relating to student experience and outcomes. Nevertheless, many providers felt that the process of participating in the TEF, as well as the outputs produced as a result of the TEF exercise, helped to drive understanding of performance. This was particularly frequently the case for providers within the Low or Unknown Tariff providers grouping.¹

Generally, panel statements were felt to be fit for purpose, with few providers expressing negative views about them. Panel statements explained the reasons behind the panel's decisions. Some providers had used both the panel statement and the data dashboards to drive understanding of performance and to inform policy development, although in each case this was only true for some providers and not others.

The TEF 2023 exercise was also generally felt to have led to some sharing of good performance and best practice across the sector, more commonly within providers than between them.

There was a roughly equal split between providers that had used the TEF 2023 process and its outputs to inform decision making and planning, and those that had not. Specific examples of policy that had been developed because of the TEF were somewhat limited, although the interviews and survey that informed this analysis were conducted relatively soon after the publication of TEF outcomes. Nevertheless, some providers had created specific action plans to address their performance in the TEF 2023 exercise. It was more common for providers to feel that the TEF had encouraged them to be more data-led and to embed evaluative principles more carefully into their planning, which was particularly true for Further Education Colleges (FECs).

Most student representatives were not aware of changes that had been implemented to improve performance at their provider. A few were able to note specific changes, but this was relatively rare.

¹ These groupings are based upon the OfS's provider student typology, focusing on the student typology groupings which are informed by the make-up of their student population or study characteristics. For more information please see: Office for Students (2022), Provider typologies 2022: Methodology for grouping OfS-registered providers, <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/provider-typologies-2022/> [Accessed January 2025]

Across the spread of the sector, overall views were positive about the TEF's role in driving continuous improvement and excellence at providers. Final impacts of the TEF 2023 exercise will be clearer in time.

2 Introduction

This report covers findings from evaluation activities looking at implementation and the early impacts of the TEF 2023 scheme, that were conducted by IFF Research for the OfS in 2024. The findings throughout this report focus on research and evaluation activities conducted with staff at providers that did and did not participate in the TEF 2023 scheme, as well as students at providers that participated. This report is part of a broader evaluation being conducted by the OfS.

Overview of the Teaching Excellence Framework

The TEF is a national scheme run by the OfS, the independent regulator of higher education in England. The OfS established the TEF with the policy intention of encouraging providers to deliver excellence relating to teaching, learning and achieving positive outcomes for their students.

The TEF assesses and rates providers for excellence above the minimum requirements for quality and standards that all providers registered with the OfS are required to meet. TEF assessments were carried out and outcomes decided by the independent TEF panel, which is comprised of academics and students who are experts in learning and teaching.

There are two ‘aspects’ or areas of assessment: student experience and student outcomes. The student experience aspect covers the extent to which teaching, learning, assessment and the educational environment at each provider delivers an excellent educational experience for its students. Student outcomes refer to the extent to which students succeed in and beyond their studies, alongside the educational gains delivered for students. For each aspect of assessment, multiple ‘features of excellence’ are defined, against which the TEF panel assessed providers.

The introduction of educational gains was a key change for the TEF 2023 framework. It was recognised by the OfS that there is no existing sector-wide measure of educational gain. The approach taken by the OfS was intended to enable providers to articulate their ambition for educational gains, how they were attempting to deliver this, and to provide evidence of its delivery in practice where possible.

Providers are given a rating for each aspect, which is determined by the TEF panel based on the “extent to which a provider has very high quality and outstanding quality features across the range of its courses for all its groups of students.”² The TEF panel also decides an overall rating, which is based on an assessment of ‘best fit’ to the overall rating criteria where aspect ratings differ.

There are three ratings – Bronze (typically high quality, and there are some very high-quality features), Silver (typically very high quality, and there may be some outstanding features) and Gold (typically outstanding). Providers may instead receive a Requires Improvement outcome at aspect or overall level if they do not meet the criteria to be rated one of these.

Participation is mandatory for providers in England to which condition B6 of the OfS regulatory framework applies (i.e. having both at least 500 undergraduate students

² Office for Students (2023), Regulatory advice 22 - Guidance on the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023, https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/7722/ra22-tef-framework-guidance-final_for_web.pdf [Accessed November 2024]

and at least two TEF indicators based on at least 500 students). Eligible providers in England to which B6 does not apply may participate on a voluntary basis, while providers based in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland could have taken part but chose not to. The assessment covers undergraduate provision, and the experiences and outcomes of undergraduate students.

Schedule 2 of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 (HERA) makes provision for providers with 'a high level quality rating' to have a different fee limit. Providers that participated in the TEF 2023 and received a Gold, Silver or Bronze overall rating are considered to have 'a high level quality rating' based on the current fee regulations and those that did not participate or received an overall outcome of Requires Improvement are not. The current fee limits are published on the OfS website.³

The TEF panel reaches outcomes for each provider by assessing the evidence (a provider submission, a student submission where available, and data indicators) against the ratings criteria. In the provider submission, providers submit evidence of excellence in student experiences and outcomes in a document of up to 25 pages long, and a provider's students may submit an optional student submission of up to ten pages outlining students' views. If a provider's students do not produce a student submission (e.g. because the TEF student contact chooses not to do so⁴) then providers are expected to offer student contacts the opportunity to contribute to the provider submission. The data indicators are produced by the OfS for measures of the student experience, and continuation, completion and progression outcomes. These are produced from national datasets, such as the National Student Survey.

Following this assessment, the panel prepares a statement explaining the rationale for its decisions. These provisional decisions are shared securely with the provider by the OfS. Providers are then able to make representations before the final outcomes are decided, if the provider considers that either the panel's judgement does not appropriately reflect the original evidence available to the panel when making its provisional decision, or that there were any factual inaccuracies in the panel statement.

The OfS publishes each provider's TEF outcomes alongside a shorter version of the panel statement summarising the reasoning from the panel, and the evidence considered by the panel. Providers may also display their own outcomes.

Evaluation objectives

This evaluation is a process and early impact evaluation. It aims to show how effectively TEF processes are running: whether, how and why the TEF is making excellent student experience and outcomes matter to providers, and what the role of the TEF is in driving continuous improvement and excellence in these areas. The early impact evaluation focuses on the outcomes and impacts that have occurred shortly after the publication of the outcomes of the TEF 2023 cycle. It is too early to

³ Office for Students (2024), Fee Limits, <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/for-providers/equality-of-opportunity/access-and-participation-plans/fee-limits/> [Accessed January 2025]

⁴ The TEF student contact was the person who could make a TEF student submission on behalf of the provider's students. Each provider was asked to nominate a person with a relevant role in representing students, such as an elected sabbatical officer, to be the TEF student contact. The TEF student contact was expected to consult with students and decide whether to make a TEF student submission.

assess the full impact and longer term outcomes of the TEF 2023 cycle. This evaluation did not consider the use of TEF information by prospective students, although the OfS has commissioned separate research on that topic.

In evaluating TEF processes, we assessed the effectiveness of TEF guidance and support; factors affecting submission quality; panel decision credibility; whether or how the TEF empowers the student voice, and looked at additional activities or efficiencies that the TEF creates, and providers' perceptions of the burden of the TEF.

When assessing the impact of the TEF on encouraging providers to prioritise excellence in student experiences and outcomes, we looked at providers' perceptions of the reputational and financial impact of the TEF, and the TEF's role overall in sectoral prioritisation and valuation of student experience and outcomes.

A full list of the evaluation questions for this research is provided in Table 2.1 below.

Finally, the evaluation looked at the role of the TEF in driving continuous improvement and sustained excellence in student experience and outcomes. This involved assessing the extent that this was happening both within and between providers. Additionally, we looked at the role of the TEF in providers' decision making and in the planning, delivery, evaluation and outcomes of interventions. We also looked for any unexpected consequences that have arisen because of the TEF 2023 exercise.

It is worth underlining that this report presents the findings from an early impact evaluation. It may, therefore, be too early to observe longer term or more concrete changes within providers when outcomes and impacts are being discussed.

The report itself is structured around the core research questions that were identified by the OfS, which are provided in Table 2.1 below. These evaluation questions were also used to inform the Theory of Change for the TEF 2023 exercise, which is provided in Appendix B.

Table 2.1 Detailed evaluation questions

Core evaluation question	
Topic	Sub-topic
1. How effectively are our TEF processes running?	
a) Effectiveness of TEF guidance, support, and training	I. Effectiveness of the <u>student</u> submission process guidance and support II. Effectiveness of the <u>provider</u> submission process guidance and support III. Whether OfS data dashboard guidance and systems support were effective to enable providers to engage with TEF data confidently and competently
b) Submission quality, with the enablers and challenges involved for strong submissions	I. Enablers and challenges involved for strong <u>student</u> submissions II. Enablers and challenges involved for strong <u>provider</u> submissions

	III. Whether and how the TEF data dashboard gave providers new insights to their student experience and outcomes performance
c) Provider perceptions of panel decision credibility	I. Whether the panel were perceived to have made assessment decisions which were credible to providers and student representatives
d) Whether and how the TEF empowers the student voice	I. How and whether the TEF process has empowered the student voice within a provider
e) Additional activities and efficiencies the TEF creates for providers, and perception of burden	a) Consequences of TEF for providers' activity and perception of burden
2. Is, and if so how and why, is the TEF making excellent student experience and outcomes matter to providers?	
a) Providers' perceptions about reputational and financial impact of the TEF	I. Whether and why providers care about the reputational and financial impact of the TEF ratings publication (i.e. what implications are they concerned about?)
b) TEF's role in how different providers and the sector (re)prioritise and value student experience and outcomes	I. Whether and how the TEF has affected providers' prioritisation of student experience and outcomes against other priorities (e.g. research, FE, other) II. Whether and how the TEF has raised the value and respect for student experience and outcomes within participating providers and across the sector III. What factors are important for voluntary providers (both participating and non-participating) in decisions to take part in the TEF
3. What is the role of the TEF in driving continuous improvement and excellence in student experience and outcomes?	
a) Role of the TEF in driving understanding of performance and finding new areas to improve excellence, within and between providers	I. Whether panel summary and detailed statements were fit for purpose II. How and whether participation in the TEF gave providers insight into their own performance strengths and weaknesses (including differences between providers) III. How and whether participation in the TEF helped providers understand opportunities for improvement in their own context that will impact on TEF outcome areas (are they identifying and

	<p>sharing excellent practices and innovations within their own provider?)</p> <p>IV. Whether and where excellent practices and innovations have been identified and shared between providers</p>
b) Role of the TEF in providers changing their interventions; decision making and planning	<p>I. Whether and how the TEF has affected providers being evidence-informed</p> <p>II. The role of the TEF in providers' decisions to initiate change to tackle an issue or deliver excellence</p> <p>III. Whether providers have put in place intervention strategies and policies to tackle an issue or deliver excellence, and understand the role of their learning from the TEF in developing those</p>
c) Role of the TEF in providers changing their interventions; delivery, evaluation and outcomes	<p>I. What interventions are planned or have been delivered</p> <p>II. Whether and how interventions are evaluated effectively</p> <p>III. The improvements in outcomes which are expected, emerging and evidenced from interventions that have been informed by TEF learning</p>
d) Unexpected consequences	<p>I. Any unexpected consequences of the TEF, for example impact on underrepresented or protected student groups.</p>

Report structure

The following chapter of this report, chapter three, covers the methodology that underpins this evaluation, including details of the theoretical approach taken, the primary research fieldwork, and the approach to analysis and reporting.

Chapter four looks at overall views of the TEF 2023 exercise, and satisfaction with the TEF outcomes.

Chapter five covers the effectiveness of TEF 2023 guidance and support.

Chapter six focuses on experiences of engaging with the TEF 2023 exercise, including factors affecting submission quality, perceptions of burden, the usability and efficacy of the TEF data dashboards, the ways that the TEF empowered the student voice, the appropriateness of the framework and TEF panel, and reasons that providers that were eligible to participate voluntarily chose to participate or not participate in the TEF 2023 exercise.

Chapter seven considers the extent to which providers care about the reputational or financial outcomes of doing well or badly in the TEF, and whether that has increased the value attached to student experience and outcomes, and the priority these areas are being given within institutions.

Chapter eight looks at the way that the TEF 2023 exercise is driving continuous improvement and excellence at providers. This includes the way that it is driving understanding of provider performance, views on the suitability of the TEF panel statements, ways that the TEF 2023 exercise encourages sharing of best practice, and effects of the TEF 2023 on decision making and policy design. This includes coverage of the way that the TEF 2023 exercise encouraged an evidence-led

approach, led to changes or interventions, and had unexpected or unplanned-for consequences.

Chapter nine provides conclusions from the evaluation.

Chapter ten covers the appendices, including providing a glossary, the Theory of Change underpinning the TEF 2023, and further methodological details.

3 Methodology

This evaluation used a mixed methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative research methods, to conduct a complexity friendly, theory-based process and early impact realist evaluation.

Realist evaluation approach

The evaluation was designed according to the UK Government's Magenta Book's outline of a realist evaluation. This means that the core focus is upon "what works, for whom, in what respects, to what extent, in what contexts, and how?".⁵ Throughout we have emphasised the interplay of context, mechanism, and outcomes to understand how the mechanisms of the TEF 2023 exercise interacted with the specific contexts of the providers that were eligible to participate in the TEF 2023 to produce outcomes. The Theory of Change that was developed in collaboration with the OfS is included in Appendix B, and was developed according to the principles that underpin such a realist evaluation approach.

Scoping

As part of the scoping stage, we conducted four interviews lasting around 30 minutes with stakeholders at Higher Education Provider (HEP) representative bodies to provide a grounding of understanding of the contexts in which the TEF 2023 was situated, and how this varied at a high level for different providers. Interviews were conducted with representative bodies at this stage given the breadth of discussions that they have with different providers, and the representative bodies were chosen purposively to cover a broad spread of provider types that were eligible to participate in the TEF 2023 exercise.

These interviews were used to inform the design of the topic guides for the provider and student interviews.

Qualitative interviews

The primary data collection for this evaluation consisted of qualitative interviews with:

- Staff involved with the TEF 2023 submission process at providers that participated in the exercise;
- Student representatives at participating providers⁶; and
- Contacts at non-participating providers who are listed as quality contacts on OfS's internal database.

To retain a focus on a deep understanding of the context that informed the outcomes and impacts of the TEF 2023 exercise, as per the realist evaluation

⁵ UK Government (2020), Magenta Book supplementary guide: Realist evaluation, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5e96c869d3bf7f41224bf3c3/Magenta_Book_s_supplementary_guide_Realist_Evaluation.pdf [Accessed: November 2024]

⁶ Student representatives were defined as either the student contact who contributed to the TEF 2023 exercise (either through a student submission or contributing to the provider submission) and student representatives that have come into post since the exercise who may be the nominated contact during a current TEF submission cycle.

approach, there was a focus on gaining multiple perspectives from participating providers, to understand differing perspectives within institutions and deepen the context informing the findings. Details of the breakdown of interviews by number of interviews, number of members of staff, and number of providers are included in Table 3.1.

Qualitative interviews took place between 20th August and 18th October 2024, around six to ten months after the final ratings were published (February 2024). Providers and students were invited to express interest in the research through invitations sent via email by the OfS in August 2024.

Table 3.1 below breaks down the number of interviews, interviewees, and coverage by providers among participating and non-participating providers. Participating providers are additionally broken down by eligibility status. A full breakdown of interviews is provided in Annex C.

Table 3.1 Coverage of participating providers (broken down by eligibility status) and non-participating providers

	Number of interviews	Number of staff members	Number of providers
Participating providers	44 (37 mandatory 7 voluntary)	49 (42 mandatory 7 voluntary)	42 (35 mandatory 7 voluntary)
Non-participating providers	8	8	8

Interviews with participating providers aimed to evaluate the process of participating in the TEF 2023 exercise and provide understanding of the early impacts that have come about because of participation.

We also conducted 20 interviews with student representatives at participating providers, ten of whom were involved in producing a TEF student submission and ten of whom had come into post since the submission. These interviews covered the process from the perspective of students who were involved in producing the student submission or contributing to the provider submission, as well as any impacts that students have seen resulting from the TEF 2023 exercise, and any conversations around continuous improvement at providers that have been driven by the TEF. Student respondents were offered a £30 voucher as a thank you for their time.

Additionally, eight interviews were conducted with staff members from providers that did not participate in the TEF 2023 exercise. The aim of this element of the research was to understand why providers decided to participate or not, where they had the choice. It also sought to understand how providers that chose not to take part perceived the early impact of the TEF.

Provider survey

A wider survey of providers was also conducted, to capture understanding of TEF processes and early impacts at scale.

This survey assessed:

- The decisions about whether to participate, for providers that took part in the TEF voluntarily
- For participating providers:

-
- Their experience of the submission process;
 - The provider perspective on student submissions;
 - Early impacts within the providers and on the student body;
 - Changes to monitoring and evaluation practices; and
 - Higher-level impacts.

Questions were also included about the estimated time and resources taken up by the TEF 2023 exercise to support a separate cost analysis exercise that the OfS is undertaking. The OfS will publish findings from this analysis separately.

The survey was administered online. Initial invites to the survey were sent on 25th September 2024, with fieldwork closing on 18th October 2024.

In total, 129 staff members, from 116 separate providers, completed the survey. These providers were made up of 97 that participated in the TEF 2023 and 19 that did not. Of the participating providers, 89 were required to take part and eight opted to participate.

There was no student survey element of this evaluation. The OfS carried out a survey of TEF student contacts at participating providers to seek feedback on their experiences in spring 2023. Students were contacted soon after the submission deadline, as many students would soon move on and could prove difficult to reach. The findings from that survey were shared to inform development of the interview guides and will be published alongside this report.

The complete provider survey can be found in Appendix D.

Coverage of providers within the research

The sampling approach followed for the qualitative interviewing element aimed to ensure coverage across a range of different HEP characteristics, covering the OfS Student Typology, TEF outcomes, history of TEF participation, and mandatory and voluntary participation (for participating providers) in the TEF 2023 exercise. For the quantitative survey, all TEF-eligible providers for which contact details were shared by the OfS were invited to take part.

The full breakdown of the participation of TEF-eligible providers in the research elements informing this evaluation are provided in Table 3.2 below.

More details about the breakdowns of provider characteristics participating in the evaluation are provided in Appendix C.

Table 3.2 Coverage of TEF-eligible providers in core research elements

	Population	Participated in qualitative interviews	Responses to quantitative survey	Student representatives interviewed
Total TEF-eligible providers	410	50	116	20
Participating providers	226 (186 mandatory 40 voluntary)	42 (35 mandatory 7 voluntary)	97 (89 mandatory 8 voluntary)	20 (15 mandatory 5 voluntary)
Non-participating providers	184	8	19	N/A

As discussed above, 50 TEF-eligible providers participated in qualitative interviews. This covered 42 of 226 participating providers (19% of all participating providers) and eight of 184 non-participating providers (4% of all non-participating providers).

In the quantitative survey, 97 participating providers responded (43% response rate) and 19 non-participating providers also responded (10% response rate).

Where possible, interviews were conducted with both students and staff at the same providers, and in some instances multiple staff at the same provider, to produce mini case studies that allow for deeper understanding of impacts across the provider. In total, ten of the 20 student representatives interviewed were from providers at which staff interviews were also conducted.

Analysis and reporting

Final analysis was based on all interviews (44 with participating providers, eight with non-participating providers and 20 with student representatives) and the findings from the survey (129 responses).

In our analysis of qualitative data, we have used the following terms to give context to how common some ideas were amongst interviewees: couple (2), few (3-4), some (more than a few, less than half), and most or many (more than half).

Data has been triangulated by comparing findings from qualitative interviews with quantitative data. This helps to cross-verify evidence, identify patterns, and strengthen causal explanations, while integrating both forms of evidence revealed information about the TEF 2023 exercise in different contexts and improved understanding. The majority of the findings focus on qualitative interviewing but, as explained, quantitative survey data will support, offering new perspective and contexts throughout.

For a more detailed methodology, please see Annex C.

4 Overall views of the TEF 2023 exercise

This chapter summarises the overall opinions that providers gave about the TEF in terms of the impact it had on them holistically.

Summary

Around half of participating providers felt that the TEF had a positive effect on their institutions while the rest gave more mixed feedback, most commonly about the balance of burden versus impact. Non-participating providers felt that not participating in the TEF 2023 exercise had little or no impact on them.

Students were largely positive about the impact of TEF 2023 and though some felt impacts had been limited, this was the start of better collaborative working.

Overall impacts of the TEF 2023 exercise on providers

During qualitative interviews, around half of participating providers felt that the impact on their provider had been positive. These positive impacts were around decision making, evidence-led approaches, and interventions introduced because of the TEF 2023 exercise that will be covered later in this report. Some providers were mixed in their views, and some were negative, often relating to perceptions of burden not being equal to impact. Some others felt that the framework was not appropriate to accurately and adequately assess all providers.

Most non-participating providers felt that the impact of the TEF 2023 exercise was negligible or non-existent for their provider, though as discussed later in this report, some had made use of the published outputs or found the data dashboards useful. One smaller, specialist provider felt there had been a negative impact of not participating for their finances, as they were losing out on the tuition fee uplift. This provider had not participated as they felt their dataset was “small and unreliable” and that this would leave them at a disadvantage in terms of performing as well as they would like to. Nevertheless, they regretted missing out on the tuition fee uplift.

Student representatives were mostly positive about the impact of the TEF 2023 exercise on their provider. Most student representatives felt that the impacts had been limited but positive, encouraging closer collaboration with students, better use of data in decision making, and some direct changes that were implemented due to the TEF, on which this report will elaborate later. A few student representatives were neutral in their overall views.

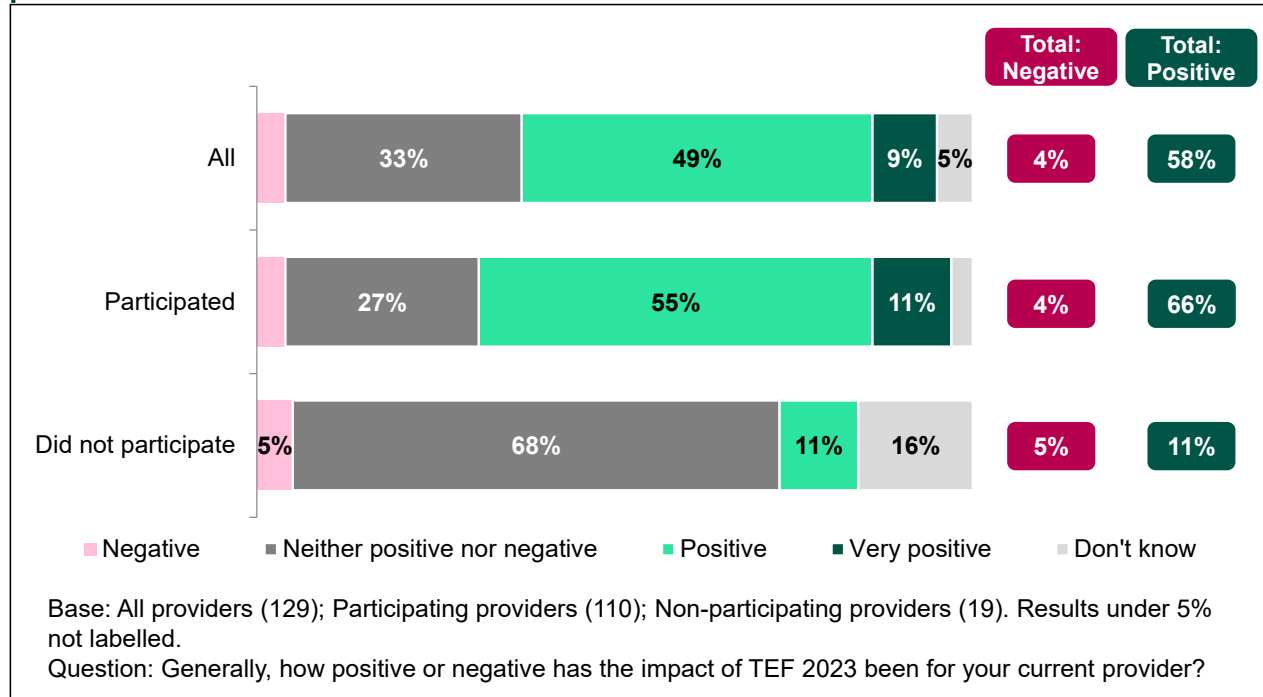
In the provider staff survey, six in ten staff at providers felt that the impact of the TEF 2023 exercise had been positive for their provider (58%), while a third felt that it had been neither positive nor negative (33%). This is shown below in Figure 4.1. Just 4% of provider staff felt that the TEF had been negative for their provider overall. FECs were more likely to be neutral about the overall impact of the TEF 2023 on their provider (46%) than other HEPs (27%). There were no statistical differences based upon whether providers had participated or not, although the low sample size of non-participating providers may be the primary driver of this lack of difference.

Most providers interviewed were satisfied with and expected the outcomes they received. In a small number of cases, providers were pleasantly surprised as they received a higher overall rating than they were expecting.

“We were delighted to get a Gold in student experience [...] It was a wonderful thing to be able to tell staff because all our strategies over the last four or five years have been about improving the student experience. It was a massive boost for the institution.”

Staff at participating provider, Low or Unknown Tariff

Figure 4.1 Staff at provider views about the overall impact of the TEF 2023 on their provider



5 Effectiveness of the TEF 2023 guidance and support

This chapter reports on perceptions of how well the TEF 2023 processes worked. As such, the findings are based on data from staff and student representatives at providers that participated in the TEF 2023 exercise. It presents findings in terms of how clear and easy processes, OfS guidance and the data dashboard were to follow, and the extent to which they enabled providers to produce provider submissions that they considered to be of good quality.

Summary

Staff and students generally spoke positively about the effectiveness of TEF processes. They valued the supporting materials and guidance, but felt these could have included more detail on what to include in their submissions, more prescriptive templates, and examples of good practice.

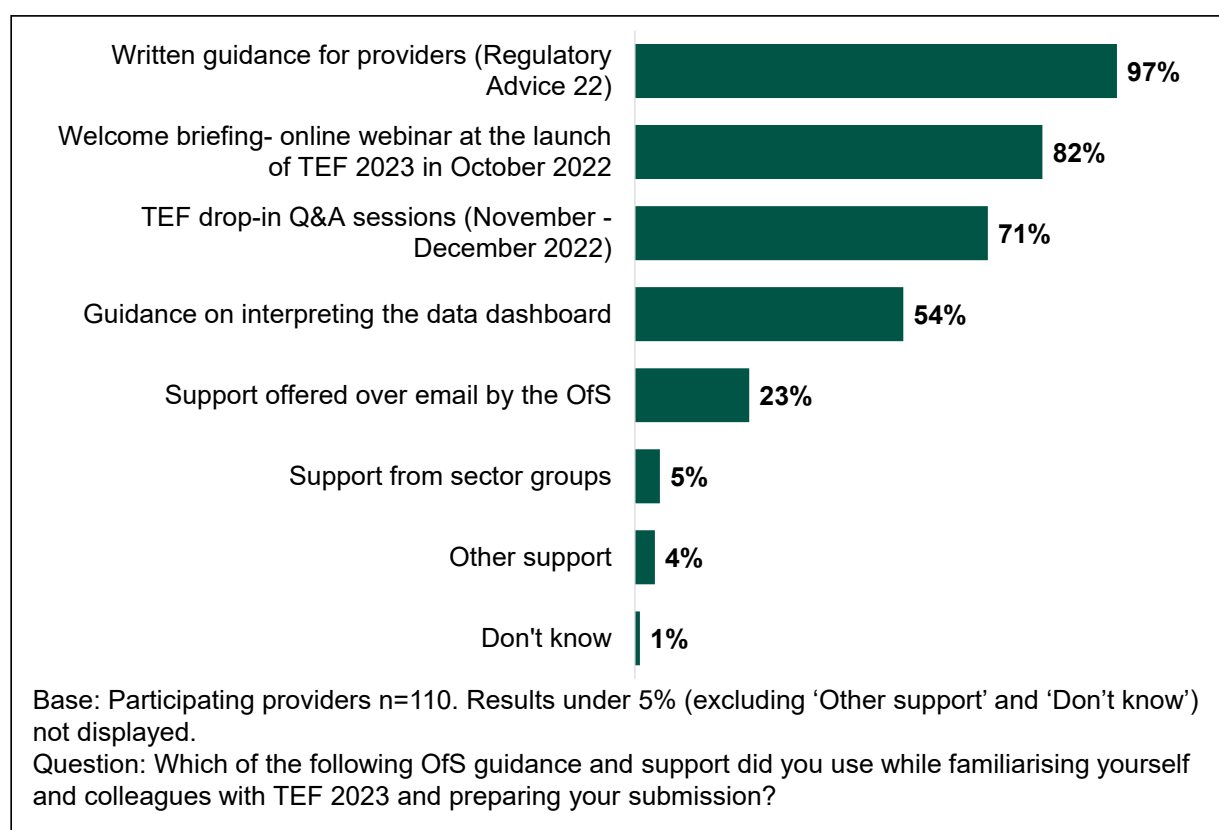
Most providers were positive about the support and guidance they received from the OfS relating to the TEF 2023 exercise. The guidelines were viewed as being relatively open to interpretation, which some providers appreciated, although some would have liked more clarity on terminology, and more detail on what was expected of them. A particular area of concern was the guidance around educational gains.

Students were also generally positive about the guidance and support they received from the OfS to prepare their student submission. There were mixed views on the autonomy they were given over the submission structure and style. A few students mentioned that the guidance could have been provided earlier and that they would have liked sight of an example student submission.

Providers' experiences of guidance and support

Figure 5.1 below shows the forms of OfS guidance and support used by staff at providers while familiarising themselves and colleagues with the TEF 2023 exercise and preparing their provider submission. Almost all providers used the written guidance (Regulatory advice 22) (97%), and a majority took part in the welcome briefing (82%) and drop-in Q&A sessions (71%). Just over half used the guidance on interpreting the data dashboard (54%) and just under a quarter received support over email from the OfS (23%). Finally, around one-in-twenty received support from other sector groups (5%) or other forms of support (4%).

Figure 5.1 Forms of OfS guidance and support used



In terms of the usefulness of the guidance, Figure 5.2 below shows that over 90% of the providers that used each form of guidance and support reported to have found the relevant resource at least 'slightly useful'. Reports of usefulness were particularly high for support offered by the OfS over email (100%)⁷, Regulatory advice 22 (99%), and guidance on interpreting the data dashboard (95%).

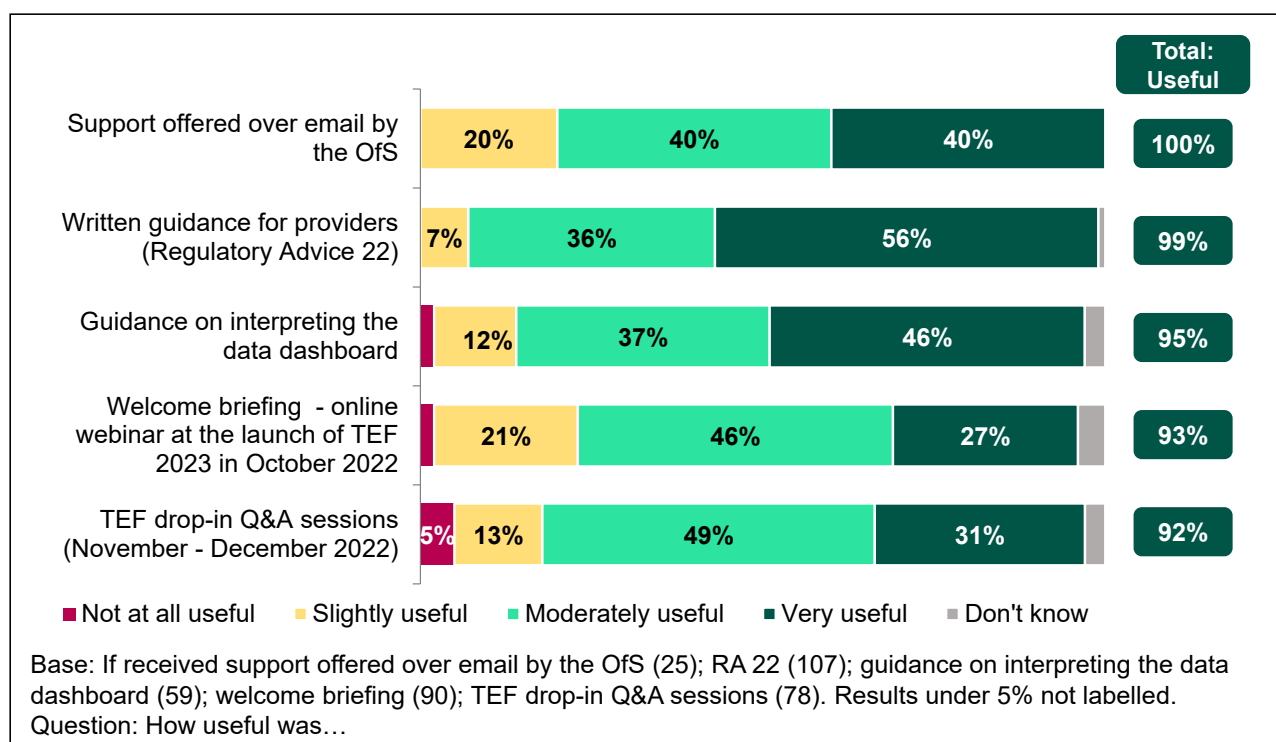
As shown in Figure 5.2 below, almost a third (31%) of participating providers did not think any improvements could have been made to the guidance. The depth interviews suggested a similar picture. Several noted that they appreciated the openness of the guidelines and the fact that they were not overly prescriptive. Additionally, some praised the OfS colleagues delivering webinars for their communication.

"They were very responsive to questions for further explanation. The consultations were open, took points on board and I did see things adapt as a result of that and become clear, which was always important and welcomed."

Staff at participating provider, Large Level 4/5

⁷ Caution is advised in interpreting this finding given the low base of 25 provider staff.

Figure 5.2 Participating providers' views on the usefulness of each type of guidance and support



Some provider staff felt the TEF guidance was released too late, making the timelines for submission too tight. A few providers struggled to interpret the guidance (this was also noted in the survey).

Some providers felt the guidance was limited and lacking useful detail, particularly in the provider submission template. A couple would have liked more information on what they would be judged on, and more guidance on how to structure their provider submission. This is corroborated by data from the survey: 11% of providers asked for more detail on the assessment criteria and on how the submission would be reviewed and weighted. Additionally, 10% of providers wanted a more detailed template, involving more detail on the layout, content and suggested approach of the provider submission, something that was frequently mentioned in the qualitative interviews.

“The template was literally just four headings...you don't really need a template for that. We could have done that.”

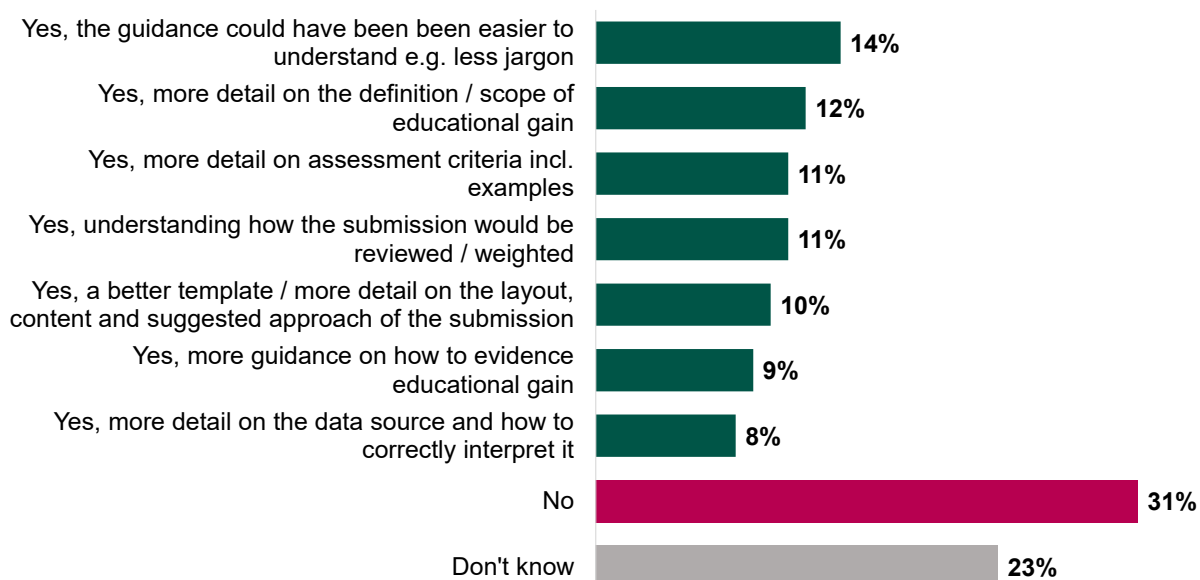
Staff at participating provider, High Tariff

There were differing opinions around the concept of educational gains⁸, which was a new addition to the TEF 2023 compared with previous exercises. Some wanted more detailed guidance while some appreciated leaving it open to providers. About one in eight providers surveyed (12%) stated unprompted that they would have liked more

⁸ In terms of defining educational gains, the OfS took an approach that was intended to enable providers to articulate their ambition for educational gains and evidence what their students should gain from their educational experience, with reference to the specific character and mission of the provider.

detail on the definition or scope of educational gains, and 9% wanted more guidance on how to provide evidence of educational gains, as shown in Figure 5.3 below.

Figure 5.3 Providers' unprompted ideas for improvements to the guidance or additional support that would have been useful while preparing for their submission



Base: All staff at participating providers (110). All answers were provided spontaneously and have been coded into categories. Results under 5% not displayed.

Question: Did you feel that there could have been any improvements to the guidance, or additional support, which would have been useful while preparing your submission?

Several providers interviewed during the qualitative element of the research felt that the concept of educational gains was not clearly defined in the guidance, and that OfS representatives were reluctant to provide a clear definition. This left the concept very open to interpretation, leading to each provider developing their own definition of what educational gains meant. This was intentional on the part of the OfS, but was not universally appreciated by providers.

"The problem that I find generally with OfS is the lack of either ability or willingness to make a commitment statement about anything, and it's you could interpret it like this, you could interpret it like that... I don't know if they intentionally try to be woolly with stuff, but it is quite infuriating."

Staff at participating provider, Large Level 4/5

Concerns around the inclusion and unclear definition of educational gains were shared across different types of provider. One High Tariff provider felt that it was harder to show gains due to their learners joining with higher levels of attainment. A couple of smaller or more specialist providers also felt that it was harder for providers of that type to demonstrate gains due to their potentially less traditional learners.

It is, however, worth noting that a similar number of providers appreciated the openness of the definition which allowed more room for providers to express themselves and accurately reflect the gains made by their learners. Again, this was felt across a variety of provider types.

Student representative experiences of guidance and support

Generally, students were satisfied with the guidance provided by the OfS ahead of the student submission to the TEF 2023 exercise. Students mentioned that the template provided was useful, and that the guidance was comprehensive. A few students appreciated the autonomy to decide what to include and how to present their student submission, such as in video format, which allowed them to tell the story of their students at their provider in an accurate way.

‘It was good to have the autonomy to decide what to include. I felt like we could really tell the story of the students at [provider], which was really valuable.’

Student at participating provider, Low or Unknown Tariff

However, some students raised that the wide range of possibilities given made it difficult to decide what to include in the student submission and how to present it. This felt counter-intuitive for some students given the short time frame they had to complete the student submission and was a slightly more commonly expressed view than that the autonomy provided was appreciated.

‘There were a lot of possibilities which makes it harder to narrow down. Working at short notice with a wide range of possibilities felt counter-intuitive. We spent a lot of time trying to work out the direction [of our submission].’

Student at participating provider, Low or Unknown Tariff

Some students shared that more guidance could have been provided at the beginning of the process, as there was confusion over what could be included in the student submission. A small number of students mentioned that an example student submission would have been useful to get a steer on the structure, tone, and writing style required.

6 Experience of participating in the TEF 2023 exercise

This chapter reports on how staff and students at providers that took part in the TEF 2023 found the process of making their submission. It presents opinions on which factors affected the quality of submissions, and the level of burden the submission created. It presents views on the usability and efficacy of the TEF data dashboards, the level to which the TEF submission process specifically helped to empower the student voice, as well as what perceptions providers had on the credibility of panel decisions and upon the appropriateness of the TEF framework. It also covers the reasons why some providers decided not to take part in the TEF 2023 exercise.

Summary

In the view of providers, the biggest factor affecting their ability to produce a strong submission was capacity and time. Staff and students reported that submissions take a lot of time that can be hard to find on top of people's existing roles. Student engagement was another challenge, as was knowing which data to present and how to prioritise it. The most commonly reported enabler of a strong submission was the use of external agents with experience of the TEF or similar data.

Staff and students generally reported that the TEF creates a large burden, and put quite a large drain on staff and student resource. However, the general sense was that the TEF was worth this burden, but would benefit from being streamlined or having less intensive timescales.

The TEF data dashboards were generally received fairly positively, though there was some more negative feedback, often around ease of use. Fundamentally, staff and students felt they were an effective tool but that it was challenging to present the wealth of data in a user-friendly and accessible way. Those that reported the greatest value tended to repackage the data into their own dashboards or data-presenting systems to help them collate and analyse their data for provider submissions.

The level to which providers considered that the TEF empowers the student voice varied. Typically, larger providers that already had student feedback mechanisms in place felt it largely replicated work they were already doing. Some providers saw a moderate impact through introducing new tools and processes or gaining impetus to further existing strategies for accessing the student voice. Others saw the TEF as integral to launching work designed to engage the student voice. Student opinion on whether the TEF empowered the student voice was varied. Some felt that the student body did not engage enough for the TEF to empower them. Others thought that the TEF had successfully amplified the student body's voice.

There were no concerns raised around the timing of the delivery of outcomes. One notable exception to this was one member of staff at a provider that made a representation who felt that their outcome being 'pending' at the time of publication had negative connotations.

Perceptions of the credibility of decisions made by the panel were somewhat mixed. The panel's composition was generally praised for reflecting a broad range of the sector, although criticisms were levelled by some provider staff at the transparency of the assessing process and perceived lack of consistency in decision making for different providers. Provider staff who were disappointed by the outcome that they received were more likely to be negative about the credibility of the panel's decisions.

Amongst providers where participation in the TEF 2023 exercise was voluntary, reasons for taking part focused upon desires to improve provision at their provider, or to enable drives towards continuous improvement, or to share good practice across the sector. Reputational considerations were more important than financial considerations around decisions about whether to participate in the TEF exercise. Workload concerns or perceptions of burden to produce a submission were the most important drivers of non-participation in the TEF.

Factors affecting provider perception of submission quality

There were numerous enablers or barriers identified by both providers and students to producing a strong TEF submission. Time was a limiting factor for providers, and many found the TEF 2023 was a substantial additional piece of work to fit around other responsibilities. Some found that they were not able to dedicate sufficient resource to the TEF to be satisfied with their provider submission. The guidance was released in October 2022 and the submission was due in January 2023, and several providers felt that this was not an ideal amount of time to prepare, especially given that the OfS knew that the TEF cycle was upcoming for a long time before this point.

Providers that achieved an overall Gold rating were more likely to feel that they had a strong submission, though a couple of providers with a Bronze overall rating thought their submission might earn them a Gold rating, but were then disappointed by their overall outcome. There were no notable trends in the types of factors affecting provider perceptions of their provider submission quality by provider types.

Accessing the relevant data from within the institution was also a hindrance to some providers. The data they needed was not always kept in the same place or indexed well and collating it could be time consuming.

“Accessing the data and information we needed was difficult. [It’s] not necessarily kept in one place religiously.”

Staff at participating provider, Specialist: Creative

Using external consultants was a powerful enabler for several providers of different types in producing strong provider submissions. Typically, these were Low or Unknown Tariff or Specialist institutions. Being able to use somebody with insight and experience of how to structure the submission and how best to present evidence was helpful.

“He [external consultant] was a critical reader of what we produced and he really tried to make sure we were responding directly to the guidance.”

Staff at participating provider, Specialist: Creative

Good levels of data literacy or access to data teams also helped providers with their provider submissions, both in terms of being able to produce them more efficiently and enabling them to provide stronger, evidence-based submissions.

A few providers that were new to the TEF felt like the language used across the submission guidelines generally was alien to them. They said that it took time to explain to staff at their provider what benchmarks and indicators were and how they worked. Those that had taken part in the TEF before expressed no such difficulties, and found it easier to get staff buy-in, which helped to provide strong provider submissions.

Staff at providers generally felt that the student submission was a difficult part of the process. Supporting their students to do this to a high level in the timescales required

was hard because of the challenges in gathering evidence from enough of the student body to be representative.

The main challenge reported by students in developing strong student submissions was time. It was felt to be challenging for sabbatical officers, often new in post in September, to digest the guidance that was released in October 2022 and plan for what they needed to do by January 2023, all while acclimatising to their new role. Several reported feeling rushed. In one case, they reported being asked by their provider to produce a student submission three weeks before the deadline, which meant they could not gather as much primary data as they would have liked. With it being the start of term, many student representatives reported that it was difficult to chase people for the relevant evidence. For some this was because student representatives were new to their sabbatical roles and prioritised their new role over the TEF student submission. Staff were also busy at the start of the academic year dealing with new intakes and the administrative burden of new students and a new year, so could offer less support. Several student representatives reported concerns that they could not collect enough evidence and were worried that this would not give them representative views of students.

"[There was] a lack of recognition that asking new sabbatical officers not long into office to pick this up in September/October and submit by January was not easy."

Staff at participating provider, High Tariff

Some students also found it hard to know what data was needed for the student submission and where to get it.

"Not having direct access to data was a bit of a challenge initially. We worked really closely with the uni providing data when we needed it, but not having it to hand was definitely a challenge when we were scoping out how we wanted our submission to look."

Student at participating provider, Low or Unknown Tariff

Some students felt that it was difficult to get accurate and sufficient student feedback because it was hard to engage students. There was a sense that students were preoccupied with their courses or their university experience and less inclined to take time to take part in a strategic exercise. A couple of providers also felt that students did not have the knowledge or experience to give robust evidence.

"Students don't necessarily understand all the questions they're being asked to answer."

Staff at participating provider, Specialist: Creative

In many cases students noted that they were working on the student submission alone, meaning they were not able to brainstorm ideas or sense check their submission. That said, students did appreciate the autonomy afforded by the process and were positive about producing a student-led output.

While most students felt they could produce an independent student submission, one student reported that they had a staff member in the room with them while they wrote the submission and felt that being monitored in this way impinged on their freedom to write exactly as they would have liked.

Perceptions of burden

The process of submitting to the TEF 2023 exercise was reported to be time consuming, with some providers starting the process six months in advance. Many providers appreciated the importance of the TEF and wanted to complete their provider submission thoroughly, but this had to be done on top of their normal roles. One provider reported that this meant staff worked 20%-30% above their normal capacity. In most cases, this did not come at extra cost to the providers, but rather to the people involved in completing the submission. Perceptions and experiences of burden were consistent across TEF outcomes and other subgroup differences such as tariff type and whether providers had taken part in TEF previously.

“ [It was] An enormous side hustle that we all had to do on top of everything else. You’re appealing to the commitment of mid-level and senior-level staff who want to see the best for the institution.”

Staff at participating provider, Specialist: Creative

The timing of the submission meant that many staff members worked over the Christmas holidays, at a personal cost for staff. For a small number of providers, there were also financial costs with some staff having to work additional days or needing to bring in extra external resources to see the process through. Other financial costs included providing refreshments or lunches to incentivise participation amongst students in focus groups.

“So there was the extra staffing, extra hours, the external that we got in, so it was human resource that would have cost us more.”

Staff at participating provider, Small Level 4/5

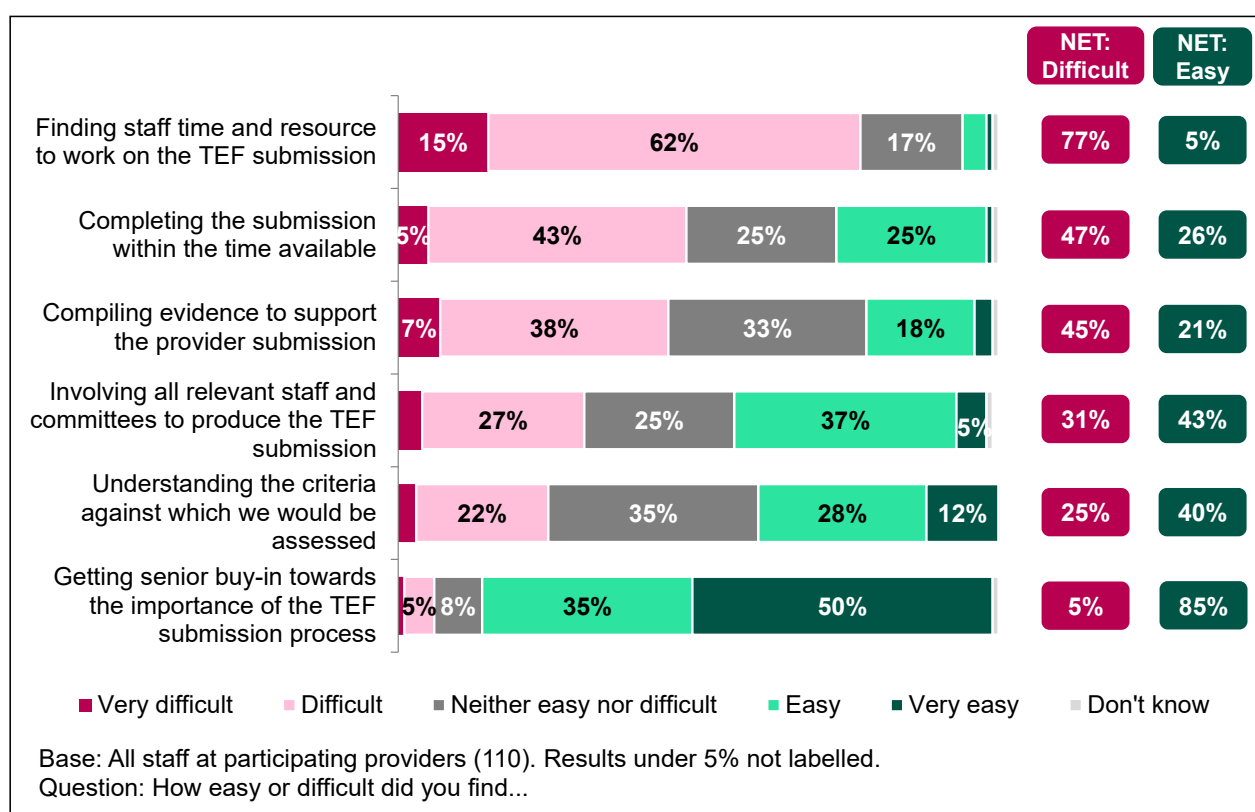
As mentioned above, the data collected internally for the TEF provider submission was felt by many providers that participated in the TEF 2023 exercise to be very useful. While useful, working with this data could be an additional burden in itself and one provider reported that they had to employ data consultants to keep on top of the workload in managing this data and its use.

Figure 6.1 shows more than three quarters (77%) of staff reported finding time and resource for the provider submission difficult (62%) or very difficult (15%).

Nearly half also found completing the provider submission in the time available to be difficult (47%), and a similar proportion found compiling evidence to support the provider submission to be difficult (45%). As discussed, these factors were considered by providers to be important drivers of submission quality.

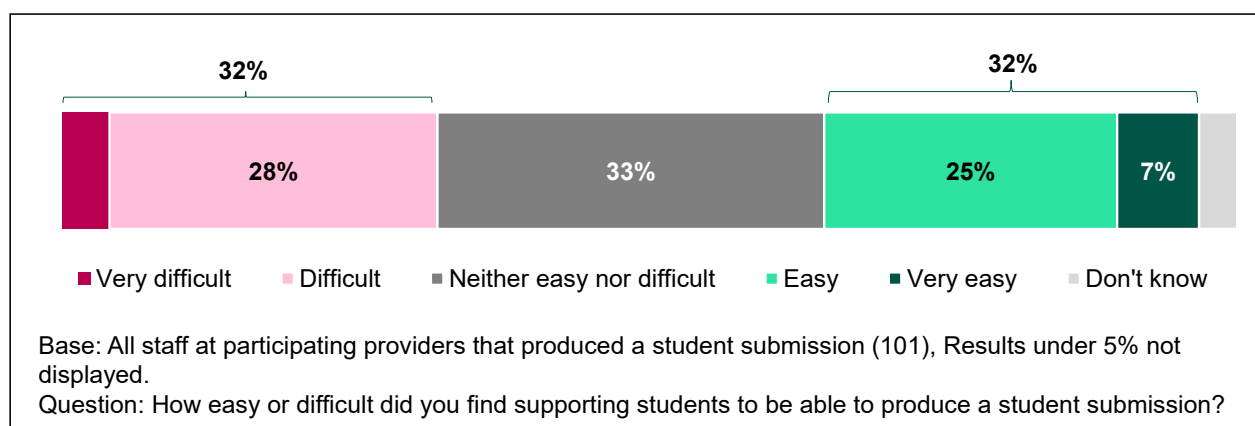
Most found getting senior buy-in to the importance of the TEF provider submission process to be easy (85%). This suggests that the value of the TEF is felt among providers at a senior level.

Figure 6.1 Ease and difficulty of the TEF submission process



Provider staff were also asked how easy or difficult it was to support students in submitting their contribution. As shown in Figure 6.2 below, there was fairly even spread in how difficult providers found this.

Figure 6.2 Ease of supporting students



In the qualitative interviews, it was apparent that providers that found it easy to support students tended to already have good relationships with them in place; they already collected this type of data and had mechanisms in place to capture the student voice.

The most common given reason for why providers did not have a student submission was a lack of student time; six of the eight providers interviewed that did not have a student submission reported this. Other reasons, each given by one participating provider, were: a lack of awareness of the TEF among student representatives, a

lack of embedded student representation structure, and a lack of value attached to the exercise.

Experiences of engaging with the data dashboards

TEF data dashboards were published in September 2022 and informed the assessment of providers in the 2023 TEF exercise. The data within them is expected to be updated annually and the data dashboards cover all English providers eligible to take part in the TEF.⁹

The data dashboards display indicators based on measures of student outcomes, including continuation, completion and progression, and measures of student experience from different areas, or scales, of the National Student Survey. The indicator data is also available to download in csv files.

The purpose of the TEF data dashboards is twofold:

- as evidence to help the panel assess quality, with appropriate consideration given to statistical confidence¹⁰
- to help providers understand their own performance and identify areas for improvement, both so they can provide commentary in their submissions around their indicator performance, and to guide ongoing enhancement activities (which is a core reason for the annual updates to the data).

At an overall level, most participating providers were positive about the data dashboards. In the provider survey, 95% of participating providers found the data dashboards to be useful (13% slightly useful, 40% moderately useful, and 43% very useful), with no differences in this regard based upon provider characteristics.

Feedback from providers on using the data dashboards, and associated guidance and support when considering their own performance and preparing submissions was mixed. Some providers reported that the dashboards were easy to use and effective, but these tended to be those that already had experience of these or similar systems or had large data teams. One member of staff became part of the TEF panel, so while they initially found the dashboards to be challenging, they later felt they were very adept at using them. This might suggest that additional training and support and the chance to spend more time using the dashboards could improve user confidence in engaging with them.

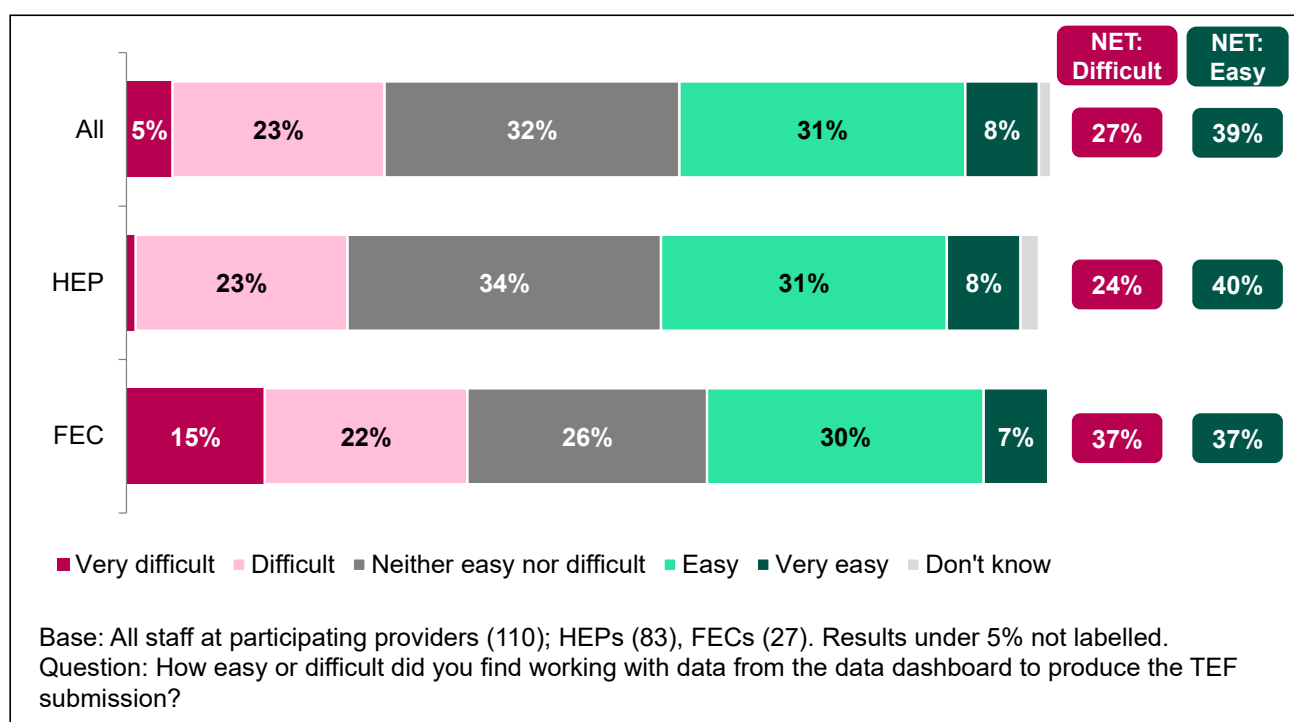
As shown in Figure 6.3, around two fifths (39%) found the dashboards easy to use but just over a quarter of staff (28%) found them difficult. A third felt that they were neither easy nor difficult (32%). Further Education Colleges (FECs) in general were

⁹ The TEF data dashboard and supporting documentation is available here: The OfS (2022), TEF data dashboard, <https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/tef-data-dashboard/> [Accessed January 2025]

¹⁰ The weighting given to the data varies across the features of excellence, with the assessment of some more heavily focused on the data and of others giving equal or greater weight to qualitative evidence from the submission.

more likely to find the dashboards to be difficult to use (37%) compared with other HEPs (24%).¹¹

Figure 6.3 Ease of using the data dashboard



The qualitative interviews suggested that members of staff who were less practised in using tools like these were more likely to find them difficult. In many cases this indicated a general lack of experience when working with data tools, but there was also feedback that the dashboards were generally difficult to use and that their interfaces were not user-friendly or intuitive. A couple of participating providers felt that the TEF data dashboards were slow and crashed quite often.

“My background is financial analysis, banking, data. So, if you're steeped in working with data and spreadsheets... then you can navigate it pretty quickly. But for people who are not...”

Staff at participating provider, Large Level 4/5

Some provider staff reported that the dashboards were inherently hard to understand and interpret, partly because of the amount of data included.

“They're quite hard to navigate until you know what they are. If you try and do anything too detailed in them they can get in a bit of a muddle and it gets quite difficult.”

Staff at participating provider, High Tariff

¹¹ For the sake of comparison, FECs here refers to providers that are majority Level 4 or 5 in terms of provision (more than 50% FTE of students at Level 4 or 5) regardless of size, while 'other HEPs' is all providers that are not majority Level 4 or 5 provision. This comparison is used throughout the report.

Providers that were used to working with data tended to incorporate the data into their own dashboards or systems to make it more user-friendly and familiar to their staff. In some cases, this was to achieve consistent branding or present data in formats known to be easily digested. This was seen generally positively; the data dashboards had provided additional data.

“We have a large data planning team. They provided a series of dashboards to the committee that allowed them to see in granular detail.”

Staff at participating provider, Low or Unknown Tariff

Some features of the dashboards were praised. The use of shaded bars in charts to show which areas fell above and below benchmarked data, and having data scaled to the size of cohorts to provide immediate context were viewed very positively by participating providers with experience of the previous TEF scheme.

The most commonly praised aspect of the dashboards was the inclusion of benchmark values. Staff valued being able to compare their performance against other providers, especially of similar size and context.

The level to which providers used the dashboards also varied. Some found them extremely useful and dug deep into the data, often using them as a starting point to analyse their performance across different measures in line with benchmarking data. These providers tended to be those that did not have their own data on these measures. In general, providers that already had their own data collection methods built into their organisational strategies were less likely to make extensive use of dashboard data, and were more likely to suggest areas for improvement.

Some felt that a lag in the data limited any insights they drew, and others thought that the dashboards didn't have the capacity to accurately reflect the difference in provider contexts. One member of staff at a Large Level 4/5 provider complained that they felt that updates to the data were not as forthcoming as had been promised. Some users felt more current and more regularly updated data informing dashboards may help to increase their utility. Despite this, views of the data dashboards were predominantly positive.

“The dashboard is really good. It does give you a good picture of how a provider is performing against the benchmarks. The problem is with the consistency of the data. It was promised that TEF indicators would be published every year, but they haven't been.”

Staff at participating provider, Large Level 4/5

Analysis of the use of data dashboards to help providers identify areas for improvement will be provided later in the report.

Empowering the student voice

Providers and students were mixed in their views about the TEF process having empowered the student voice. Views were particularly positive about the role of the student submission in this regard, which was felt to be a very powerful outlet for student opinion, partly due to the fact that it needs to be a distinct submission, written in its own voice, that does not simply repeat what is in the provider submission.

High Tariff providers were more likely to have strong student feedback systems in place and see the impact of the TEF in this regard to be smaller. Smaller or lower tariff providers were generally more likely to feel that the TEF had helped them and

be in the medium or high impact groups described below. Specialist providers most commonly reported that they struggled to engage students and capture the student voice.

The 20 student representatives who were interviewed generally felt that the TEF 2023 exercise had empowered the student voice in a limited way although this was not universal. Positivity generally related to the way that the process had given student representatives greater involvement in their provider's quality systems. Some student representatives did not feel that the student voice had been empowered as a result of the TEF, with a few saying they had not seen a change. This was not necessarily seen negatively, with some feeling that their providers were already listening to students or improving processes to do so, but a few students felt that their providers needed to listen to the student voice more, and that the TEF 2023 exercise had not driven this. In a couple of instances, student representatives noted that the TEF might have encouraged providers to listen to their students more.

"In some ways TEF might have been a bit of a wake-up call for the school by realising the anecdotal data they had for the students does impact these reports."

Student at participating provider, Specialist Creative

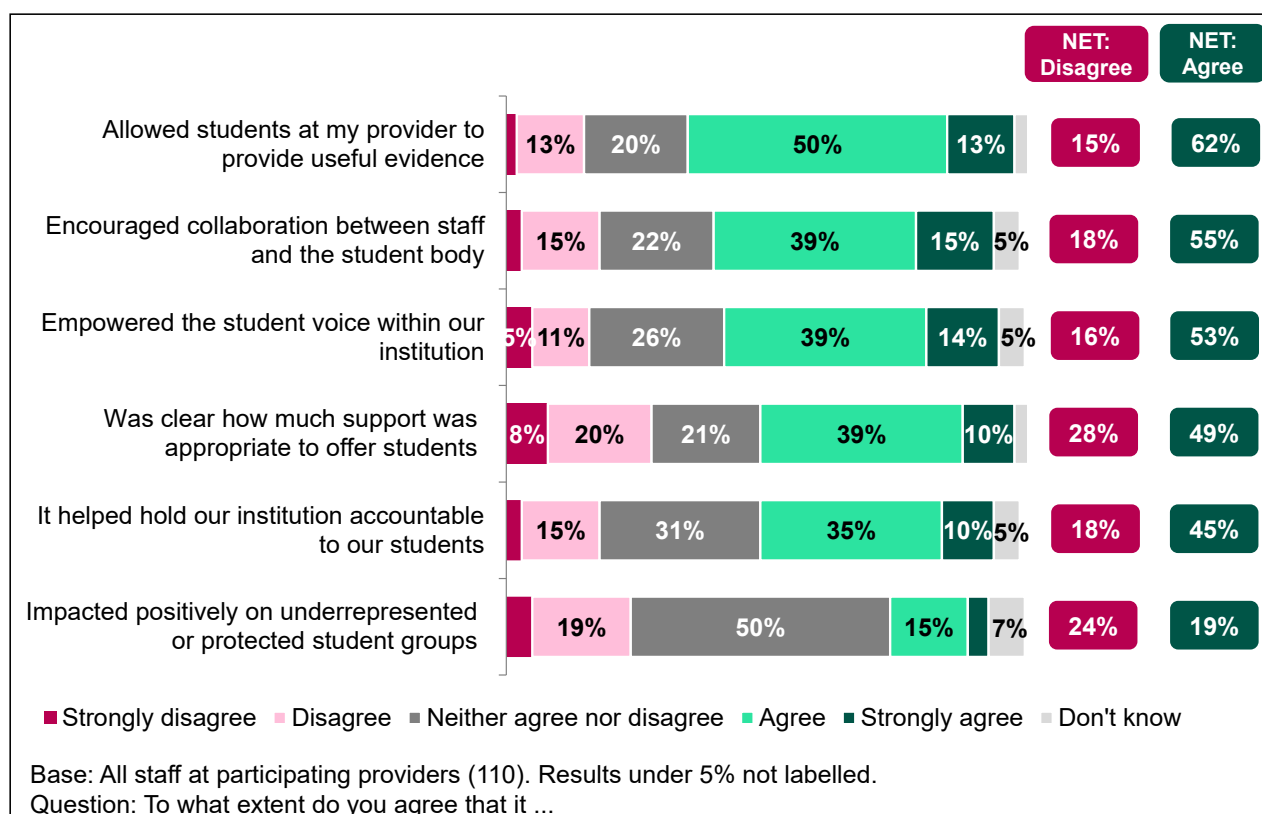
As shown in Figure 6.4 just under two thirds of participating providers (62%) agreed that the TEF student submission allowed students to provide useful evidence. In the qualitative interviews, staff at participating providers reported that timings, capacity and student engagement were the main barriers to students providing evidence.

Just over half (53%) of staff at participating providers agreed that the TEF 2023 student submission empowered the student voice within their provider. During qualitative interviewing, there was a feeling among a few providers that the provider submission is more quantitative in nature and provides factual information on delivery while the student submission is there to capture the nuance of the student experience in a more qualitative way.

Figure 6.4 also shows that over half (55%) of staff agreed that the TEF student submission encouraged collaboration between staff and the student body. Qualitative interviews suggested that there was desire for this kind of collaboration, and that the TEF facilitated and gave impetus to achieve it, but that time constraints were the greatest challenge in achieving it. Some of those who did not feel that it encouraged this kind of collaboration felt that it was already present at their provider.

Just under half of provider staff (45%) agreed that the TEF student submission helped hold the provider accountable to students.

Figure 6.4 The impact of the TEF student submission on processes around capturing the student voice



During analysis, providers were able to be categorised into three broad levels of impact that the TEF 2023 submission had on affecting the ways that they seek to capture the student voice:

High impact. Most providers fall into this category in which the TEF gave them the impetus and the processes to start to empower the student voice, particularly Medium or Low Tariff providers. This is an area that has often been aspirational for providers but the TEF 2023 has provided tools and impetus to embed this into their strategy and practice. Either from analysing the data collected as part of the provider submission, or looking at benchmarking data, some providers have been confronted with the need to better engage with their student populations and forge closer relationships to work to improve the student experience. Others have used the opportunity to build on the evidence-gathering process for the provider submission to create better links with the student body. These links have allowed them to improve communication and collaborative work to improve the student experience moving forward.

“So we’ve set up a network for student academic representatives, which is a kind of a dual collaboration between the Students Union staff, and us and obviously involves the elected SU sabbatical officers.”

Staff at participating provider, High Tariff

Medium Impact. For some providers, most frequently Medium or Low Tariff providers, the TEF has made a difference to their approach or intentions to promote the student voice. For many of these providers, they were already working with students and student representatives to empower the student voice, but the TEF 2023 gave them some tools and in some cases a framework to do this more

effectively. Other providers that felt a medium impact in terms of the TEF helping them empower the student voice, reported that data collection from students was challenging, and as a result there was a limit to how much the TEF could achieve.

“It comes back to what can you realistically expect a group of students to do in terms of the process of TEF. So, if you look at the guidance to the students it was very much tell us what your students think, don't tell us what you think, tell us how you've evidenced that it was lots of students not just three students.”

Staff at participating provider, High Tariff

Little or no impact. Some providers felt that the TEF 2023 had little or no impact on how they were empowering their student voice because they felt they already had effective mechanisms and relationships in place. These were more often High Tariff providers. Non-participating providers also most often were within this group, with none mentioning any impact upon student voice because of the TEF 2023 exercise.

“We had incredibly robust processes for student voice already in place.”

Staff at participating provider, Low or Unknown Tariff

Perceptions of panel decision credibility

Provider views on the credibility of the decision were often related to how satisfied they were with their overall rating. Those that were rated Gold tended to praise the process and efficacy of the judgements, while those that were disappointed by a lower overall rating tended to be more critical.

Some institutions commented that they felt the panel was able to make credible judgements and that it executed effective and fair results in testing circumstances.

In general, provider staff felt that the panel was composed appropriately, and that it mostly reflected a good spread of the diversity of the sector. Some provider staff did not know or did not feel they could comment on this because they were unsure about the way that the panel was composed. Some provider staff however praised the diversity of the composition of the panel, including amongst smaller, specialist providers and Level 4/5 providers.

A small number of providers felt that it was difficult to reflect the breadth of the sector when only three people assessed each submission.¹² This was particularly true for staff at providers who felt they had particularly unique contexts such as relating to subject specialisms or teaching modes and styles. Nevertheless, most providers did not feel negatively about the composition of the panel.

“I thought there it was a very broad range. It was literally from all parts of the sector. I think I'm pretty sure rather that there was somebody who I knew from what I would call the FE sector in every group. You could see that specialist providers were in there too.”

¹² See part 6 of Regulatory advice 22 for information on the TEF 2023 assessment and decision-making process, which involved initial assessment by three members of a panel ‘sub-group’, followed by consideration of each case and provisional decisions by the wider sub-group, and then final decisions by a ‘referral group’ of the panel.

Staff at participating provider, Large Level 4/5 provider

There were no concerns about the timings of the outcomes from the process amongst providers that participated, except for one point around the timing of the publication of outcomes for providers that made a representation.

Some providers criticised the credibility of the decision for lack of transparency. Several providers commented that they were not clear exactly how they were being assessed and so could then not directly understand why they were given the outcomes that they were.

“It was really unclear what actually got you the ratings and awards...There was no indication for me about why it was that they thought those particular bits were deserving of Gold or in some cases hadn't been kind of credited. So I think for me on this, there was a real lack of, and this is for our personal submission, critical engagement.”

Staff at participating provider, Medium Tariff

Several providers looked at other provider submissions but were no clearer about how decisions were reached. Instead, this gave them less faith in the process after seeing what they believed to be inconsistencies.

“Certainly reviewing some other provider submissions, evidence could be very flimsy. In some places even contrary to what was in the guidance. Makes it really hard to have any confidence in the credibility of the assessment.”

Staff at participating provider, Medium Tariff

Related to this, a few providers thought that the interpretations of data indicators were too narrow and that they were being judged on a set of criteria that did not stretch far enough to represent all the ways in which excellence can manifest. A couple of smaller providers felt that indicators were also skewed towards larger providers that benefited from this imbalance.

“The way we were assessed through TEF made me conclude that we were looked at by people working in big unis who were expecting a particular type of evidence. I don't think they were open-minded enough to really try and understand the evidence that we had provided around excellence. The guidance wasn't clear enough even to people on the panel, especially around [how] the features of excellence are not [intended to be] exhaustive.”

Staff at participating provider, Specialist: Creative

A couple of providers felt that there was a fair assessment of their context and that the panel had clearly taken this into consideration, while a couple of other provider staff felt they had been subjected to a broad and unsuitable examination that did not factor in their idiosyncrasies and weight evidence accordingly.

“Then again, in the way the panel interpreted it, they didn't really pay attention to that nuance (student feedback). I feel we were disadvantaged in how our student submission was judged alongside student submissions of big unis with funded student unions and sabbatical officers.”

Staff at participating provider, Specialist: Creative

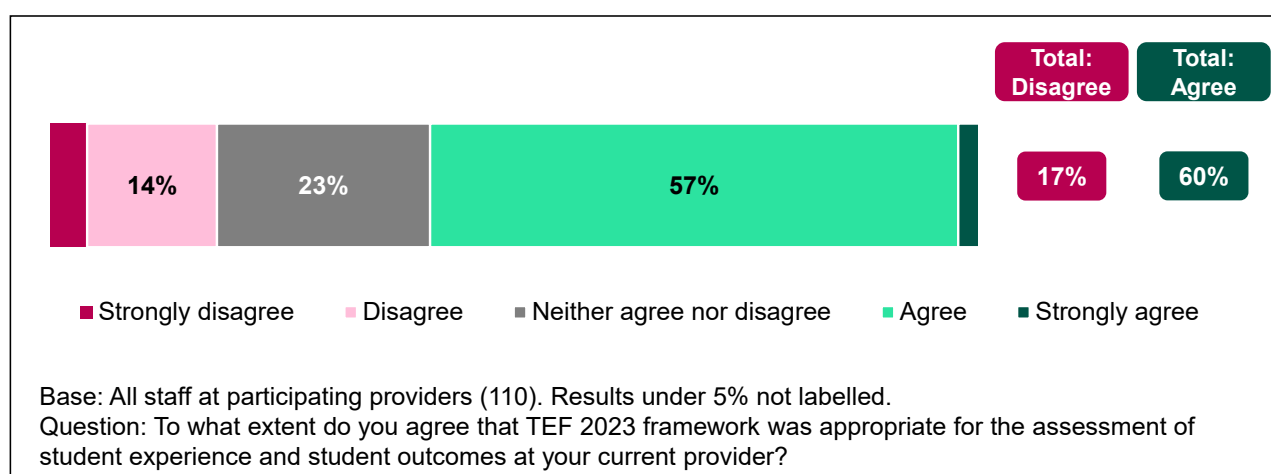
Responses to the statement received from the panel were predominantly positive, with a small number of negative views. (Views on the panel statements will be provided later in the report.)

A small number of providers that took part in the qualitative interviews made a representation after receiving their provisional outcome. In most of these cases, providers felt that the panel statements did not reflect the overall outcome they had received, or that their outcome did not reflect the evidence that they had provided as part of their provider submission.

Appropriateness of the TEF scheme for the assessment of student experience and outcomes

As shown in Figure 6.5 below, three fifths (60%) of surveyed participating providers felt that the TEF framework was appropriate for the assessment of student experience and outcomes at their current provider. About one quarter of providers (23%) neither agreed nor disagreed, while just under one in five providers (17%) disagreed. While most participating providers agreed that it was appropriate, only 3% strongly agreed.

Figure 6.5 Participating provider views on whether the TEF framework was appropriate for the assessment of student experience and outcomes at current provider



Views on the representation process

When asked about their experience of the representations process, most providers were satisfied and felt that it was straightforward.

“The time frames that we were given were suitable. It was a fairly open process about how you could respond as it was up to you, you had freedom to choose how to structure [the representation].”

Staff at participating provider, Large Level 4/5

In terms of the outcome of the representations and the way that this was communicated, there was an even split between providers that were successful, partially successful, and unsuccessful in having their ratings or outcomes changed. A few members of staff at providers who made representations felt that the outcome of the representation was not well articulated, and there was a lack of explanation about why they had been successful or not in their representation.

“When [the OfS] came back they didn't answer or give any detail about our queries, they just said ‘here you are’... So the learning for us wasn't there, there was no benefit, no understanding [...] The most challenging thing was that they didn't help us understand the decision”

Staff at participating provider, High Tariff

One provider mentioned that making a representation had probably led to some reputational damage, due to being listed as ‘Pending’ when the initial results were published. This member of staff felt that the OfS could have avoided this through clearer communication about the meaning of the “Pending” status. This was the only instance in which the timing of the publication of the outcomes was raised as a concern for providers.

“There was a period of time where some commentators made a real assumption that anyone who was listed as ‘Pending’ was arguing against being Bronze, which was not the case for all institutions. So there was probably unintended reputational damage. There should have been a much stronger press release to ensure that being in the ‘pending pool’ didn't equate to negative outcomes.”

Staff at participating provider, Medium Tariff

Reasons why voluntary providers chose to take part in the TEF 2023 exercise

Amongst providers that chose to take part, the motivation was primarily a desire to take student experience more seriously and take steps to strive for excellence. As well as wanting to achieve excellence in this area, providers also wanted recognition. For some, this was to recognise the work of staff and students and to measure how well they were doing against a recognised framework. For others, they wanted to be able to promote their good practice within the sector and a couple mentioned the desire to use this recognition as a recruitment tool.

A few providers that had previously received a Bronze overall rating commented that they wanted to take part simply to improve their rating, and some others acknowledged that they felt that a Bronze or Silver overall rating would be the most positive overall outcome that they could achieve. This contrasts with some provider staff who viewed Bronze as a disappointing outcome. This shows that providers have different expectations and perceptions of ratings.

A few providers participated because they appreciated the impetus to define educational gains and to consider how best to achieve them. They also felt that being able to measure themselves at a national level was beneficial.

“It had made us look and think very carefully about our definition of educational gain - helped our thought processes.”

Staff at participating provider, Medium Tariff

Few provider staff talked about the financial implications of the TEF. Its reputational value, and the overarching goal of implementing teaching excellence and enhancing the student experience, held far more weight than the incentive around the fee uplift and financial benefits relating to student recruitment.

“[It] was definitely more about the reputation, obviously we would hope that more students would end up coming to us, but that [financial incentives] wasn’t the reason why we did it [...], we had a lot to shout about, a lot of good stuff going on.”

Staff at participating provider, Large Level 4/5

The pull of reputational recognition extended to feeling part of the higher education landscape. For larger providers in this group, performance in the TEF was important for maintaining their standing and ensuring that they were not losing pace with competitors. This was further reflected when mandatory providers spoke about whether they would have taken part if the TEF was voluntary and reported that they would be driven by what the rest of the sector did i.e. they would still take part if everybody else did.

For smaller, specialist providers that were aspiring to degree-awarding powers, the TEF 2023 exercise was a way of proving that they belong in the sector and have value to contribute.

“[It was] a necessary part of demonstrating that we are part of the sector”

Staff at participating provider, Specialist: Creative

Of the eight providers that chose to take part in the TEF and completed the survey, six had felt confident that they would achieve an overall rating with which they would be satisfied. The same number wanted to identify areas in which they could improve. Five believed in the goals and mission of the TEF. Four were worried that not taking part would have a negative impact on their reputation and the same number wanted to raise the profile of student experience and outcomes across the sector. Only one mentioned wanting to achieve the uplift in student fees.

Reasons why voluntary providers chose not to take part in the TEF 2023 exercise

Providers that did not take part in the TEF 2023 were asked to select from a list of reasons why they did not do so during the provider survey. Of the 19 non-participating providers that were asked this question, just over half said one of the reasons was the financial cost, including staff time and workload. Just under half said another reason for not taking part was because they were prioritising other work and the same number thought that the data in the TEF dashboard was too limited. Just over a quarter said that they did not think they would achieve a satisfactory overall rating or that it would impact negatively on their reputation. Two providers answered additionally that they did not take part because it was not mandatory. Providers that reported other reasons, mostly reported a view that they were too small to reach the “threshold” to take part, which could have been a misunderstanding or again a reference to participation not being mandatory for them.

During qualitative interviewing, a couple of providers felt that they were not mature enough as providers of HE to be able to be satisfied with their provider submission. Broadly, the reasons for not participating came from providers that felt that, in theory, participating was a good idea. In practice, however, they expressed concerns about the provider’s capacity to submit a good quality provider submission. Smaller providers were concerned about being able to draw on students as part of the submission (either inputting to the provider submission or producing a student submission), and having the required resource to produce the provider submission.

One non-participating provider was negative about the prospect, seeing submitting as a “distraction” from their core activities and fearing negative repercussions of failing to achieve a Bronze overall rating.

7 Making excellent student experience and outcomes matter to providers

This chapter will present findings around the incentives for providers to do well in, or in the case of voluntary providers, to participate in the TEF.

Summary

The TEF seeks to incentivise providers to deliver an excellent student experience and student outcomes. For it to do this, providers need to care about the reputational or financial outcomes of doing well or badly in the TEF, the implication being that if they care, they will give greater focus to areas covered by the framework.

Providers were generally more concerned about reputational impact, both positive and negative, than financial impact. Where concerns about financial outcomes existed, they usually related to reduced income due to the potential for negative impacts on student recruitment if providers received a lower TEF overall rating. For a small number of voluntary providers, there were concerns related to accessing the tuition fee uplift.

Reputational concerns acted as an incentive to do well in the TEF, but views on the extent to which this had raised the value of student experience and outcomes for providers, and resulted in their prioritisation compared to other aspects of provision, were mixed. Some providers felt it had made no difference; some felt that student experience and outcomes were always a priority for institutions and that the TEF had not changed this. More commonly, providers felt that it galvanised or complemented existing pushes towards improving student experience and outcomes. Others felt it had instigated a real desire for change, which in some instances led to the implementation of new or altered policies.

Most student representatives had seen positive changes in the way their provider prioritised student experience and outcomes since the TEF 2023 exercise. However, many students felt that student experiences and outcomes were already being prioritised, and there was some uncertainty about the extent to which positive changes were exclusively driven by the TEF.

It is worth acknowledging that the TEF 2023 exercise is just one factor amongst many that may incentivise delivery of excellent student experience and outcomes. It also followed other TEF exercises that may have already instigated change in this regard.

Whether providers care about the reputational and financial outcomes of TEF

Most providers considered the reputational impact of the TEF of greater importance than the financial, but their view of reputational impact often extended to the resulting impact on student recruitment and therefore indirectly to financial impact.

Most providers, and particularly High Tariff and Large Level 4 / 5 mandatory providers, did not consider TEF outcomes resulting in negative consequences for recruitment to be a significant risk. Many were oversubscribed and felt that the TEF would not have an impact unless something “radically changed” or that they became an outlier in terms of performing poorly.

"I guess there's a reputational risk if you don't do particularly respectably. [...] The trick is to not be the outlier at the bottom. Beyond that, we remain an institution that is oversubscribed in terms of the students who want to come and study with us."

Staff at participating provider, High Tariff

Conversely, some providers that were not oversubscribed had concerns about financial impacts, related to reduced income due to negative impacts on student recruitment if they received a lower overall rating. But some of this group also recognised that receiving good overall outcomes led to them being more confident in their marketing and recruitment to bring in more students, which in turn would bring financial benefits.

"I think from a financial point of view the two things [reputational and finances] are linked [...] our intention is to improve our metrics, move up the league table to get TEF Gold, therefore we have a reputational uplift which would assist with recruitment, therefore there's a financial gain from that point of view."

Staff at participating provider, Low or Unknown Tariff

The financial impact of the TEF was a concern for a minority of providers in relation to accessing the tuition fee uplift. In a few cases, the tuition fee uplift was one of the primary reasons voluntary providers chose to take part in the TEF.

"We don't have to do it, but we have to do it if you want the higher fee amounts...the fees haven't changed for eight years and the extra £250 per student makes a big difference. There's no way we could not do it."

Staff at participating provider, Medium Tariff

Many providers interviewed shared that TEF overall outcomes were used as a marketing tool for prospective students and it was a good way to demonstrate the value of their provider. Small providers and voluntary providers in particular shared that taking part in the TEF was a good way to increase their visibility across the sector, and to demonstrate that they "have a place at the table".

"We want to grow our HE provision so we wanted a way to demonstrate to the outside world how good we think we are. In essence kind of rubber stamped by achieving well in the TEF, and that's now something that we can put out there to people, it's not just us saying this, it's something that's backed up."

Staff at participating provider, Small Level 4/5

They also recognised that dropping an overall rating or receiving a Requires Improvement overall outcome could potentially have negative consequences for them.

"Could it [the TEF rating] have damaged our strategy [to grow]? Possibly some people may not want to have worked with us. I don't really know because we didn't land there."

Staff at participating provider, Large Level 4/5

Despite the emphasis on reputational considerations and potential impact on recruitment or growth, there was widespread uncertainty and at times cynicism about how much TEF outcomes had permeated student decision making. Most providers felt that applicants did not understand what the TEF is and were unsure about how much it fed into their decision to choose a provider. Nevertheless, many providers shared that the TEF could help frame the provider in a particular way and helped providers construct a narrative about why students should choose that particular provider. A few also noted that while they doubted the extent to which students understood the TEF, TEF overall rating logos were very common in provider marketing materials, suggesting that providers do feel it has some effect.

“[The] TEF has a halo effect... it frames the institution if an applicant is looking at where to study and their parent is looking over the shoulder worrying about teaching quality.”

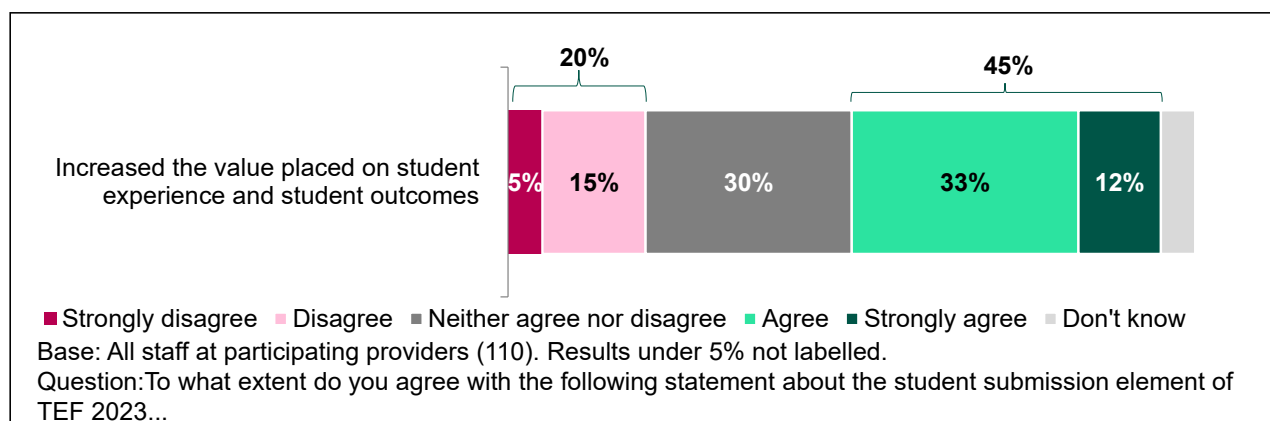
Staff at participating provider, Specialist: Creative

Prioritising student experience and outcomes

There were mixed views among providers surveyed about the extent to which TEF resulted in a (re)prioritisation of student experience and outcomes.

In the provider survey, less than half of staff (45%) agreed that the TEF student submission increased the value placed on student experience and outcomes. Only 20% disagreed that it had, and 30% neither agreed nor disagreed, as shown in Figure 7.1.

Figure 7.1 The impact of the TEF student submission on value placed on student experience and student outcomes



In a similar vein, there was a mixed response from the providers interviewed about the extent to which the TEF had raised the value and respect for student experience and outcomes. Some providers felt it had made no difference, some reported that it had helped them make improvements that they were already seeking to make, and others felt it had enhanced the desire to deliver excellent student experience and outcomes.

Those providers that felt it had not increased the value put on student experience and outcomes generally reported that this was because they felt that they already prioritised it, or did not have time to make any changes to the way that they prioritised different factors.

“I don't think [we have increased our prioritisation of student experience and outcomes] as a result of taking part in it, I think that's something we're always doing. I don't think we're changing anything fundamentally.”

Staff at participating provider, Small Level 4/5

The most common response from providers was that they already cared about delivering excellent student experience and outcomes, but the TEF had given them greater impetus to prioritise it. In completing their submission, providers felt that they had to think more about student experience and outcomes, which was a positive outcome of completing the TEF, even if it simply reinforced that they were doing the right things or thinking in the correct ways.

“It kind of verified it and through actually doing that research and analysis ourselves into what students find valuable, then we were able to think actually well that's something that we need to tell people that we do.”

Staff at participating provider, Small Level 4/5

Most students shared that they had seen positive changes in the way their provider prioritised student experience and outcomes since the TEF 2023, while a smaller number of students had not seen any changes.

A number of students felt that student experiences and outcomes were already being prioritised in their provider. However, students who had seen changes relating to the way that student experience and outcomes were prioritised felt that the TEF 2023 exercise helped their provider to focus their improvements. Examples of the changes that were made will be provided in the next chapter, but this included identifying specific areas such as career support, safety on campus, and employability. The TEF acted as an incentive to improve performance in these areas.

Some students questioned the extent to which changes were driven solely by the TEF 2023 exercise, due to a combination of factors, or that they were exclusively driven by other factors. For instance, a number of students felt that many improvements in terms of the prioritisation of student experience and outcomes were also the result of findings from the National Student Survey (NSS) and a small number of students felt that this primarily related to the NSS and not the TEF.

“The National Student Survey is regularly referred back to: ‘Why are we doing this? Oh, it's because students said in this survey that this was important’. But I don't see that same space being given to TEF.”

Student at participating provider, High Tariff

It is worth noting at this stage the context of the TEF 2023 exercise within the broader higher education ecosystem, and the existence of other factors that have resulted in an increase in the value attached to student experience and outcomes, and therefore their prioritisation. There are many possible incentives for providers to focus on these areas, including previous TEF exercises. As was noted in the Independent Review of TEF report, produced by the Dame Shirley Pearce to the Secretary of State for Education, previous TEF exercises contributed to increased prioritisation and focus on enhancement of teaching and learning, employability and

student engagement.¹³ In this context, a more limited role for the TEF 2023 is perhaps unsurprising.

¹³ Independent Review of the TEF (2021), Independent review of TEF: report <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-review-of-tef-report>, p. 77 [Accessed January 2025]

8 Driving continuous improvement and excellence in student experience and outcomes

This chapter will report on the extent to which taking part in the TEF 2023 has enabled providers to identify their own performance strengths and weaknesses and to identify areas for improvement. This involves evaluating the impact of TEF processes and outputs on the ways that providers assess and understand their performance. It also covers how this learning and understanding that is derived from the TEF exercise is shared within a provider and across the sector. The chapter looks at how some providers have changed their planning and decision making because of the TEF exercise. Furthermore, this chapter will cover the changes made by providers because of the TEF 2023 exercise.

Summary

Staff at participating providers were mixed in their views of the role of the TEF 2023 exercise in driving continuous improvement and excellence. Many providers feel that the process of participating in the TEF, as well as the outputs produced from the TEF exercise, drive understanding of performance. This was not universally appreciated, however, with some feeling that the impacts of the TEF on understanding of performance within the sector were limited. Overall, though, perceptions were broadly positive about the role of the TEF in driving understanding of current performance and allowing providers to identify areas for improvement, particularly for Low or Unknown Tariff providers.

Generally, panel statements were felt to be fit for this purpose, with few providers expressing negative views about them. In terms of their utility, some providers had used panel statements to drive understanding of performance and to inform policy development, although this was only true for some providers and not others.

Data dashboards were also used by providers to drive understanding of performance and to introduce interventions relating to continuous improvement of the delivery of excellent student experience and outcomes.

The TEF 2023 exercise was also generally felt to have led to some sharing of good performance and best practice across the sector, more commonly within providers than between them.

There was a roughly equal split between providers that had used the TEF 2023 process and its outputs to inform decision making and planning and those that had not. At this stage in the TEF cycle, specific examples of policy that had been developed in direct response to the TEF were somewhat limited, although some providers had created specific action plans to address their performance in the TEF 2023 exercise. It was more common for providers to feel that the TEF had encouraged them to be more data-led and to embed evaluative principles more carefully into their planning, which was particularly true for FECs.

Across the sector, overall views were positive about the TEF's role in driving continuous improvement and excellence at providers, although final impacts of the exercise will be clearer in time.

Driving understanding of performance

Staff at participating providers were broadly positive about the way that the various key elements of the TEF 2023 exercise enabled them to identify performance strengths and weaknesses, and most had used it to do so, although some had not.

There were no key differences based upon provider type as to whether staff at participating providers had used the TEF to identify areas of strength and weakness in performance.

“It makes us really have to sit and be honest about what we're good at... It takes something like TEF or an audit to highlight successes and shout about things.”

Staff at participating provider, Specialist: Creative

The submission process that was part of the TEF 2023 exercise was described by a few staff members at participating providers as offering a moment of reflection, from which they were able to take stock and consider their performance. This requirement to conduct some backwards-looking analysis was felt by a few providers to offer a key moment at which they were able to consider what has been going well, what could be improved, and what needs to be furthered to maximise impact. This is reflected in the fact that 96% of surveyed participating providers described the compilation of evidence as useful in helping them to identify possible areas for improvement in their provider (25% slightly useful, 34% moderately useful, and 37% very useful).

“It enabled us to write about ourselves in a reflective way, which maybe wouldn't have happened otherwise.”

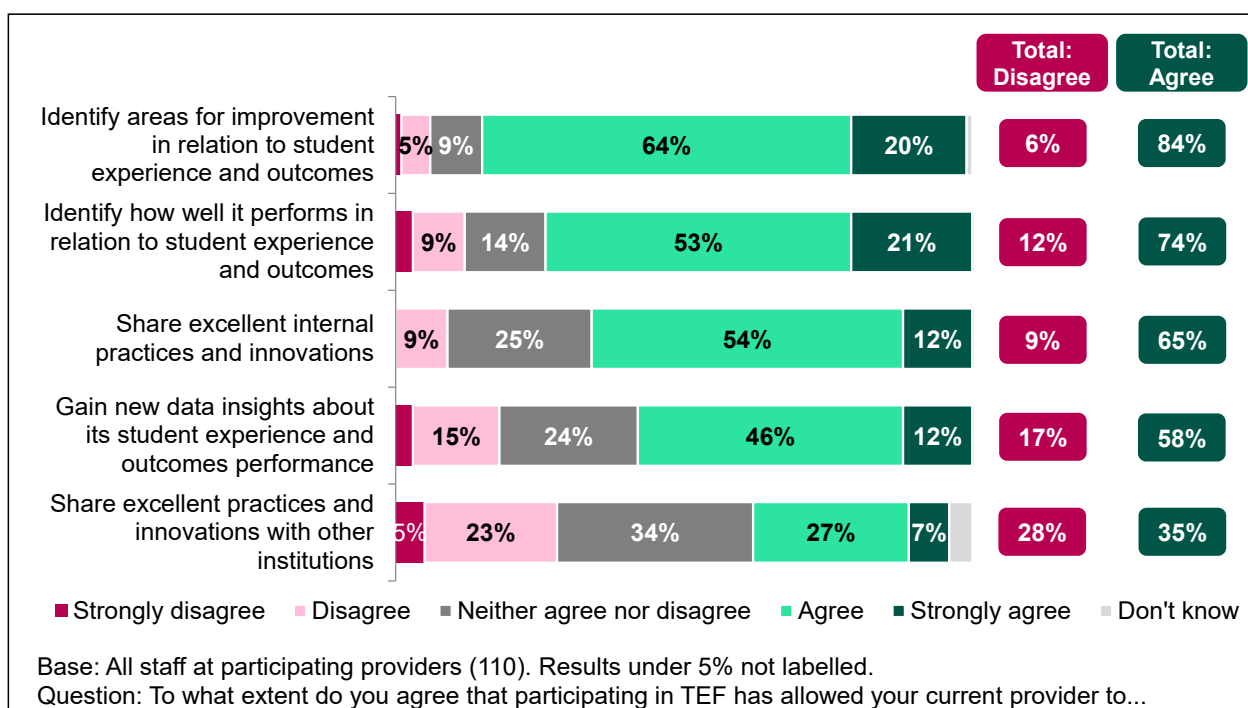
Staff at participating provider, Specialist: Creative

A couple of providers that did not think that the TEF helped to drive their understanding of performance, however, felt that the backwards-looking design to the TEF 2023 limited its impact, as its analysis was focused too much on past performance, for example by incorporating data from previous cohorts of students.

The broadly positive reception of the TEF 2023 exercise in terms of driving understanding of performance was also seen in survey responses. Across participating providers, 84% of staff felt that participating in the TEF had allowed them to identify areas for improvement in relation to student experience and outcomes. Three quarters felt it had allowed them to identify how well they perform in relation to student experience and outcomes (74%). A majority also agreed that participating had enabled them to share excellent internal practices and innovations (65%).

Around a third of staff at participating providers felt that the TEF 2023 exercise had allowed them to share excellent practices and innovations with other providers (35%), although a fairly similar proportion neither agreed nor disagreed that it had (34%), and 23% disagreed, as shown in Figure 8.1 below.

Figure 8.1 Levels of agreement that the TEF 2023 helped providers to assess and gain new insights into their performance and share excellent practice



During qualitative interviews, Low or Unknown Tariff providers were particularly likely to agree that engagement with the TEF 2023 exercise led to insights into performance strength and weaknesses. Other types of providers were more mixed in their views about whether the TEF helped them to analyse performance.

Staff at non-participating providers were also asked in the survey if they had used data dashboards, published panel statements, and other provider submissions. Small base sizes prevent thorough analysis, although five of 19 had not used any, with 12 having used the dashboards and five having used both published panel statements and other provider submissions.

In the qualitative interviews, around half of non-participating providers had engaged with some of the outputs and half had not. In qualitative interviews, a couple of staff members mentioned that they found the data dashboards very useful for monitoring either student experiences or outcomes, and some responded that they monitored others' submissions for examples of best practice. One non-participating provider mentioned that they found the dashboards "essential" to their data-driven approach to improving student experience, and another said that they had used them "extensively" for student outcome data.

In terms of how data dashboards were used by providers to identify performance strengths and weaknesses, some providers felt that they were able to use them as a quick way to do this, providing visualisations of strengths and weaknesses that were able to be digested quickly and easily. A few staff at participating providers also highlighted that they have used them to discuss areas for improvement with colleagues. Providers did not generally give too much specific information about instances in which they had been used for these purposes, but rather more widely expressed appreciation for how quick and easy it was to access visualised data about their performance.

A couple of providers, both those participating and those not, noted that dashboards were useful in relation to monitoring progress relating to other regulatory elements,

including Access and Participation Plans, and Condition B3, as well as in relation to thinking about how to improve NSS results.

A few providers reported more specific examples of having used data dashboards to identify performance strengths and weaknesses. One High Tariff participating provider had taken the data in the dashboards and analysed them at school level so that each school could see their performance, benchmarked. Similar benefits relating to communicating performance were seen at a range of providers. One non-participating Large Level 4/5 provider felt that the dashboards were crucial for them to be able to track performance and to identify areas for improvement. A few smaller providers showed appreciation for the dashboards.

"For a small provider those dashboards are essential because we just don't have the capacity to take our raw data easily and produce timely, good quality replicas of that... We're using that data to say 'What actions do we now need to put in place to improve that bit?' That's why some of these metrics are useful."

Staff at non-participating provider, Large Level 4/5

Staff that felt that the process of engaging with the TEF 2023 exercise had helped them to assess their performance strengths and weaknesses identified a range of areas in which this had happened, including student outcomes and looking at course level performance to try to improve specific course offerings. Generally, the areas were not overly specific, but were more of a "temperature check" on performance in a few key areas. Student experience was the area where several staff felt the TEF 2023 highlighted poorer performance.

Views on TEF panel statements being fit for purpose

Generally, providers thought the detailed and summary panel statements were fit for purpose in terms of reflecting the views of the panel and the outcomes of the assessment process. They were also seen as effective tools to drive learning and understand performance. There were few complaints about the format of the panel statements, although a couple of participating provider staff felt that they were perhaps too detailed and long. In the provider survey, 88% of participating providers described their detailed panel statement as useful in helping them to identify improvements in their provider (16% slightly useful, 32% moderately useful, and 40% very useful).

During qualitative interviews, there was a more mixed reaction on the ability for the panel statements to identify areas for change. Around half of the participating providers that were interviewed for this research felt that they were useful because they helped to identify areas for improvement or areas of excellence to maintain.

"One of the things that we reflected on was that the panel judgements were really comprehensive, and really helpful actually, in a way that I hadn't anticipated."

Staff at participating provider, High Tariff

A few participating provider staff had more negative views about the panel statements. A few felt that they were composed well but offered little in the way of actionable insight, or that they were merely confirmatory rather than revelatory, for example, stating that a decision had been reached but not the underlying reasons for it. A couple of staff also felt that the panel statements were more like a replay of

what had been included in the provider submission, rather than analysing potential areas for improvement in detail. However, at one provider with negative views, it was noted that the provider's governors, who were less close to HE provision, found the panel statements useful.

"They're quite anodyne and formulaic really. I will say that the Governing body did find them useful...We have a lot of Governors and not all of them are close to HE all of the time because why would they be? So I think it was useful for them."

Staff at participating provider, Large Level 4/5

A very small number of providers felt that panel statements were not fit for purpose. One provider, who received a Silver overall outcome but felt that their provider had been "treated unfairly", described their provisional statement as being inaccurate and poorly written. They stated the rationale behind each of the different outcomes for the features of excellence was inaccurate based upon the OfS's guidance.¹⁴ While this strong view is worth considering, it is worth noting that this is an outlier amongst participating providers. In general, they viewed panel statements favourably or at least thought they were high quality, if not particularly useful.

Views on engaging with TEF 2023 processes leading to sharing of good practice

One of the goals of the TEF 2023 is that learning gained from engaging with the process and its outputs will be shared within and between providers. Many participating providers said, during qualitative interviewing, that they had shared examples of excellent practice across their provider as a result of engagement with the TEF 2023. This was done in a range of ways, including through: practice being shared horizontally and vertically around the provider as a result of producing the provider submission; findings gained from reviewing the detailed panel statements being shared during continuing professional development (CPD) sessions; broader findings from the process being shared during learning and teaching committees and board meetings; and through events specifically created to share good practice identified during engagement with the TEF 2023.

Sharing of good practice was done fairly broadly across the spread of participating providers, albeit there were some provider staff who felt that the TEF 2023 exercise had not led to any changes at all, including in sharing good practice across the provider.

Another goal of the TEF 2023 was to share good practice between providers. Providers were less likely to think that this had been achieved, although a few examples were evident. Each of these examples came from Low or Unknown Tariff providers or a Small Level 4 or 5 provider. A few participating providers expressed scepticism that the TEF could revolutionise sharing of good practice across the sector so quickly, given the sector's size, history and the competitive nature of the market in which providers operate.

¹⁴ This was addressed through a representation, in which the provider's student experience outcome was raised, although they were still disappointed with their overall outcome, feeling that they still did not receive the rating that they felt they "truly deserved".

“I’m not sure it’s opened up a whole new world of collaboration across providers, but I’m not sure that’s a bad thing.”

Staff at participating provider, Medium Tariff

Nevertheless, some provider staff clearly did feel that good practice was being shared across providers as a result of engagement with the TEF 2023 exercise. This included at external conferences such as those organised by TASO, through coverage in sector publications like Wonkhe, and through informal networking between staff.

“We have an event that our Principal organised, where he gets some colleges, creative institutions together, just across the UK, and he was able to talk through the TEF report and what we’d done in the process, but also some examples of that good practice that our College was highlighted for as well. So, we were sharing that with other institutions as well as making our own staff aware.”

Staff at participating provider, Small Level 4/5

The TEF 2023 exercise was, of course, situated within a wider sectoral picture, and many of the ways that engagement with the TEF 2023 led to providers identifying performance strengths and weaknesses complemented other processes. A few staff at both participating and non-participating providers felt that the increased interest in developing datasets that allow for effective monitoring and evaluation was important context, and that the TEF was just contributing to this general trend. Similarly, other regulatory requirements including Access and Participation Plans and other regulatory frameworks were noted as important contexts in which the TEF 2023 scheme was helping providers to identify strong or weak areas of their performance in tandem with other processes.

Planning interventions, use of evidence, and evaluation of their outcomes

There was a mix of positive and neutral views on whether the TEF 2023 exercise had led to changes in the way that policy decisions are made at providers. Participating providers that took part in the qualitative interviews were split between those that felt it had positively affected their decision-making processes and those that felt that it had no effect. The most common neutral views in this regard were simply that the TEF 2023 was having no effect in their current planning processes.

One direct example of the TEF 2023 exercise influencing policy making was a provider that created action plans for every feature of excellence in which they received a “very high quality” judgement rather than “outstanding quality”, and introduced changes or interventions to address this and improve performance. A few other providers had created similar plans and designed policy using the features of excellence as a framework for planning improvements.

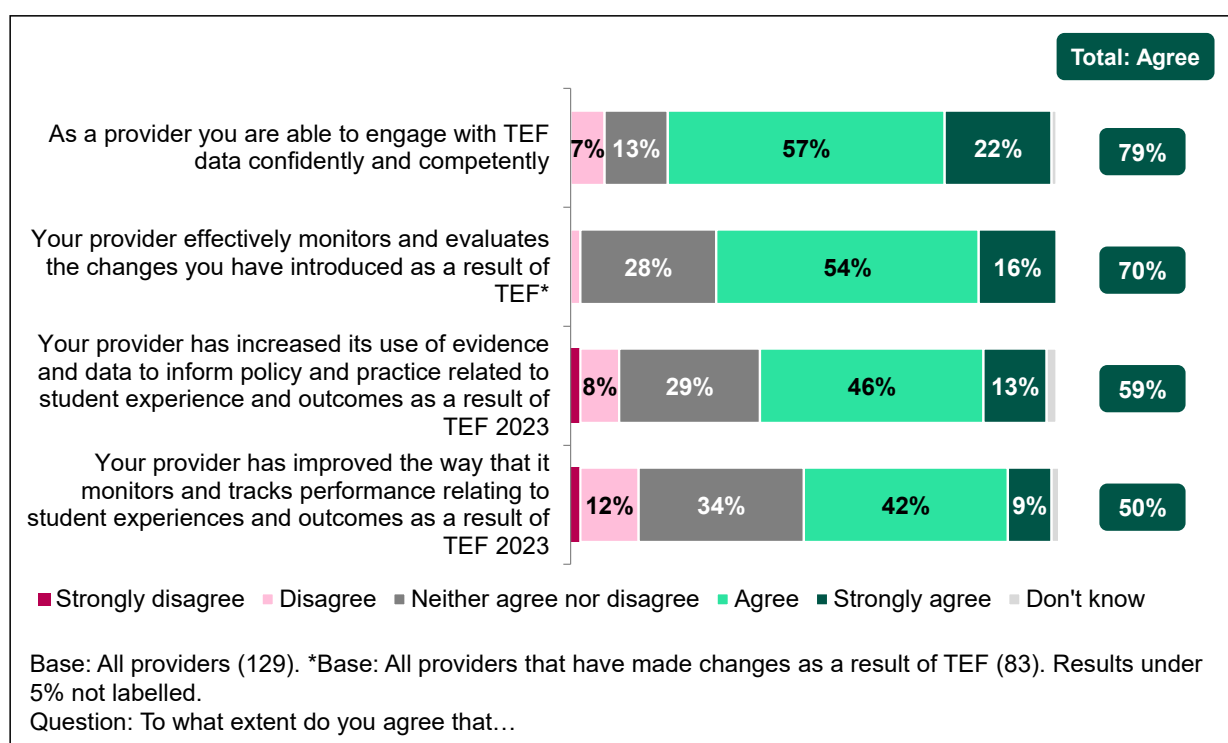
One of the more implicit consequences of the TEF 2023 scheme is that it has encouraged providers to be more evidence-led. In the provider survey, a small majority felt that the TEF 2023 exercise had done this: 59% of provider staff agreed that their provider has increased its use of evidence and data to inform policy and practice related to student experience and outcomes as a result of the TEF 2023,

with just 9% disagreeing.¹⁵ In the qualitative interviews there was a general sense that providers felt that the TEF 2023 process encouraged a more evidence-informed mode towards policy design by encouraging providers to think about data, reflect on performance, and provide evidence for various areas of their provision.

Half of all providers surveyed also agreed that they had improved the way that they monitor and track performance relating to student experiences and outcomes as a result of the TEF 2023 scheme (50%; 55% participating providers, 21% non-participating providers). Additionally, eight in ten members of staff were confident in terms of engaging with TEF data confidently and competently (79%: 82% participating and 63% non-participating providers), with just 7% disagreeing.

Similarly, amongst providers that had made changes as a result of the TEF (76% of participating providers), 70% felt that they were able to effectively monitor and evaluate these changes.

Figure 8.2 Extent of agreement that the TEF has resulted in outcomes related to monitoring and evaluation



Some providers summarised this as entering a more 'evaluative mode'. A few of these providers acknowledged that they had been weaker in undertaking monitoring and evaluation than they had perhaps realised before their involvement in the TEF 2023. One provider stated that this meant that they had moved towards undertaking a more conscious evaluative cycle, that involves using data and previous evaluations to inform policy development, tracking performance of the policy, and then consciously evaluating again at the end. Another provider felt that engaging with the TEF 2023 process had encouraged them to develop a theory of change to

¹⁵ Throughout the following analysis, as a result of the low base size for non-participating providers, there are no statistically significant differences based upon participation status, however figures are split out to provide extra context.

improve student experience, again reflecting an evaluative element to planning and decision making.

“One thing we identified was that we don’t do evaluation very well, that we don’t evaluate why we didn’t hit targets, we just pitch the next target and try again. I brought in, alongside the quality cycle, an evaluative cycle that now operates in the sub-committees of the academic board... That has come out of TEF – writing the TEF has made us realise that we haven’t done that well.”

Staff at participating provider, Specialist: Creative

One non-participating provider found that the indicators provided in the data dashboard were useful in enabling them to set targets that they could aim for, which were used to inform policy making, and then to evidence their performance against them.

“We’ve got a great team of excellent educators, and they’re always focused on doing what’s best for the students, but now we’ve always got in the back of our minds that we need to evidence it with robust evidence of impact - ideally numbers-based, statistic-based, percentage-based.”

Staff at participating provider, Specialist: Creative

A few providers felt that participating in TEF merely “coloured” rather than led the move towards a greater use of evidence in decision making. Some participating providers said that the key factor was a general trend towards increased use of data to make decisions, both within the HE sector and outside of it. This trend, they said, comes from increased data literacy and greater appreciation for the value of data-led decision making and evaluative practices. An example of this was a Medium Tariff provider that had not changed the data that they used in decision making, but had reworked how they talk about it to include TEF rating language (Gold, Silver, Bronze) to make it easier to think about. In a few cases, participating providers felt that, while the TEF did not encourage them to use evidence in planning interventions and policies, it did aid them in measuring their progress and trajectory after introducing the change.

Only one particularly negative view was expressed about the (lack of) impact of TEF on planning processes, which was that the data systems at that provider were more sophisticated and better than those offered through the TEF.

“What we had in place before was already far superior to what’s there [in TEF]. We have a very sophisticated data approach.”

Staff at participating provider, Low or Unknown Tariff

In general, FECs were slightly more positive than other providers about the way that the TEF 2023 had led them to be more evidence and data-informed while designing policy. A few FECs stated that it gave them access to live data that they would otherwise have been unable to access, with one noting that TEF data dashboards are a resource that they “actually use on a day-to-day basis.”

Amongst the couple of FECs that did not agree that the TEF had been positive in this regard, one felt that they had become more evidence-informed when designing interventions, but primarily as a result of Access and Participation Plans rather than the TEF. In this regard, regulatory frameworks and OfS work were still driving

positive change, with the TEF 2023 exercise situated as one pillar in this move towards a greater use of data and evidence in decision making.

“One thing that we've not been great at as an institution is... articulating what the strategy for improvement would be and monitoring the outcomes against that. So the Access and Participation plan has really embedded that at the front of our minds and we've got decent evaluation strategies going on, but that's not as a result of TEF.”

Staff at participating provider, Large Level 4/5

Student representatives were unaware of any change in use of evidence or data to inform decision making. A couple of student representatives felt that data processes had been improved but in relation to being able to submit to the next TEF exercise. Most student representatives were not aware of any changes in this regard, although they generally felt that this was due to a lack of awareness of change rather than being confident that nothing had changed.

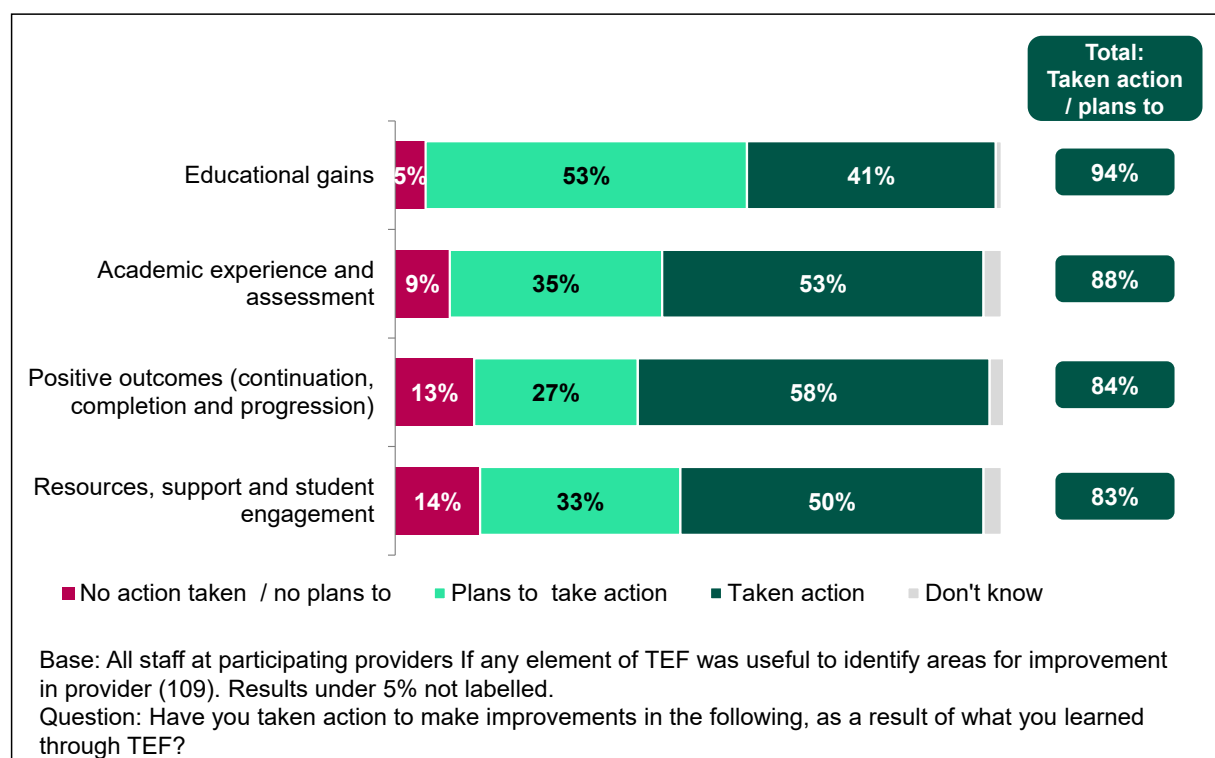
Actions taken because of the TEF 2023

Participating providers that used any of the core elements (compiling evidence, producing a provider submission, data dashboards, panel statements etc.) of the TEF 2023 to identify areas for improvement generally stated in the survey that they had acted, or planned to, as a result. Of staff at participating providers who had acted as a result of the TEF 2023 (76% of participating providers):

- 94% had either acted or planned to in the area of educational gains,
- 88% had acted in the area of academic experience and assessment,
- 84% had acted for positive outcomes, and
- 83% had acted for resources, support and student engagement.

Figure 8.3 breaks down these figures. Between two fifths and three fifths of these providers had already taken action in these areas due to the TEF 2023 process (41% for educational gains, 53% for academic experience and assessment, 58% for positive outcomes, and 50% for resources, support and student engagement).

Figure 8.3 Actions taken to make improvements because of what providers learned through the TEF¹⁶



Provider staff were also asked the level at which these actions were taken during the provider survey. In general, when these actions were taken, they were at a whole provider or strategic level (86%), rather than at individual course (6%) or individual department level (5%).

Despite the positive results in the survey, providers were not able to name a large number of different interventions, or plans for changes, directly resulting from engagement with the TEF 2023 during qualitative interviews. Some of the specific examples that providers were able to describe are set out here.

A couple of providers that received a Silver overall rating in the TEF 2023 had undertaken some concrete work to make changes to the educational gains that their students received as a result of their experiences at the university. This involved creating a working understanding of the term “educational gains” across the university and implementing measures to be able to understand their performance in this regard. New interventions were still at the planning stage, with policies being designed based upon more information developed through this work. Both felt that engaging with the TEF 2023 had encouraged them to reflect upon their educational gains and to consider their performance.

A couple of other providers also suggested that they had introduced plans to more tightly define the educational gains that they wanted their learners to benefit from.

“[We want to define] the kind of actual concrete gains you get from going through a three-year degree programme in a particular institution... the

¹⁶ These four areas of student experience and student outcomes were assessed as part of the TEF 2023, as set out in Regulatory Advice 22.

measurement is the challenge and of course the causalities here are very complicated."

Staff at participating provider, High Tariff

One Low or Unknown Tariff provider, rated Gold in the TEF 2023, gave a few clear examples of the effect that the TEF 2023 has had on the university in the form of policies or changes introduced. This included the replacement of a Virtual Learning Environment (VLE), the development of a new student skills programme, as well as an academic skills programme, and digitising monitoring and evaluation work. These specific policies were designed using benchmarking data to identify areas for improvement. This included deciding that they wanted to develop academic skills further. They also established, directly as a result of the TEF, a student performance indicators group that meets every three weeks and evaluates ongoing student data.

"The Student Success Programme is the kind of umbrella for lots of different activity directed at improving our student outcomes... It was reflecting on the data sets and owning the institutional data and performance [that inspired it]."

Staff at participating provider, Low or Unknown Tariff

One provider also highlighted that some changes had been made around sharing good practice as a result of the TEF exercise, with a new policy towards creating more away days and opportunities in which it was easy to share examples of good practice across the university.

"There was an emphasis on moving away from just looking at the bad, to having away days and looking at good and bad practice. One motivation was to drive up performance and the other was to share good practice."

Staff at participating provider, Low or Unknown Tariff

Some participating providers had made changes relating to how they manage assessment and had developed new assessment strategies that will be matched to the TEF features of excellence.

"You know, helping students recognise and develop skills grades within the curriculum and extra-curricula, and then that piece around kind of assessment and actually feedback to students as well, because that's all part of assessment."

Staff at participating provider, High Tariff

At one participating provider, a member of staff felt that they had used the TEF 2023 to help galvanise the development of a "musculature" to support student experience and outcomes. This musculature covered prioritising recruiting strategic staff who could drive performance forwards, as well as in creating data analysis structures to support these processes. All of this work was pushed forwards by a reflection on their overall TEF rating (Silver) and creating a RAG rating system of analysing all the elements of their performance within the TEF 2023, and deciding that they wanted to improve their performance relating to student experience and outcomes.

"It does help push the levers towards the student experience as opposed to just privileging research. "

Staff at participating provider, High Tariff

There were no examples of providers that felt that they had been hindered from making changes to improve their delivery outside of simply feeling that their time could have been spent better elsewhere, which was broadly expressed by a few providers.

In general, most providers appear to be at the stage of being informed, influenced or inspired to improve by their experiences with the TEF 2023. More are designing plans for change, rather than at the point of introducing changes. However, some providers have made changes, and discussions with provider staff at participating providers suggested that others may do in the near future.

Most student representatives were not aware of changes implemented to improve performance relating to student experience and outcomes that could be attributed to the TEF 2023 exercise. A few students had seen changes but felt that this was more to do with ongoing drives to improve performance. For example, one student representative had seen a new Vice-Chancellor come into their provider who had renewed focus on these elements.

A few student representatives had seen changes at their provider that had been driven by the TEF. The most notable of these examples was at a provider that had introduced a new department focused on student life, directly driven by awareness about areas for improvement relating to student experience which had been highlighted by their performance in the TEF 2023. At this provider, their outcome in the student experience aspect was lower than their previous overall outcome. Another provider had introduced measures to improve access to the campus for students with disabilities, which had been driven by feedback in their detailed panel statement. One student representative shared that after receiving a Silver outcome relating to student outcomes, their provider introduced changes to their career support services:

“There was a push towards improving students’ outcomes after receiving Silver and an acknowledgement that there should be better career support, so some career masterclasses were run following TEF 2023.”

Student at participating provider, Specialist: Creative

Other changes ascribed to the TEF 2023 by student representatives were described vaguely, with students citing a lack of knowledge about the link between the TEF and these changes.

A couple of student representatives had used performance in the TEF 2023 exercise to campaign for improvements relating to student experience and outcomes, and they felt this had been successful. This included more lighting on campus for safety, more women-only spaces, consideration of employability indicators and ways to improve this for students, changes in the way that student feedback is taken into account, and increased structure in teaching methods.

Other consequences

Most participating providers did not report any unexpected consequences in the interviews. In line with this, in the survey, only 9% of providers said they experienced unexpected consequences to the TEF 2023 exercise, compared with 80% that did not. There were no significant differences in these figures between different sub-groups of providers.

A few providers commented on unexpected consequences of the outcomes for a provider’s reputation. For example, one provider noted that their Gold overall rating

provided a boost to staff morale. On the other hand, another provider expressed concerns at the way a Bronze overall rating might be interpreted from outside the sector. A couple of providers were also keen to stress that the Bronze category signifying excellence was not necessarily obvious to people who are not as close to the TEF scheme and might expect it to signify below-par performance.

“Even though Bronze represents excellence, does it suggest that to a student? It might suggest that they're below being Gold quite significantly, so unintended consequences for the sector is that it doesn't actually show excellence to a person coming across this system.”

Staff at participating provider, Low or Unknown Tariff

A member of staff at another participating provider noted a lack of clarity about how different regulations marry up (e.g. B3, Access and Participation Plans) with the TEF, especially around financial matters (e.g. tuition fee uplift). This member of staff felt that the OfS needed to do a better job of explaining this. This member of staff was overall positive about the TEF but described themselves as an “engaged advocate” for the TEF who is happy to point out areas for potential improvement. They felt that the way that core regulations and frameworks designed by the OfS interact was currently “muddy”.

Another specific change that was not intended to be a consequence of the TEF, which was mentioned by one provider, was increasing the proportion of staff who have the professional recognition of the Fellowship of the Higher Education Academy (FHEA) through Advance HE. This was despite the provider feeling that artistic quality is very important as educators, which is not part of FHEA. However, they felt that professional recognition was a major consideration for the TEF panel so are aiming to increase the proportion of staff who have their FHEA for the next TEF cycle.

“Now we are cracking the whip across the whole team... You must get your FHEA by the next TEF application or else! That's not how I want to work with my team but it's literally the only thing that I feel able to do.”

Staff at participating provider, Specialist: Creative

Student representatives were generally not aware of any unexpected consequences. One student mentioned that their provider had been going through a difficult period and that their positive overall outcome had provided a well-timed morale boost for staff.

9 Conclusions

What are the overall views about the TEF 2023 exercise?

The overall picture relating to the TEF 2023 exercise is positive. Across the spectrum of providers, opinions generally range from neutral to positive although a relatively small number of providers felt that the TEF has had a negative impact upon their provider. The more negative views focused on a perceived imbalance between the burden of participating in the exercise and the impacts derived from it.

Most providers were satisfied with the outcomes that they received.

How effective is TEF guidance and support?

The guidance and support around the processes of the TEF that were provided by the OfS were received well by providers. Broadly speaking, the guidance was felt to be clear, relatively concise, and helpful, and OfS staff who were contacted were praised for the support that they offered.

The templates provided by the OfS to guide submissions were felt by some providers to be too vague overall and could be improved: although the intention was to afford flexibility, these providers felt that it made it hard to know what to include or where to start, particularly for those who are less confident in the submission or who are less experienced in TEF submissions. Another suggestion from providers in this regard was the provision of examples of provider and student submissions to help guide structures and thinking.

Another area in which guidance and support was criticised by a few providers related to educational gains. While some providers acknowledged positive elements around not defining this concept too tightly, which offered flexibility in a varied sector, others felt that it made addressing it difficult. A few providers felt that it would be easier to define educational gains and provide evidence of their provision in this area in future TEF cycles now that there has been some experience in the sector in writing provider submissions that address the concept.

How did provider staff and students find the process of participating in the TEF 2023 exercise?

The most common challenge faced during the process of submitting to the TEF 2023 cycle related to staff and student time. Perceptions that the TEF was a burdensome exercise were fairly commonplace across providers of all shapes and sizes. For some providers, the use of external consultants to aid with the submission process was worthwhile and was felt to be a driver of positive submission experiences, including writing the provider submission, albeit at a financial cost.

Providers that had participated in previous TEF exercises were less likely to have encountered any issues with the process of submitting to the TEF 2023.

TEF data dashboards were positively received by providers, with most feeling that they were of value when producing submissions. While some issues around ease of use were noted, they were relatively infrequent.

Staff and students found the process of participating in the TEF 2023 exercise to be burdensome. For most providers the burden involved was worthwhile for the impacts that resulted from the work.

Despite the value derived from TEF 2023 processes, working with providers to understand their timescales, schedules and timings may help to alleviate workload concerns and pinch-points in workflows. This would also allow student sabbatical officers more time to come into post and become accustomed to the role before working on the TEF student submission.

Providers felt that, at the very least, expected timeframes could be communicated further out from the submission date to allow staff and students to plan their workloads and timetables accordingly.

Around half of all provider staff felt that the TEF 2023 exercise empowered the student voice but around half did not. The extent of this impact was mixed, with some providers changing their processes for incorporating student viewpoints markedly due to the TEF 2023 exercise, while for others the impact was mixed or low. **For High Tariff providers, the impact was more likely to be low, while for Medium or Low Tariff providers it was more likely to have had a relatively large impact in galvanising mechanisms for capturing and listening to the student voice.** Overall, few staff at providers viewed the TEF 2023 exercise and its influence on the relevance of the student voice negatively, although some felt fairly neutral about its role.

There were no concerns around the timing of the delivery of outcomes, except for one provider that made a representation feeling that their outcome being 'pending' at the time of publication had negative connotations.

Overall, providers had mixed views about whether the TEF panel was a credible body for assessing student experience and outcomes. Providers that were satisfied with their outcomes in the TEF 2023 exercise tended to praise the process and efficacy of the panel. Criticism generally related to perceptions that the outcomes and assessment processes were lacking in transparency, or that there were some inconsistencies in judgements between different providers.

The panel was felt to be appropriately composed overall, with very few providers, usually smaller or more specialised providers, feeling that it did not reflect the full breadth of the sector, or that they were unsure whether it did or not. Other providers felt that the panel was fair, reasonable, and came to judgements in ways that took into account the contexts of providers.

On the whole, in the quantitative survey, 60% of staff at participating providers agreed that the TEF 2023 framework was appropriate for the assessment of student experience and student outcomes, and 17% disagreed (23% neither agreed nor disagreed).

The representation process was viewed positively, although the outcomes received from them were not viewed consistently positively. Some providers felt that the rationale provided for the outcome of their representation was lacking in specificity, making it difficult to use to drive positive change.

For providers that chose to take part, decisions around whether to take part tended to focus on a desire to improve provision, reputational considerations and workload. Those that chose to participate generally did so as they either felt that it was reputationally important to do so or because they felt that it may help them to improve their performance.

Providers that were able to participate voluntarily and decided not to participate, generally felt that they could not fit it into staff workloads in the timeframes required, or that it was not worth the resource cost of submitting.

Is the TEF making excellent student experience and outcomes matter to providers?

The TEF seeks to incentivise providers to deliver an excellent student experience and student outcomes. For it to do this, providers need to care about the reputational or financial outcomes of doing well or badly in the TEF, the implication being that if they care they will give greater focus to areas covered by the framework.

Most providers considered the reputational impact of the TEF of greater importance than the financial, but their view of reputational impact often extended to the potential impact on student recruitment and therefore indirectly to financial impact.

Access to the tuition fee uplift was a concern for a minority of providers, as most were confident of receiving a Bronze or higher overall rating. In a few cases, the tuition fee uplift was a primary reason voluntary providers chose to take part in the TEF.

Views about whether the TEF 2023 exercise had raised the value of student experience and outcomes for providers were mixed, including its standing relative to other priorities for providers. The most common view was that it had complemented existing pushes towards improving student experience and outcomes, rather than acting as the main incentive for excellent delivery. A few provider staff felt that they had seen little impact from the TEF 2023 exercise in this regard. Most student representatives had seen positive changes relating to the regard for delivery of excellent student experience and outcomes since the TEF 2023 exercise, although the attribution of this change to the TEF was difficult for most to make.

The TEF 2023 exercise followed other TEF exercises and operated within a mix of different factors that incentivise excellent student experience and outcomes. Previous reviews of TEF exercises showed that other iterations of the TEF had been successful, at least to some extent, in making excellent student experience and outcomes matter to providers. This context may, in part, explain a more limited scope for the 2023 iteration of the TEF to have an impact in this regard.

Providers generally agreed that the potential reputational impacts of the TEF 2023 exercise were important to them and that they incentivised excellent delivery of student experience and outcomes. This was partly because they could lead to financial impacts due to effects on student recruitment (positive or negative).

There is more limited evidence that the tuition fee uplift acts as an effective incentive for the delivery of excellent student experience and outcomes delivery. In some cases, provider staff reported being confident that they would achieve at least a Bronze overall outcome and so were not worried about potential limitations on their fee-charging status. In a few cases, however, tuition fee uplift was a primary reason voluntary providers chose to take part in the TEF so it is potentially having some effect.

The TEF 2023 exercise has not universally changed the value placed on student experience and outcomes by providers but it has increased the value placed on them at some providers. For others it had made little difference, and for others it had provided renewed impetus to make changes that were already in train before the TEF 2023 exercise. In the main, views were either positive or neutral in this regard.

What is the role of the TEF in driving continuous improvement and excellence in student experience and outcomes?

The TEF 2023 exercise has been positive in terms of enabling many providers to identify areas of strength and weakness in their performance. While this was not universal, it did cross all types of provider. The mechanisms through which this was primarily felt to have occurred were that the process offered a moment to reflect, the data dashboards provided data that could be used to analyse performance, and the panel statements were used by some providers to identify areas of excellence or for potential improvement. **Low or Unknown Tariff providers were particularly positive about this outcome of the TEF.** A small number of providers did not feel that the TEF had helped them to understand areas for potential improvement on its own, but for many providers it proved to be a useful exercise in contributing to their understanding of their strengths and weaknesses.

Most providers felt that panel statements were fair, detailed, and produced to a high quality, although a couple of providers felt that they were not fit for purpose. The two providers that were negative about the panel statements both felt aggrieved at their overall outcome and suggested that the rationale in the statements did not fit the guidance set out by the OfS. **Panel statements were used to varying degrees in provider decision making and policy design,** with examples existing of providers methodically going through each element of the statements to analyse their performance, and some providers having found them to be almost irrelevant. There was a roughly even split between provider staff who felt that panel statements could be used to drive policy design and those who felt that they could not.

The TEF 2023 exercise encouraged many providers to share good practice within providers, and in some cases across different providers. Mechanisms through which this occurred included development of CPD offerings, sharing findings at board meetings, or events being designed specifically to share examples of good practice identified in the TEF 2023 exercise, as well as through conferences and external coverage in sectoral publications.

One particularly positive and widespread outcome of the TEF 2023 exercise was that it has driven providers to make decisions in a more evidence-led manner. This was particularly true for FECs, with some FECs feeling that engagement with the TEF had been integral to them being able to access the data that they need to make effective decisions. Some other providers felt that they were becoming more evidence-led and data-literate, but that this was due to other factors in the sector, including Access and Participation Plans.

The policies and interventions introduced because of the TEF 2023 exercise are still somewhat limited. As this is an early impact evaluation, conducted relatively soon after the publication of TEF 2023 outcomes, this should not be a surprise, although some specific examples of changes brought in to deliver excellent student experience and outcomes were provided. A few providers also felt that the TEF 2023 exercise had made introducing policies aimed to improve student experience and outcomes easier. A few student representatives had also successfully lobbied for changes.

Overall, providers tended to fall within three groups. The smallest group included providers that had introduced changes and policies as a result of the TEF 2023 exercise. One of the two larger groups was providers that have made no changes. The other larger group of providers had been influenced by the TEF 2023 towards

making changes or had changed the way that they plan for and evaluate changes, but had not yet made any direct policy interventions.

Overall conclusions

Overall, the TEF 2023 exercise has been received relatively well from a process side and has shown early signs of meeting its objectives in terms of impacts for at least some providers. From the perspective of staff and students at providers, processes could be tightened up but overall run relatively well. The outcomes broadly range from relatively modest or minimal through to much larger and more important, rather than beginning at the negative end. Impacts are still unfolding but overall look positive.

Positively too, while there is variance in the picture across different provider types, in the main the reception of each element of the TEF is primarily positive in different settings, contexts, and at different providers. **Smaller or more specialist providers were overall more likely to want more support for the process, and more likely to derive benefits from the data dashboards and panel statements. As a result, it was these types of providers that were most likely to encounter difficulties during submission, but most likely to learn about their performance and to develop evidence-led approaches to policy formulation as a result.**

Across the full spectrum of provider types, there is emerging evidence of positive outcomes from the TEF 2023 exercise. Positive outcomes include a sense that, overall, the TEF 2023 has contributed to empowering students, encouraging providers to be more evidence-led, encouraging sharing of good practice within and to some degree between providers, and in identifying areas for potential improvement. None of these positive impacts were felt uniformly across the sector. Where positive outcomes are lacking it tended not to be based upon the type of provider, but more related to their maturity in terms of collecting data and using evidence to inform policy decisions: those that require less support in this regard see fewer benefits arising from the TEF. **Despite these positive impacts, a relatively small number of providers had introduced specific interventions because of the TEF, although as an early impact evaluation these changes may begin to surface more over time.**

10 Appendices

Appendix A: Glossary

Table 10.1 Glossary

Term	Definition
Benchmarking	<p>Benchmarking is the method used by the OfS to take account of the mix of courses and students at a provider and indicate how well that provider has performed compared with performance for similar types of students on similar types of courses in the HE sector as a whole. Benchmarks are produced for each provider's indicators and split indicators based on the characteristics of courses and students that were selected as benchmarking factors.</p> <p>The benchmark therefore represents the performance of similar types of students on similar types of courses to that of the provider being benchmarked.</p> <p>This approach means that a provider is not compared with a pre-set group of providers, but rather compared with the outcomes of similar students across the entirety of the HE sector.</p>
Data dashboards	<p>The TEF data dashboards were published in September 2022 and informed the assessment of providers in the TEF 2023 exercise. The data dashboards show the measures of student experience, continuation, completion and progression outcomes for each provider. The benchmarks shown in the data dashboards indicate how well a provider has performed for its mix of students and courses, compared with performance for similar types of students on similar types of courses in the higher education sector as a whole.</p>
Educational gains	<p>In the 2023 TEF exercise, the OfS asked providers to set out what 'educational gains' they intend their students to achieve, how they support students to achieve them, and what evidence they have that students are succeeding in achieving these. Educational gains go beyond the measures of continuation, completion and progression also used in the TEF, and extend into areas such as knowledge, skills, personal development, and work readiness.</p>

Term	Definition
Further Education Colleges (FECs)	FECs are providers that have more than 50% FTE students at Level 4 or 5, regardless of size. This is a typology used for analysis in this report that is a composite of the two Level 4/5 provider types used in the OfS's student typology of providers.
Other Higher Education Providers (HEPs)	Other HEPs are providers that have less than 50% FTE students at Level 4 or 5. This is a typology used for analysis in this report that is a composite of the non-Level 4/5 provider types used in the OfS's student typology of providers.
High Tariff provider	Provider with less than 90% FTE students at Level 7+, has less than 75% FTE in one subject area or less than 90% in two subject areas. High Tariff providers are the top third of providers in this group when mean provider tariff score is used to order them. This is one of the typologies in the OfS's student typology of providers.
Large Level 4/5 provider	Provider with more than 300 FTE students at Level 4 or 5, that make up over 50% of its total student body. This is one of the typologies in the OfS's student typology of providers.
Low or Unknown Tariff provider	Provider with less than 90% FTE students at Level 7+, has less than 75% FTE in one subject area or less than 90% in two subject areas. Low or Unknown Tariff providers are the bottom third of providers in this group when mean provider tariff score is used to order them, or those for which mean tariff is unknown. This is one of the typologies in the OfS's student typology of providers.
Medium Tariff provider	Provider with less than 90% FTE students at Level 7+, has less than 75% FTE in one subject area or less than 90% in two subject areas. Medium Tariff providers are the middle third of providers in this group when mean provider tariff score is used to order them. This is one of the typologies in the OfS's student typology of providers.
Panel statements	Each provider received a written panel statement setting out the TEF panel's reasoning for its rating decisions. This included a rationale for each aspect rating and the rationale for the overall rating a provider received.

Term	Definition
Provider submissions	The provider submission is the evidence submitted by the provider for consideration by the TEF panel. The provider submission can be up to 25 pages in length.
Provider student typology	The OfS developed two typologies of providers that seek to allow users of their data to understand the patterns across the sector and for providers with similar characteristics. The student typology has been used throughout this report to compare providers of similar characteristics, in recognition of the diversity of the HE sector.
Regulatory advice 22	<p>The OfS's published guidance for the TEF exercise that ran in 2022-23 (referred to as the TEF 2023). It set out guidance on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the assessment framework, including what was assessed in the TEF and what the possible outcomes were • which HEPs were able to or had to take part in the TEF • the timetable for implementation and publishing outcomes • the evidence required for submission by participating providers • the TEF indicators produced by the OfS, that also informed the assessments • how the TEF panel needed to carry out the assessments.
Representations	Providers were able to make a representation if they felt that either the panel judgement did not appropriately reflect the original evidence that was available to the panel when making their provisional decision or if there were any factual inaccuracies in the panel statement. Providers had 28 days following receipt of the provisional rating decisions letter to make a representation.
Small Level 4/5 provider	Provider with less than 300 FTE students at Level 4 or 5, that make up over 50% of its total student body. This is one of the typologies in the OfS's student typology of providers.
Specialist: creative provider	Provider with 75% or more FTE students in one subject area or 90% or more FTE students in two subject areas, with the main subject areas being the creative arts. This is one of the typologies in the OfS's student typology of providers.

Term	Definition
Specialist: Other provider	Provider with 75% or more FTE students in one subject area or 90% or more FTE students in two subject areas. This is one of the typologies in the OfS's student typology of providers.
The NSS	The NSS is a UK survey for final year, undergraduate students to give feedback on their higher education experience. The NSS is managed by the OfS on behalf of the UK funding and regulatory bodies – the Department for the Economy (Northern Ireland), the Scottish Funding Council and the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales. The TEF uses NSS data as the basis for some of its indicators.
The OfS	The OfS is a non-departmental public body of the Department for Education, acting as the regulator and competition authority for the higher education sector in England. The TEF process is managed by the OfS.
Specialist provider	Specialist providers are those with at least 75% of total FTE students in one subject area or at least 90% of total FTE students in no more than two subject areas. This is a typology used for analysis in this report that is a composite of the two specialist provider types used in the OfS's student typology of providers.
Student representative	Current or former student who was either the student contact for a provider during the TEF 2023, or a student who would theoretically fill that position since that time.
Student submissions	The student submission is an independent, optional submission made by students at the provider for consideration by the TEF panel.
The TEF	The TEF is a scheme run by the OfS that aims to encourage HEPs in England to improve and deliver excellence in teaching, learning and student outcomes. The TEF does this by assessing and rating the extent to which a provider delivers an excellent student experience and outcomes above a set of minimum requirements for quality, for its mix of undergraduate students and courses.
TEF main contact	Nominated OfS contact for an institution who oversaw the provider submission process, and

Term	Definition
	who the OfS contacted for operational matters relating to participation in the TEF.
TEF student contact	Nominated student contact for an institution who oversaw the student submission process and who the OfS contacted for operational matters relating to the student submission element of the TEF.
TEF indicators	The TEF indicators are a set of measures that are produced consistently for all OfS-registered providers. They are used in the TEF assessment, as one part of the evidence considered by the TEF panel alongside the evidence in submissions, as well as for ongoing enhancement for the sector. They include measures of the student experience, and continuation, completion and progression outcomes.

Appendix B: Theory of Change

Figure 10.1 Theory of Change

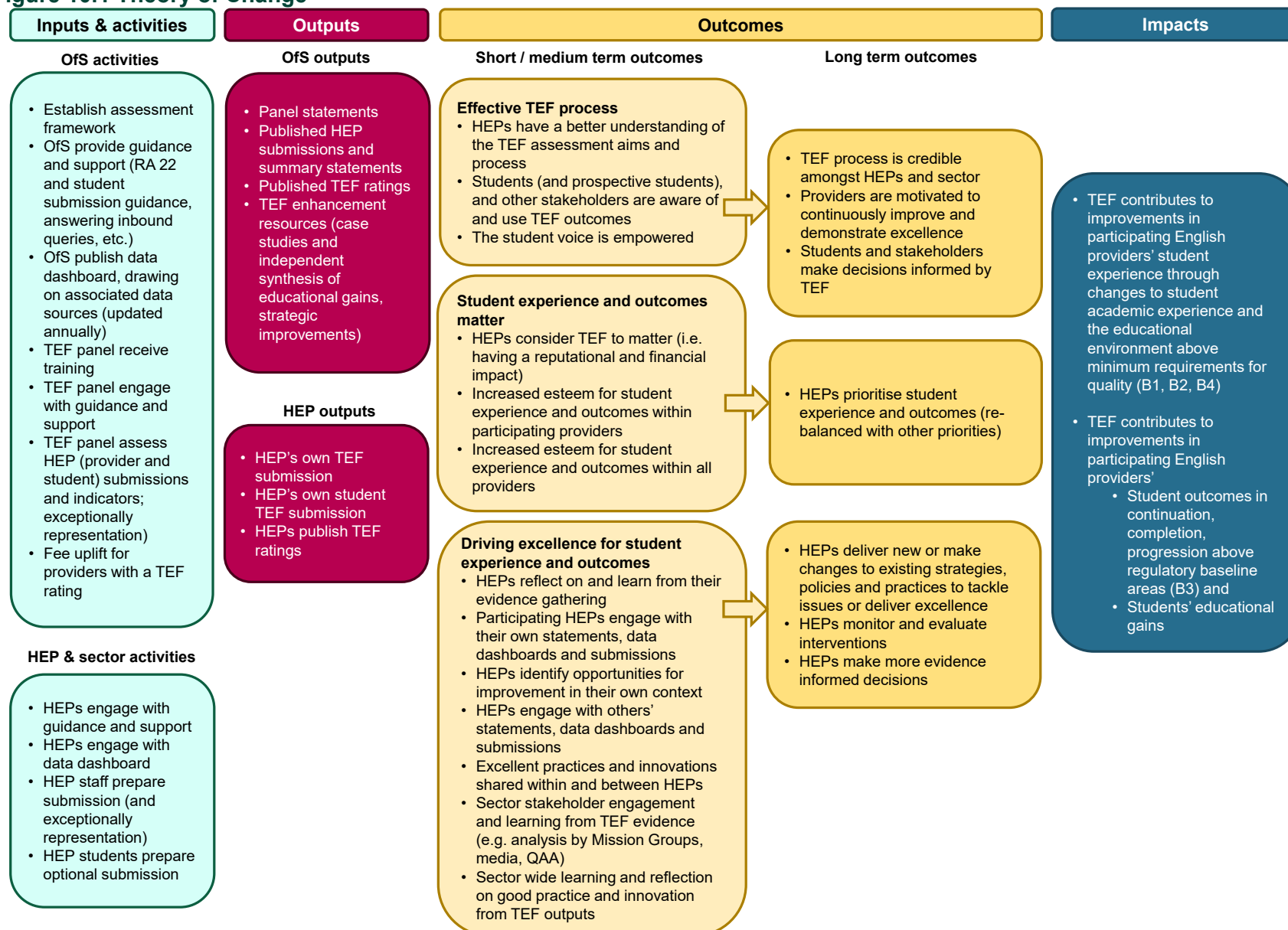


Figure 10.2 Assumptions underpinning the Theory of Change

Assumptions:

- RA22 delivers clear TEF assessment framework and provider submission process guidance and support
- OfS guidance and provider evidence gathering exercise makes for strong and credible provider (and student) submissions
- Panel statements and summaries provide a detailed explanation of the rationale for the ratings that supports providers to identify improvements
- Panel decisions are credible
- OfS guidance and sector engagement leads to confidence in process / credibility of assessment decisions
- Providers have sufficient resources / skills / capacity to create strong submissions
- Sector has requisite motivation to participate fully in TEF process
- Improvements are equitable, drive positive outcomes for all, and do not negatively affect equal opportunities
- Different HEPs are incentivised differently to participate or not participate in TEF (when participation is voluntary)
- Provider learnt something (from their TEF participation) that causes them to change approach (identifies own issue or excellent practice elsewhere)
- Panel feedback is especially pivotal in providers' learning for providers who had weaker ability to assess their own performance in their submissions
- HEPs have credible intervention strategies, policies and practices informed by evidence and good practice learning
- Data dashboard gives new insights for providers to their student experience and outcomes performance

Appendix C: Methodological Detail

This appendix will provide further details on the methodology underpinning this evaluation and is intended to expand upon, but not replicate, the contents in the Methodology chapter.

Realist evaluation approach

As mentioned in the Methodology chapter of this report, this evaluation was designed according to the UK Government's Magenta Book's outline of a realist evaluation.

The Theory of Change that was developed in collaboration with the OfS is included in Appendix B and was developed according to the principles that underpin such a realist evaluation approach. Through the redesign work of the Theory of Change, assumptions and theoretical statements were incorporated in earlier drafts to ensure that this approach was followed throughout the evaluation, for example *"RA22 delivers clear TEF submission provider process guidance and support OfS guidance and evidence gathering exercise makes for strong and credible provider (and student) submissions."*

These theoretical statements were subsequently removed during redrafting with the OfS, to ensure that the Theory of Change was accessible and digestible in the report. However, analysis has still been conducted around these statements and the logic of them is still retained in the Theory of Change. In doing so, we are seeing how context affects the outcomes of participating in TEF (i.e. what works, for whom, in what respects, to what extent, in what contexts, and how?).

The report itself is driven by the evaluation questions (as seen in Table 2.1 in the Introduction chapter) as agreed with OfS and is informed throughout by the realist approach at each step.

Qualitative interviews

Interviews were conducted with 44 members of staff at participating providers, 20 student representatives at participating providers, and eight staff at non-participating providers. Breakdowns of these interviews can be found in Table 10.2 below.

The topic of these interviews broadly covered the following:

- The context of the respondent and their provider (all interviews)
- Deciding on whether to submit to the TEF 2023 exercise (voluntary participating providers and non-participating providers)
- Preparing a TEF submission (participating providers, students who produced a TEF submission)
- Understanding of the TEF 2023 exercise (students who did not produce a TEF submission)
- Views on the TEF assessment process (participating providers)
- Perceptions of outcomes of the TEF 2023 exercise on providers and the sector (all interviews)

Table 10.2 below provides a breakdown of the conducted qualitative interviews by key provider characteristics. We have not provided a breakdown by overall TEF 2023 rating

as it could be identifying given the small numbers of providers receiving Requires Improvement outcomes and smaller overall base sizes.

Table 10.2 Qualitative interviews by provider characteristics

Student typology	Participating provider interviews	Non-participating provider interviews	Total provider staff interviews	Student interviews
High tariff	6	0	6	3
Medium tariff	8	0	8	2
Low or Unknown Tariff	15	0	15	6
Large level 4/5	8	2	10	2
Small level 4/5	1	2	3	1
Specialist: Creative	5	1	6	5
Specialist: Other	1	3	4	1
Total	44	8	52	20
TEF eligibility status	Participating provider interviews	Non-participating provider interviews	Total provider staff interviews	Student interviews
Mandatory participation	37	N/A	37	15
Optional participation	7	8	15	5
Total	44	8	52	20
Provider type	Participating provider interviews	Non-participating provider interviews	Total provider staff interviews	Student interviews
FEC	9	4	13	2
Other HEP (not FEC)	35	4	39	18
Total	44	8	52	20
Region	Participating provider interviews	Non-participating provider interviews	Total provider staff interviews	Student interviews
East Midlands	4	0	4	1
East of England	2	0	2	2
London	9	3	12	7
North East	4	0	4	0
North West	6	1	7	1
South East	3	3	6	3

South West	6	0	6	4
West Midlands	3	0	3	1
Yorkshire and the Humber	7	1	8	1
Total	44	8	52	20

Online survey

All 410 TEF-eligible HE providers were invited to complete the survey if contact details were held by the OfS. The provider's TEF contact and any relevant strategic roles were invited to take part with contact details sourced using OfS lists. We also asked provider staff to share the link with relevant colleagues, and received some contact details through provider staff providing contact details of colleagues who had agreed to take part. The survey was an attempted census of all 410 TEF-eligible HE providers and a profile of those that took part can be found in the table below. In total 579 provider staff members were invited to complete the survey. A total of 129 members of staff took part in the survey, across a total of 116 individual TEF-eligible HE providers.

The online questionnaire was developed in close collaboration with the OfS and was designed around the key evaluation objectives. The survey centred around semantic scales to capture the extent to which the TEF process was effective in terms of submission, the usefulness of the TEF data dashboards (and supporting materials) and panel statements as well as the degree to which staff perceived a change in student experience and outcomes because of TEF participation.

Because staff may have moved between different providers from the submission point to the time of the survey, all data collected about the submission process was aligned with the provider they worked for at the time of submission, and all data collected about impacts was aligned with their current provider. Each member of staff was asked to confirm the provider that they worked at during the submission process as well as at the time of the survey through questions included within the survey.

The survey broadly covered the following topic areas, with some questions only asked of providers that participated in the TEF 2023 exercise:

- Decision making around whether to participate in the TEF 2023 exercise (all submission providers)
- The process of producing a submission (participating submission providers)
- Views on the support and guidance provided by the OfS (participating submission providers)
- Views on the optional student submission (participating submission providers)
- Early impacts within the staff member's current provider, including to assess current performance and design policies and interventions, as well as the level in the provider at which these decisions were taken (participating current providers)
- Likelihood to participate in future TEF exercises (non-participating current providers)

- Use of TEF resources to make changes ahead of the next TEF cycle (non-participating current providers)
- Influence of TEF resources in monitoring and evaluation of performance at providers (all current providers)
- Cost questions (participating submission providers)

Data about the providers was read into the survey data from OfS's database of provider information.

A breakdown of survey completions is shown in Table 10.3, focusing on the provider that the staff worked for at the time of submission. Each reflects a response to the survey, and each provider (116 represented) could have more than one response (129 total).

Table 10.3 Provider survey responses by HEP characteristics at the time of submission

Student typology	Participating provider responses	Non-participating provider responses	Total
High tariff	10	0	10
Medium tariff	25	0	25
Low or Unknown Tariff	37	1	38
Large level 4/5	22	5	27
Small level 4/5	2	10	12
Specialist: Creative	9	2	11
Specialist: Other	5	1	6
Total	110	19	129
TEF eligibility status	Participating provider responses	Non-participating provider responses	Total
Mandatory participation	102	N/A	102
Optional participation	8	19	27
Total	110	19	129
Provider type	Participating provider responses	Non-participating provider responses	Total
FEC	26	14	40
Other HEP (not FEC)	84	5	89
Total	110	19	129
Overall TEF 2023 outcome	Participating provider responses	Non-participating provider responses	Total
Gold	29	N/A	29
Silver	67	N/A	67
Bronze	13	N/A	13
Requires Improvement	1	N/A	1
Did not participate	N/A	19	19
Total	110	19	129

Region	Participating provider responses	Non-participating provider responses	Total
East Midlands	8	0	8
East of England	7	1	8
London	19	5	24
North East	10	0	10
North West	12	4	16
South East	17	5	22
South West	15	1	16
West Midlands	8	1	9
Yorkshire and the Humber	14	2	16
Total	110	19	129

Appendix D: Provider survey

Landing page

SHOW TO ALL

TEF 2023 Evaluation: Provider Survey

Thank you for your interest in the TEF 2023 Provider survey, which is being administered by IFF Research on behalf of the Office for Students (OfS). This survey is part of the wider TEF 2023 Evaluation, which will allow the OfS to understand the effectiveness of the TEF submission and assessment processes, and early impact of TEF 2023 in providers between 2021-24.

IF PARTICIPATING PROVIDER [SAMVAR_TEF_PARTICIPATION=1: This survey explores your views and experiences of submitting to TEF 2023 and any early impacts it may have had within your institution.

IF NON-PARTICIPATING PROVIDER [SAMVAR_TEF_PARTICIPATION=2]: This survey explores your views on TEF 2023 as well as any early impacts it may have had on your institution. We are aware that your institution did not participate in TEF 2023, but we would still like to hear about your views.

IF OPEN LINK: This survey explores your views on the TEF 2023 and any impacts it may have had on your institution. We are interested in your views irrespective of whether your institution participated in the TEF 2023 exercise.

SHOW TO ALL

We welcome your participation in the survey – your views will help to refine the way the TEF works going forwards.

The results of this survey will be fed back to the OfS in an aggregate form, meaning that neither you nor your provider will be identified in any reporting. No individual or institution will be personally identified as a result of having participated in the survey.

For more information about the way that your data will be stored and used, as well as your rights relating to privacy and data protection, please see the Privacy Policy for this research here: www.iffresearch.com/ic/docz/13156/PrivacyNotice.htm

If you have any questions you can contact Luke Catterson or Daisy Woods at IFF Research via email at TEF2023evaluation@iffresearch.com or by calling 0207 250 3035, or you can ask the OfS team at tef@officeforstudents.org.uk.

The survey will take no more than 15 minutes to complete. To continue, please click 'NEXT'.

S Screener

S1Dum SAMPLE VARIABLES (for use in survey routing / text substitutions – other data will be read in for analysis)		
SAMVAR_PROVIDER	Provider name from sample	1
SAMVAR_PROVIDER TYPE	HEP	1
	FEC	2
SAMVAR_TEF_ELIGIBILITY	Mandatory	1
	Optional	2
SAMVAR_TEF_PARTICIPATION	Participated	1
	Did not participate	2
SAMVAR_TEF_OVERALL_RATING	Gold	1
	Silver	2
	Bronze	3
	Requires Improvement	4
SAMVAR_REGISTRATION_CATEGORY	Approved (fee cap)	1
	Approved	2

SHOW TO ALL

First, we would like to ask some questions about your provider.

IF SAMPLED

S2 **Please could you confirm that you work at [Samvar_Provider]?**

Yes	1	
No	2	

IF OPEN LINK OR DON'T WORK AT PROVIDER ON SAMPLE [OPEN LINK OR S2=2]

S3 **Please could you confirm the provider that you work for?**

DS – INSERT DROPDOWN LIST OF INSTITUTION NAMES. PLEASE UPDATE SAMPLE VARIABLES BASED ON THIS ANSWER.

DON'T KNOW OPTION – ROUTE OUT: “Thank you for your time, however we are looking to speak to respondents working at the providers in the dropdown list provided.”

ASK ALL

- S4 **Did you work at [IF S2=1; Samvar_Provider; IF S2=2; PROVIDER GIVEN AT S3] while the TEF 2023 submission was being prepared and submitted?**

Yes	1	GO TO SECTION A
No	2	

IF MOVED PROVIDER SINCE TEF 2023 SUBMISSION [S4=2]

- S5 **Which provider were you working at while the TEF 2023 submission was being prepared and submitted?**

DS – INSERT DROPDOWN LIST OF INSTITUTION NAMES AND OPTION FOR “I WAS NOT WORKING AT A PROVIDER DURING THE TEF 2023 SUBMISSION PROCESS”

IF S5=“I WAS NOT WORKING AT A PROVIDER DURING THE TEF 2023 SUBMISSION PROCESS” screen out: “Many thanks for your time, however we are looking to speak to respondents who were working at a provider during the TEF 2023 submission process.”

S5Dum PROVIDER DETAILS			
CURRENT_PROVIDER	[IF S2=1] PROVIDER NAME FROM SAMPLE		
	[IF S2=2] PROVIDER NAME FROM S3		
SUBMISSION_PROVIDER	[IF S4=1] CURRENT_PROVIDER		
	[IF S4=2] PROVIDER NAME FROM S5		
SUBMISSION_PROVIDER_TYPE	HEP	1	From SUBMISSION_PROVIDER_TYPE data
	FEC	2	
CURRENT_TEF_ELIGIBILITY	Mandatory	1	From CURRENT_PROVIDER data
	Optional	2	
	Mandatory	1	

SUBMISSION_TEF_ELIGIBILITY	Optional	2	From SUBMISSION_PROVIDER data
CURRENT_TEF_PARTICIPATION	Participated	1	From CURRENT_PROVIDER data
	Did not participate	2	
SUBMISSION_TEF_PARTICIPATION	Participated	1	From SUBMISSION_PROVIDER data
	Did not participate	2	
CURRENT_TEF_OVERALL_RATING	Gold	1	From CURRENT_PROVIDER data
	Silver	2	
	Bronze	3	
	Requires Improvement	4	
SUBMISSION_TEF_OVERALL_RATING	Gold	1	From SUBMISSION_PROVIDER data
	Silver	2	
	Bronze	3	
	Requires Improvement	4	
CURRENT_REGISTRATION_CATEGORY	Approved (fee cap)	1	From CURRENT_PROVIDER data
	Approved	2	
SUBMISSION_REGISTRATION_CATEGORY	Approved (fee cap)	1	From SUBMISSION_PROVIDER data
	Approved	2	

A Deciding to participate in TEF and producing a submission

ASK IF CURRENT AND SUBMISSION PROVIDER DIFFERENT [S5]

- A1 **For the next few questions, we will be primarily asking about your experiences and time working at [SUBMISSION_PROVIDER] because we are interested in understanding the experiences of submitting to the 2023 TEF. Later in the survey**

we will ask more about impacts, which will primarily relate to [CURRENT_PROVIDER].

ASK IF SUBMITTED DURING TEF 2023 [SUBMISSION_TEF_PARTICIPATION=1]

- A2 **Were you the main TEF contact for the TEF 2023 submission at [SUBMISSION_PROVIDER]?**

Yes	1	
No	2	
Don't know	3	

IF PROVIDER PARTICIPATED IN TEF [SUBMISSION_TEF_PARTICIPATION=1]

- A3 **What was your involvement in TEF 2023 at [SUBMISSION_PROVIDER]?**
PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT APPLY. RANDOMISE

Involved in evidence collection	1	
Involved in data analysis (including use of data dashboards)	2	
Worked with students on the production of the student submission	3	
Co-ordinated the team involved in producing the submission	4	
Contributed to the writing process of the submission	5	
Provided strategic oversight for the TEF submission process	6	
Other (please specify)	7	WRITE IN. FIX.
Don't know	8	EXCLUSIVE. FIX.
None of these	9	EXCLUSIVE. FIX. SCREEN OUT.

IF INSTITUTION PARTICIPATED IN TEF AND NON-MANDATORY

[SUBMISSION_TEF_PARTICIPATION=1 & SUBMISSION_TEF_ELIGIBILITY=2]

- A4 **Why did your provider participate in TEF 2023?**

PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT APPLY. RANDOMISE

We were confident that we would achieve a rating that our provider would be satisfied with	1	
We were worried that not participating would impact negatively on our reputation	2	
We believe in the goals and mission of TEF	3	
To raise the profile of student experience and outcomes across the sector	4	

The potential to use the experience to identify areas for improvement at our provider	5	
We felt that student recruitment would increase as a result of participating	6	
[SUBMISSION_REGISTRATION_CATEGORY=1] Desire to gain the uplift in tuition fees	7	
Other (please specify)	8	WRITE IN. FIX.
Don't know	9	EXCLUSIVE. FIX.
Prefer not to say	10	EXCLUSIVE. FIX.

IF INSTITUTION DID NOT PARTICIPATE IN TEF
[SUBMISSION_TEF_PARTICIPATION=2]

A5 **Why did your provider not participate in TEF 2023?**

PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT APPLY. RANDOMISE

Concerned we would not achieve a rating that we would be satisfied with	1	
We were worried that participating would impact negatively on our reputation	2	
We do not believe in the goals and mission of TEF	3	
Prioritising other work, interventions, and projects within our provider	4	
We felt that student recruitment may be reduced through our participation	5	
Financial cost of producing a submission, including in terms of staff time and workload	6	
Lack of time	7	
The data reported in our TEF dashboard was too limited	8	
Other (please specify)	9	WRITE IN. FIX.
Don't know	10	EXCLUSIVE. FIX.
Prefer not to say	11	EXCLUSIVE. FIX.
Don't know	3	

A6 **Question moved**

- A7 IF PROVIDER PARTICIPATED [SUBMISSION_TEF_PARTICIPATION=1]
How easy or difficult did you find the following elements of the TEF 2023 submission?

PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION FOR EACH ROW. RANDOMISE

	Very difficult	Difficult	Neither easy nor difficult	Easy	Very easy	Don't know
[IF PRODUCED STUDENT SUBMISSION A6=1] _1 MOVED TO NEXT SECTION						
_2 Compiling evidence to support the provider submission	1	2	3	4	5	6
_3 Understanding the criteria against which we would be assessed	1	2	3	4	5	6
_4 Working with data from the data dashboard to produce the TEF submission	1	2	3	4	5	6
_5 Finding staff time and resource to work on the TEF submission	1	2	3	4	5	6
_6 Involving all relevant staff and committees to produce the TEF submission	1	2	3	4	5	6
_7 Getting senior buy-in towards the importance of the TEF submission process	1	2	3	4	5	6
_8 Completing the submission within the time available	1	2	3	4	5	6

- A8 IF PROVIDER PARTICIPATED [SUBMISSION_TEF_PARTICIPATION=1]
Which of the following OfS guidance and support did you use while familiarising yourself and colleagues with TEF 2023 and preparing your submission?

PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT APPLY.

Written guidance for providers (Regulatory Advice 22)	1	
Welcome briefing - online webinar at the launch of TEF 2023 in October 2022	2	
TEF drop-in Q&A sessions (November - December 2022)	3	
Support offered over email by the OfS	4	
Guidance on interpreting the data dashboard	5	
Other support (please specify)	6	WRITE IN. EXCLUSIVE. FIX
None of these	7	EXCLUSIVE. FIX.
Don't know	8	EXCLUSIVE. FIX.

IF USE ANY GUIDANCE OR SUPPORT [A8=1 TO 6]

A9 **How useful was the guidance you received?**

PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION FOR EACH ROW.

	Not at all useful	Slightly useful	Moderately useful	Very useful	Don't know
[IF A8=1] Written guidance for providers (Regulatory Advice 22)	1	2	3	4	5
[IF A8=2] Welcome briefing - online webinar at the launch of TEF 2023 in October 2022	1	2	3	4	5
[IF A8=3] TEF drop-in Q&A sessions (November - December 2022)	1	2	3	4	5
[IF A8=4] Support offered over email by the OfS	1	2	3	4	5
[IF A8=5] Guidance on interpreting the data dashboard	1	2	3	4	5

IF PROVIDER PARTICIPATED [SUBMISSION_TEF_PARTICIPATION=1]

A10 **Did you feel that there could have been any improvements to the guidance, or additional support, which would have been useful while preparing your submission? If so, please state what that would have been.**

Yes (please specify)	1	WRITE IN
No	2	
Don't know	3	

G Optional student submission and impact of TEF on the student body

IF PROVIDER PARTICIPATED [SUBMISSION_TEF_PARTICIPATION=1]

G1 **Did students at your institution submit a student submission for TEF 2023?**

Yes	1	
No	2	
Don't know	3	

IF PRODUCED STUDENT SUBMISSION (G1=1)

G2 **How easy or difficult did you find supporting students to be able to produce a student submission?**

Very difficult	1	
Difficult	2	
Neither easy nor difficult	3	
Easy	4	
Very easy	5	
Don't know	6	

IF PROVIDER PARTICIPATED [SUBMISSION_TEF_PARTICIPATION=1]

G3 **To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the student submission element of TEF 2023...**

PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION FOR EACH ROW. RANDOMISE.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
_1 It helped hold our institution accountable to our students	1	2	3	4	5	6
_2 It encouraged collaboration between provider staff and the student body	1	2	3	4	5	6
_3 IF PROVIDER SUBMITTED A STUDENT SUBMISSION [G1 = 1] It allowed students at my provider to provide useful evidence to inform the assessment	1	2	3	4	5	6

_4 IF PROVIDER SUBMITTED A STUDENT SUBMISSION [G1 = 1] It was clear how much support was appropriate for a provider to offer to students while they were preparing the TEF 2023 student submission	1	2	3	4	5	6
_5 It empowered the student voice within our institution	1	2	3	4	5	6
_6 It increased the value placed on student experience and student outcomes at our provider	1	2	3	4	5	6
_7 It impacted positively on underrepresented or protected student groups at our provider	1	2	3	4	5	6

IF PROVIDER DID NOT SUBMIT A STUDENT SUBMISSION [G1 = 2]

G4 **What were the reasons students at your institution decided not to submit a student submission for TEF 2023?**

PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT APPLY. RANDOMISE.

Lack of awareness of the TEF among student representatives	1	
Lack of knowledge / understanding about how make a strong student submission	8	
Lack of embedded student representation structure	2	
Lack of student time / resource	3	
Lack of value attached to the exercise	4	
Other (please specify)	5	WRITE IN. FIX.
None of the above	6	EXCLUSIVE. FIX.
Don't know	7	EXCLUSIVE. FIX.

B Early impacts within your provider

ASK ALL PARTICIPATING PROVIDERS [CURRENT_TEF_PARTICIPATION=1]

- B1 **We would now like you to think about the impacts of TEF 2023 on [CURRENT_PROVIDER]. To what extent do you agree or disagree that participating in TEF 2023 has enabled [CURRENT_PROVIDER] to...**

PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION FOR EACH ROW. RANDOMISE.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
_1 Identify how well it performs in relation to student experience and outcomes	1	2	3	4	5	6
_2 Identify areas for improvement in relation to student experience and outcomes	1	2	3	4	5	6
_3 Share excellent internal practices and innovations	1	2	3	4	5	6
_4 Share excellent practices and innovations with other institutions	1	2	3	4	5	6
_5 Gain new data insights about its student experience and outcomes performance	1	2	3	4	5	6

ASK ALL NON-PARTICIPATING PROVIDERS [CURRENT_TEF_PARTICIPATION=2]

- B2 **We would now like you to think about any potential impacts of TEF 2023 on [CURRENT_PROVIDER]. Despite [CURRENT_PROVIDER] not participating in TEF 2023, have you used any of the following TEF resources made available as part of the 2023 exercise?**

PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT APPLY. RANDOMISE.

Data dashboards	1	
Published panel statements	2	
Other provider submissions	3	
Other guidance (please specify)	4	WRITE IN. EXCLUSIVE. FIX
None of these	5	EXCLUSIVE. FIX.
Don't know	6	EXCLUSIVE. FIX.

IF SELECTED ANY RESOURCES [B2 1 TO 4]

B2a **To what extent do you agree or disagree that TEF resources have allowed [CURRENT_PROVIDER] to...**

PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION FOR EACH ROW. RANDOMISE.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
_1 identify how well it performs in relation to student experience and outcomes	1	2	3	4	5	6
_2 identify areas for improvement in relation to student experience and outcomes	1	2	3	4	5	6
_3 share excellent internal practices and innovations	1	2	3	4	5	6
_4 share excellent practices and innovations with other institutions	1	2	3	4	5	6
_5 gain new data insights about its student experience and outcomes performance	1	2	3	4	5	6

ASK ALL NON-PARTICIPATING PROVIDERS [CURRENT_TEF_PARTICIPATION=2]

B2b **How likely is it that [CURRENT_PROVIDER] will participate in future TEF exercises?**

PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION

Very unlikely	1	
Unlikely	2	
Neutral	3	
Likely	4	
Very likely	5	
Don't know	6	

ASK NON-PARTICIPATING PROVIDERS (VERY) LIKELY TO TAKE PART IN FUTURE TEF [B2B=4 OR 5] AND HAVE ACCESSED RESOURCES [B2=ANY OF 1-4]

B2c **Are you using the TEF resources you have accessed to make improvements in student experience and outcomes specifically to prepare for the next TEF cycle?**

Yes	1	
No	2	
Don't know	3	

ASK ALL PARTICIPATING PROVIDERS [CURRENT_TEF_PARTICIPATION=1]

B3 **How useful were any of the following elements of the TEF in helping you to identify improvements in your provider?**

PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION FOR EACH ROW. RANDOMISE

	Not used	Used but not at all useful	Slightly useful	Moderately useful	Very useful	Don't know
_1 TEF Data dashboards	1	2	3	4	5	6
_2 Compilation of evidence	1	2	3	4	5	6
_3 Working with students on student submission	1	2	3	4	5	6
_4 Writing the provider submission	1	2	3	4	5	6
_5 Your provider TEF panel statement	1	2	3	4	5	6
_6 Other providers' TEF statements, data and submissions	1	2	3	4	5	6
_7 Wider sector activity related to TEF 2023 (e.g. conferences, articles published about it etc.)	1	2	3	4	5	6

ASK IF ANY ELEMENT OF TEF WAS USEFUL TO IDENTIFY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT [B3_1 TO B3_7=3 TO 5]

B4 **And have you taken any action, or plan to take any action, to make improvements in the following areas as a result of what you learned through the TEF?**

PLEASE SELECT ALL THAT APPLY.

	Taken action	Plans to take action	No action taken / no plans to	Don't know
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_1 Academic experience and assessment	1	2	3	4
_2 Resources, support and student engagement	1	2	3	4
_3 Positive outcomes (continuation, completion and progression)	1	2	3	4
_4 Educational gains	1	2	3	4

IF TOOK ANY ACTIONS AT B4 [B4_1 TO B4_4=1]

B4a **In general, at what level were these actions taken?**

PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION

Whole institution / strategic level	1	
Individual department level	2	
Individual course level	3	
Other (please specify)	4	
Don't know	5	

ASK ALL PARTICIPATING PROVIDERS [CURRENT_TEF_PARTICIPATION=1]

B5 **To what extent do you agree or disagree that TEF 2023 framework was appropriate for the assessment of student experience and student outcomes at [CURRENT_PROVIDER]?**

PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION

Strongly disagree	1	
Disagree	2	
Neither agree nor disagree	3	
Agree	4	
Strongly agree	5	
Don't know	6	

C Monitoring and evaluation

ASK ALL

- C1 **We would now like to ask a couple of questions about [CURRENT_PROVIDER]'s approach to monitoring and evaluating performance relating to student experience and student outcomes. To what extent do you agree or disagree that...**

PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION FOR EACH ROW. RANDOMISE

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Don't know
_1 Your provider has increased its use of evidence and data to inform policy and practice related to student experience and outcomes as a result of TEF 2023	1	2	3	4	5	6
_2 Your provider has improved the way that it monitors and tracks performance relating to student experiences and outcomes as a result of TEF 2023	1	2	3	4	5	6
[Any of B4_1 to B4_4=1] _3 Your provider effectively monitors and evaluates the changes you have introduced as a result of TEF 2023	1	2	3	4	5	6
_4 As a provider you are able to engage with TEF data confidently and competently	1	2	3	4	5	6

ASK IF FEEL THERE HAS BEEN A CHANGE TO LEVELS OF EVIDENCE-LED PRACTICE [C1_1 TO C1_3 = 4 OR 5]

- C2 **What changes has your provider made relating to the way that it uses evidence or data as a result of TEF 2023?**

PLEASE SELECT ALL OPTIONS THAT APPLY. RANDOMISE.

Increased scale of data collection exercises	1	
Increased use of OfS data dashboards	2	
Embedded monitoring and evaluation principles into change-focused interventions	3	
Aligned data collection or analysis exercises with those used within the TEF	4	
Gathered more evidence or data from the student body	5	

Created or changed frameworks for analysing data	6	
Created or changed systems to flag poor performance within specific areas of the provider	7	
Created or changed systems to flag good performance within specific areas of the provider	8	
Built an evidence bank of good practice to be shared within the institution	9	
Built an evidence bank of good practice to be shared across the sector	10	
Embedded analysis of datasets that exist externally to the provider	11	
Emulated processes followed by other providers	12	
Other (please specify)	13	WRITE IN. FIX.
Don't know	14	EXCLUSIVE. FIX.
None of these	15	EXCLUSIVE. FIX.

D Higher-level impacts

ASK ALL

- D1 **Thinking more generally, in your view, how positive or negative do you feel that the impact of TEF 2023 has been for [CURRENT_PROVIDER]?**

PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION ONLY

Very negative	1	
Negative	2	
Neither positive nor negative	3	
Positive	4	
Very positive	5	
Don't know	6	

ASK ALL

- D2 **Have there been any consequences of TEF 2023 for [CURRENT_PROVIDER] that you were not expecting?**

PLEASE SELECT ONE OPTION ONLY

Yes	1	
No	2	
Don't know	3	

ASK IF SEEN UNEXPECTED CONSEQUENCES [D2=1]

- D3 **What have these unexpected consequences been?**

WRITE IN		
Don't know	1	

E Cost questions

ASK IF SUBMITTED DURING TEF 2023 [SUBMISSION_TEF_PARTICIPATION=1]

We would like to finish by asking a few questions about the costs that were associated with participating in the TEF for [SUBMISSION_PROVIDER]. We are interested in your best estimates, we are not necessarily expecting you will be able to provide precise figures.

ASK IF HEP [SUBMISSION_PROVIDER_TYPE=1] AND PARTICIPATING PROVIDER [SUBMISSION_TEF_PARTICIPATION=1]

- E1 **Please estimate how much time, in working days, [SUBMISSION_PROVIDER] spent preparing your TEF submission, between guidance publication in October 2022 and making your submission in January 2023.**

This should only include time that you think is **directly linked to doing the TEF submission**, including familiarisation time staff spent on understanding guidance/processes and supporting the student representatives involved. Please exclude time related to representations here and any subsequent work or changes made at your provider.

For context, there were 75 working days between these dates.

TYPE OF ROLE	Estimated number of working days	Don't know	Not involved in TEF submission
_1 Head of Institution e.g. Vice-Chancellor/Principal/equivalent; or Deputy Vice-Chancellor; Pro Vice-Chancellor; CEO	WRITE IN (0-75)	1	2
_2 Director of major function e.g. finance, corporate services, HR; or Director of major academic area	WRITE IN (0-75)	1	2
_3 Head of an academic area or centre, e.g. head of school/division/department; function head; or Professor	WRITE IN (0-75)	1	2
_4 Non-academic staff: section manager or team leader (professional, technical, administrative); or academic staff: senior lecturer, reader or principal research fellow,	WRITE IN (0-75)	1	2
_5 Senior professional staff; lecturer; or researcher	WRITE IN (0-75)	1	2
_6 Administrative staff, assistant professional staff	WRITE IN (0-75)	1	2

ASK IF HEP [SUBMISSION_PROVIDER_TYPE=1] AND PARTICIPATING PROVIDER [SUBMISSION_TEF_PARTICIPATION=1]

- E2 **Please estimate any other total costs in £ directly linked to submission e.g. consultancy or legal costs**

WRITE IN £		
Don't know	1	
No other costs incurred	2	

ASK IF HEP [SUBMISSION_PROVIDER_TYPE=1] AND PARTICIPATING PROVIDER [SUBMISSION_TEF_PARTICIPATION=1]

E3 **Did [SUBMISSION_PROVIDER] make any representations about your rating?**

Yes	1	
No	2	
Don't know	3	

ASK IF MADE REPRESENTATION [E3=1]

E4 **Please estimate how much time, in working days, [SUBMISSION_PROVIDER] spent on TEF representations.**

This should only include time that you think is directly linked to making the TEF representation.

TYPE OF ROLE	Estimated number of working days	Don't know	Not involved in TEF representation
_1 Head of Institution e.g. Vice-Chancellor/Principal/equivalent; or Deputy Vice-Chancellor; Pro Vice-Chancellor; CEO	WRITE IN (0-75)	1	2
_2 Director of major function e.g. finance, corporate services, HR; or Director of major academic area	WRITE IN (0-75)	1	2
_3 Head of an academic area or centre, e.g. head of school/division/department; function head; or Professor	WRITE IN (0-75)	1	2
_4 Non-academic staff: section manager or team leader (professional, technical, administrative); or academic staff: senior lecturer, reader or principal research fellow,	WRITE IN (0-75)	1	2
_5 Senior professional staff; lecturer; or researcher	WRITE IN (0-75)	1	2
_6 Administrative staff, assistant professional staff	WRITE IN (0-75)	1	2

ASK IF MADE REPRESENTATION [E3=1]

E5 **Please estimate any other total costs in £ directly linked to representation e.g. consultancy or legal costs.**

WRITE IN £		
Don't know	1	
No other costs incurred	2	

ASK IF FEC [SUBMISSION_PROVIDER_TYPE=2] AND PARTICIPATING PROVIDER [SUBMISSION_TEF_PARTICIPATION=1]

- E6 **Please estimate how much time, in working days, [SUBMISSION_PROVIDER] spent preparing your TEF submission, between guidance publication in October 2022 and making your submission in January 2023.**

This should only include time that you think is **directly linked to doing the TEF submission**, including familiarisation time staff spent on understanding guidance/processes and supporting the student representatives involved. Please exclude time related to representations here and any subsequent work or changes made at your provider.

For context, there were 75 working days between these dates.

TYPE OF ROLE	Estimated number of working days	Don't know	Not involved in TEF submission
_1 Senior leaders e.g. Principal; Vice-Principal; CEO; Managing Director	WRITE IN (0-75)	1	2
_2 Managers e.g. faculty leads, head of department, head of major function e.g. finance, corporate services, HR	WRITE IN (0-75)	1	2
_3 Teaching staff e.g. lecturers, practitioners, instructors	WRITE IN (0-75)	1	2
_4 Support staff, e.g. teaching assistants, technicians, assessors	WRITE IN (0-75)	1	2
_5 Administration staff, including data analysts, business managers, communication support, employer engagement, legal	WRITE IN (0-75)	1	2

ASK IF FEC [SUBMISSION_PROVIDER_TYPE=2] AND PARTICIPATING PROVIDER [SUBMISSION_TEF_PARTICIPATION=1]

- E7 **Please estimate any other total costs in £ directly linked to submission e.g. consultancy or legal costs**

WRITE IN £		
Don't know	1	

No other costs incurred	2	
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ASK IF FEC [SUBMISSION_PROVIDER_TYPE=2] AND PARTICIPATING PROVIDER
[SUBMISSION_TEF_PARTICIPATION=1]

E8 **Did [SUBMISSION_PROVIDER] make any representations about your rating?**

Yes	1	
No	2	
Don't know	3	

ASK IF MADE REPRESENTATION [E8=1]

E9 **Please estimate how much time, in working days, [SUBMISSION_PROVIDER] spent on TEF representations.**

TYPE OF ROLE	Estimated number of working days	Don't know	Not involved in TEF representation
_1 Senior leaders e.g. Principal; Vice-Principal; CEO; Managing Director	WRITE IN (0-75)	1	2
_2 Managers e.g. faculty leads, head of department, head of major function e.g. finance, corporate services, HR	WRITE IN (0-75)	1	2
_3 Teaching staff e.g. lecturers, practitioners, instructors	WRITE IN (0-75)	1	2
_4 Support staff, e.g. teaching assistants, technicians, assessors	WRITE IN (0-75)	1	2
_5 Administration staff, including data analysts, business managers, communication support, employer engagement, legal	WRITE IN (0-75)	1	2

ASK IF MADE REPRESENTATION [E8=1]

E10 **Please estimate any other total costs in £ directly linked to representation e.g. consultancy or legal costs.**

WRITE IN £		
Don't know	1	
No other costs incurred	2	

F Thank and close

- F1 Many thanks for taking the time to participate in the TEF 2023 Provider survey. The information you have provided today will be used only for the purposes of this evaluation.

The evaluation reporting and data supplied to the OfS, will be completely anonymised and none of your responses will be attributed to you or your institution. This includes the OfS, who will at no point be able to identify the individuals or providers who have participated in the research. Only the project team at IFF Research will be able to identify you during the analysis stage. Survey data collected in response to costs involved in participating in the TEF will be provided to the OfS at a provider level for the purposes of evaluation analysis, with providers' identities hidden from the OfS. At no point will the OfS have information that links response data to named providers.

All data held by IFF will be retained until 30 August 2025 when it will be destroyed as per the contract, unless the OfS instructs the supplier to destroy the data earlier. By this we mean that the data will be removed from all IFF digital systems held by any member of the evaluation team. You can ask that your data is withdrawn before this date. Until the point data is destroyed, you also have the right to ask for access to your survey data. You can ask to withdraw your data or to see your data by contacting Luke Catterson or Daisy Woods at IFF Research on 0207 250 3035 or email TEF2023evaluation@iffresearch.com.

Anonymous extracts of what you said may be included in any reports, presentations or publications arising from the research. After publication, it will not be possible to withdraw your contribution completely from inclusion. Therefore, please contact us by January 2025 if you want to withdraw from anonymised inclusion in the research. For more information about this research and to view the specific privacy policy for this work, follow this link: www.iffresearch.com/ic/docz/13156/PrivacyNotice.htm

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