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Measuring teaching excellence: challenges and possibilities

Paul Ashwin,

CGHE, Lancaster University

p.ashwin@lancaster.ac.uk

Twitter: @paulashwin

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Introduction

➢ Teaching Excellence

➢ The challenge of comparing Teaching Excellence through metrics;

➢ Key characteristics of a valid comparisons of teaching quality;

➢ Problems with existing comparisons of quality;

➢ The TEF

➢ Alternative ways of approaching the TEF;

➢ Conclusions.

Teaching Excellence

- ➢ Higher Education Teaching Excellence initiatives are widespread internationally (for example see Land and Gordon 2015);

- ➢ In a context in which there is increasing demand to measure and compare the quality of university teaching;

- ➢ There are many unhelpful myths around 'excellence' in teaching;

- ➢ I want to focus on issues around the measurement and comparison of teaching excellence.

The pursuit of excellence

Excellent teaching needs to flourish across the sector; lacklustre teaching and unacceptable variability in quality need to be addressed.

Success as a Knowledge Economy:

Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice

Department for Business Innovation & Skills

May 2016

The challenge of comparing teaching quality through metrics

➢ Teaching as a local achievement;

➢ Involves helping particular students to engage with particular bodies of knowledge in particular settings;

➢ This makes it very difficult to capture a valid measure of teaching quality through metrics.

Considerations when developing comparisons of teaching quality

➢ Any measures need to take account of **both:**
  ➢ What we know based on over 40 years of research into learning and teaching in higher education;
  ➢ What we know about what happens when measures become performance indicators (Goodhart's Law/Lucas Critique);
➢ We need to recognise that measurement is expensive and so needs to lead to changes in practices;
➢ We need to beware of false precision in any proposed measures - we are working with sledgehammers rather than lasers!

Key characteristics of valid comparisons of teaching quality

We need ways of assessing teaching quality that:

1. Provide a relatively simple comparison of quality;

2. Measure the quality of teaching offered rather than reputation or prestige;

3. Require improvements in teaching practices in order to improve performance on the measures;

4. Draw on a variety of measures that tell us about quality from different perspectives;

5. As a whole, are based on a coherent, research-informed vision of teaching;

6. Make comparisons at the level of the subject rather than the institution;

7. Reflect the purposes of higher education

   (based on Ashwin and Sweetman 2016)

Problematic Comparisons: Rankings

- National and international higher education rankings are a dominant way of comparing quality.

- They travel across a number of contexts and audiences;

- They tend to involve unrelated and incomparable measures;

- Differences of many places are meaningless;

- Their stability reinforces privilege: higher status institutions tend to enrol a much greater proportion of privileged students.

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Assessment of rankings as a measure of teaching quality

1. **Provide a relatively simple comparison of quality;**	☑
2. Measure the quality of teaching offered rather than reputation or prestige;	☒
3. Require improvements in teaching practices in order to improve performance on the measures;	☒
4. **Draw on a variety of measures that tell us about quality from different perspectives;**	☑
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Teaching Excellence Framework

➢ The aims of the TEF are to:
  ➢ Link fees to quality;
  ➢ Inform student choice;
  ➢ raise the profile of teaching;
  ➢ ensure HE better meets the needs of employers and industry

➢ Year 1: Any institution with a positive QAA Institutional Review can raise fees from September 2017.

➢ Year 2: Institutions opt into the TEF. All level of awards can raise fees by same amount in September 2018.

➢ Year 3: Different level of awards will impact on fees increases in September 2019. Pilots of subject level TEF.

➢ Year 4: Subject level TEF introduced and inclusion of taught postgraduate students.

TEF Year 2 Structure

Universities assessed on assessment criteria relating to teaching quality, learning environment and student outcomes.

➤ **Teaching Quality:** Student Engagement (TQ1); Valuing Teaching (TQ2); Rigour and Stretch (TQ3); Feedback (TQ4).

➤ **Learning Environment:** Resources (LE1); Scholarship, Research and Professional Practice (LE2) Personalised Learning (LE3).

➤ **Student Outcomes and Learning Gain:** Employment and Further Study (SO1); Employability and Transferrable Skills (SO2); Positive Outcomes for All (SO3).

(see DfE 2016)

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TEF Year 2 Metrics: White Paper & Technical Consultation

➢ Examine performance on metrics over a three-year period;
- ➢ Students' views of teaching, assessment and academic support from the National Student Survey;
- ➢ Non-completion rates;
- ➢ Rates of employment and further study from the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education Survey (DHLE) and 'highly skilled job metric'.

➢ Benchmarked by student intake with significant differences flagged.

➢ Initial hypothesis formed based on number of positive/negative flags

➢ Then examination of contextual information and institutional 15 page submission

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Assessment of TEF Year 2 as a measure of teaching quality

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Issues with the Year 2 TEF metrics

Issues as metrics:

- How and why selected?

Issues related to their use:

- Differences between institutions' scores on the selected metrics tend to be small and not significant (Office for National Statistics, 2016)

- Back to peer review?

Year 3 TEF and Beyond

➢ Existing metrics not robust enough to support a future subject level TEF (ONS, 2016).

➢ Identified future metrics:

  ➢ Longitudinal Education Outcomes data set – more precise data on the relationship education and earnings;

  ➢ Contractual status of academic staff – measure extent of casualisation;

  ➢ Teaching intensity/weighted contact hours.

None of these directly related to quality of teaching. With teaching intensity/contact hours particularly problematic.

Why are contact hours such a poor measure of teaching quality?

There might be contractual reasons for students having guarantees over contact hours, **BUT …**

➢ High quality teaching is about designing programmes that enable students to develop understanding;

➢ Increasing the contact hours on a well designed degree programme will not improve the quality of students' learning;

➢ This is why there is no evidence they are related to the quality of students' learning;

➢ Contact hours are also incredibly easy to game.

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Assessment of TEF Year 3 and beyond as a measure of teaching quality

1. **Provide a relatively simple comparison of quality;**	☑
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3. Require improvements in teaching practices in order to improve performance on the measures;	☒
4. **Draw on a variety of measures that tell us about quality from different perspectives;**	☑
5. As a whole, are based on a coherent, research-informed vision of teaching;	☒
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Assessment of rankings as a measure of teaching quality

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Alternative ways of developing the TEF: The System

➢ The overall TEF criteria need to be aligned with a clear view of high quality teaching;

➢ Individual metrics need to be designed to be an integral part of a collective and coherent system of metrics;

➢ There needs to be a mechanism for a sector-wide discussion of the system of criteria metrics rather than simply the individual metrics.

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TLRP 10 Principles of Effective Teaching and Learning

Effective Teaching and Learning:

Demands consistent policy frameworks;

Needs assessment to be congruent with learning.

Depends on the research and learning of all those who teach.

Requires learning to be systematically developed.

Recognises the significance of informal learning to developing specific expertise

Recognises the importance of prior or concurrent experience and learning.

Fosters both individual and social processes and outcomes.

Engages with expertise and valued forms of knowledge in disciplines and subjects

Promotes the active engagement of the student as learner.

Equips learners for life in its broadest sense.

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Alternative ways of developing TEF: Individual metrics

➤ Survey scales informing metrics should be drawn from a very large bank of potential items, with the actual items used changing every year.

➤ If there is to be a contact hours metric, it should focus on whether students' perceive that they had sufficient teaching to understand the knowledge they were engaging with;

➤ If the TEF is to measure teaching quality, then it needs to develop metrics associated with:
  ➤ Scholarly teaching;
  ➤ Students relations to knowledge;
  ➤ 1st year experience.

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Conclusions

> TEF needs to be informed by a systematic view of teaching quality;

> TEF Year 2 metrics will offer a more valid view of teaching quality than university rankings;

> However, they are unlikely to support the level of differentiation that are expected of them;

> Future metrics look more worrying;

> Danger that metrics associated with students' consumer rights dominate rather than those associated with teaching quality;

> There are clear alternative, more valid, ways in which the TEF could be developed.

References

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