

## **T7.1** Chepstow Friday 9 December 10.30 - 11.00

### ***An Investigation into the impact of Higher Education Policy: the Teaching Excellence Framework. A single case. (0154)***

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This research investigates how the Department for Education (DfE) represents teaching excellence in UK higher education (HE) through the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and how course leaders, in a single institution, perceive and enact the framework through the following questions:

How is teaching quality in higher education represented by the Department for Education?

How is higher education policy perceived and enacted by practitioners responsible for undergraduate courses in a single institution?

How is higher education policy perceived to relate to practice by undergraduate course leaders?

### **Policy Context**

The architecture of the sector is changing under the jurisdiction of the Office for Students (OfS) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI). This is underpinned by a consumer model of higher (Brown and Carasso, 2013; Collini, 2012; Naidoo, Shankar, & Veer, 2011). Analyses of policy from *the Browne Review (2010)* to the *Higher Education and Research Act (2017)* find that there is a deficit model of academic practice within policy and academics, as an interest group, are not considered to be significant stakeholders. Academic practitioners face uncertainty as institutions require them to enact new policy agendas (Frankam, 2015; Sabri, 2010). They face competing pressures (Ashman, 2010; Ball, 2015; Collini, 2012; McNaughton and Billot, 2016; Mc Innis, 2010). Mechanisms for implementation of new higher education policies such as the Teaching Excellence Framework do not allow for a positive, fully engaged model of practice and individual academic staff are marginalised. This impacts upon academic identity and ontological security (Ball, 2015). There is a lack of an agreed definition of teaching excellence in the sector (Greatbatch and Holland, 2016). There are assertions that systems such as the TEF are not necessarily effective in terms of identifying or promoting excellence (Brusoni *et al.*, 2014; Rudd and Goodson, 2017). Within this context and critiques in mind, this paper seeks to identify how teaching excellence is presented through the TEF as a policy object (PO), (Sin, 2014) and its enactment.

## Method

This research investigates the forces of policy upon individuals in a single case through two units of analysis: the 2017, *Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework Specification* (TEF) and three semi-structured interviews with leaders of undergraduate courses. The policy discourse is analysed through the lens of O'Connell's (2017) *Analytical protocols for textual analysis*. These enable policies to be scrutinised in terms of: prominent discourses, power dimensions, any contradictions and tensions in the text, and actors' agency and activities.

## TEF: The Policy Object

The 2017 Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework Specification (Department for Education, 2017) states that the purpose of the TEF is to better inform students' choices about what and where to study, to raise esteem for teaching, to recognise and reward excellent teaching, also, to better meet the needs of employers, business, industry and the professions. Teaching excellence is defined broadly to include: teaching quality, the learning environment, and student outcomes and learning gain. These broad definitions are measured through the metrics below. A narrative provider submission is also submitted as evidence for a Gold, Silver or Bronze TEF award.

Table 4: TEF metrics aligned with aspects of quality

Aspect	Metric	Source
<b>Core Metrics</b>		
Teaching Quality	Teaching on my course	NSS Q1-4
Teaching Quality	Assessment and feedback	2015 NSS and 2016 NSS Q5-9, subsequent NSS Q8-11
Learning Environment	Academic support	2015 NSS and 2016 NSS Q10-12, subsequent NSS Q12-14
Learning Environment	Continuation	HESA and ILR data
Student Outcomes and Learning Gain	Employment or further study	DLHE declared activity 6 months after qualification
Student Outcomes and Learning Gain	Highly skilled employment or further study	DLHE declared activity 6 months after qualification
<b>Supplementary Metrics</b>		
Teaching Quality	Grade inflation	Mandatory provider declaration for providers with degree awarding powers
Student Outcomes and Learning Gain	Sustained employment or further study	LEO 3 years after qualification
Student Outcomes and Learning Gain	Above median earnings threshold or further study	LEO 3 years after qualification

## Case

A single case of a post-1992 University (TEF 'Gold' award) is used to investigate policy enactment.

The case is viewed from a bounded setting, where in-depth, first hand, data can be collected and analysed (Ashley, 2017; Yin, 2004; Yin, 2013), it seeks to illuminate to the broader phenomenon of the TEF.

## Findings and Discussion

### Framework Specification

The Framework specification drives a significant shift in the sector in terms of teaching quality measures. Prior assessment measures are relegated to a baseline position through the TEF. An abundance of measurement tools and assessment are used to underpin the DfE's values of teaching excellence. These are encapsulated in a three – tier award system of Gold, Silver or Bronze awards. The DfE views teaching quality through the lens of student outcomes and achievement, evidenced through the TEF metrics. The provider submission contributes to the argument for quality provision. The metrics are seemingly both illuminating and constrictive. The DfE relies on the metrics to provide a sector - wide understanding of teaching quality. An acting hypothesis of an award for is made through the metrics, prior to the provider submission being considered. The findings show that metrics have enormous informational prominence. This is reflected in the institution through the interview data. The metrics data are substantial influencers of power in the academy.

There is no single definition of teaching excellence in higher education in the Framework Specification. The DfE includes many contributing factors into its representation of quality as below:

<b>Teaching Quality</b>	<b>Learning Environment</b>	<b>Student Outcomes and Learning Gain</b>
Student Engagement (TQ1)	Resources (LE1)	Employment and Further Study (SO1)
Valuing Teaching (TQ2)	Scholarship, Research and Professional Practice (LE2)	Employability and Transferable Skills (SO2)
Rigour and Stretch (TQ3)		Positive Outcomes for All (SO3)
Feedback (TQ4)	Personalised Learning (LE3)	

## **Interview Data**

Participants agree that the students' view of learning is ultimately important in terms of quality. However, they describe a lack of agency in influencing the metrics such as DLHE data, perceived to be outside of practitioners' sphere of influence. There is evidence of changes to practice in line with TEF metrics. Participants concur that they are 'blunt' instruments through which to measure quality and lack nuance (Hammonds 2017; Williams and Mindano, 2015). In terms of policy enactment, a number of initiatives are being driven by the TEF in response to the metric data. Participants agree that the TEF has significant impact on course management but little on teaching.

The data provided no evidence of celebration the institutional 'Gold' award or of any reputational influence. Participants are more concerned with the minutiae of the metric - related targets at course level, resonating with prominent discourse of testing, evaluation and assessment in the Framework. The data shows the metrics have significant impact on practice, for example practitioners suffering from anxiety and concern around how the metrics compete and contrive to create administrative burdens.

No sense of marginalisation (Sabri, 2010) is articulated for participants' relational situation but there is a sense of a 'squeezed-middle' position. They are responding to a broad set of demands which test their practice and compete for resources. They state that there is a lack of discourse on rewarding teaching and career development in the institution. The Framework does not discuss pursuance of teaching excellence as a career pathway. It is only mentioned once, in the TEF award descriptors for gold. There is no discussion on how this might be achieved, nor are there any methods for developing staff towards achieving excellence. This resonates with Sabri's (2010) identification of a deficit model of academic practice. There is a tangible sense of teaching as a craft being undervalued in the institution and no evidence that the TEF addresses these concerns.

## References

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