

April 2016

## Universities Scotland's position on the Teaching Excellence Framework

### Background

1. Universities Scotland responded to the UK Government Green Paper on Higher Education, including proposals for a Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), on 15 January 2016.<sup>1</sup>
2. Universities Scotland's Learning and Teaching Committee has since established a Working Group on Teaching Excellence, chaired by Professor Vicky Gunn. The group includes broad sector representation and has heard evidence from a wide range of sector agencies.
3. This paper outlines the current position of Universities Scotland on engagement with the TEF, informed by the work of the group to date and on the basis of information available at this time. It is understood that a technical consultation on more detailed proposals is likely to be published by the UK Government in May 2016; this paper represents our stance in advance of this.

### Our position: achieving equivalence

4. Scotland's higher education institutions are committed to excellence in learning and teaching. Students are at the heart of the Scottish approach to quality, and Scotland performs strongly in student satisfaction and graduate outcomes. To ensure the world-class standards of the sector continue to be recognised across the UK and beyond, Universities Scotland is engaging actively and constructively in the development of the TEF to secure a route to accreditation at all levels that is **different but equivalent** and builds on our existing, distinctive quality arrangements.
5. To demonstrate comparability in a clear and credible way, our working group intends to map the elements of Scotland's Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) – including the components of Enhancement-Led Institutional Review (ELIR) – onto the different levels of the TEF. Our initial focus will be on TEF level 1, given its imminent introduction.
6. ELIR as a whole goes significantly beyond TEF level 1 – it is a rich process that focuses on quality enhancement as well as assurance, and it is vital this is recognised. At the same time, we acknowledge that ELIR and the QEF may need to continue to evolve in the long term to enable Scottish institutions to demonstrate how all requirements of higher levels of the TEF are met.
7. On the basis of the information on the TEF available at this time, our working group believes that the Advance Information Set (AIS) component of ELIR should be recognised as equivalent to TEF level 1. It also intends to look at other data that institutions are required to submit to consider if there is duplication in the AIS that could be streamlined.
8. More detailed mapping should be possible once the technical consultation is published by the UK Government in May 2016.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/contribution/response-to-uk-governments-green-paper-higher-education-teaching-excellence-social-mobility-and-student-choice](http://www.universities-scotland.ac.uk/contribution/response-to-uk-governments-green-paper-higher-education-teaching-excellence-social-mobility-and-student-choice)



## Principles of Scotland's approach to quality

9. Scotland's higher education sector is committed to an **enhancement-led approach to quality**. This distinctive Scottish approach includes a commitment to the following principles:
  - collaboration and collegiality
  - purposeful striving to continuously improve teaching
  - student partnership
  - supporting learning excellence
  - recognition of the interdependence of research and teaching links
  - learning from international experience
  - focus on equalities
  - preserving the diversity of the sector
10. These principles are consistent with the Enhancement Descriptors<sup>2</sup> developed by Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC), and with the wider QEF. Similar themes also emerged in the evidence that sector agencies shared with the working group.
11. Participation in the TEF must be consistent with these principles.

## Risks

12. Perceived risks of participating in the TEF in the Scottish sector include:
  - distracting from our enhancement-led approach to quality and challenging collaboration, diversity and other key Scottish sector principles;
  - the potential costs of participation (particularly in any subject-level elements); and
  - Scottish institutions being presented in an unfavourable light relative to rUK institutions due to rUK comparability issues.
13. Not participating in the TEF, however, presents the significant risk that, in future, Scottish institutions may not possess the same perceived markers of quality as English institutions.

## Opportunities

14. Engaging actively and constructively in the development of the TEF offers opportunities for the Scottish sector to:
  - highlight the distinctive strengths of the Scottish approach to quality;
  - share our wealth of experience and expertise in quality enhancement to inform and influence the development of the TEF; and
  - secure a different but equivalent route to accreditation at all levels for Scottish institutions.
15. It also presents an opportunity to reflect on the wider context of data and accountability in Scottish higher education, and invite sector agencies to consider how institutional reporting could be streamlined to reduce administrative costs, avoid duplication, and improve clarity about the purpose of information collected.

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<sup>2</sup> [www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/sheec/descriptors-of-enhancement](http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/sheec/descriptors-of-enhancement)

