Teaching Excellence Framework 2023 student contact survey findings

Contents

Executive summary

This report presents the key findings from the 2023 Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) student contact survey, conducted by the Office for Students (OfS). The survey aimed to gather feedback from student representatives involved in the TEF process, focusing on their experience of preparing a student submission, the guidance and support provided by the OfS, their motivations, and the impact of their involvement. These findings will inform the planning and design of future quality assessments, and how the OfS supports student representatives to participate in these.

- **Resources and support:** Nearly all respondents used the student submission guidance, which was rated as the second most helpful resource. However, there were calls for earlier access to the guidance and more detailed templates. The OfS email and phone contacts were rated the most helpful resource, while the launch webinar received the lowest rating as it repeated content in the guidance.

- **Submission timing and length:** Most respondents found the submission timeframe challenging, particularly given the overlap with busy academic periods and holidays. While the majority felt the page limit was appropriate, some struggled with deciding what to exclude.

- **Challenges and successes:** Key challenges included handling existing data and working with the student outcomes aspect of the framework. Successful strategies included early data collation and clear communication with higher education providers.

- **Provider support:** Respondents generally reported positive experiences with provider support, highlighting the importance of regular communication and access to data. However, some felt constrained in expressing their views fully.

- **Impact of TEF involvement:** Most respondents felt their involvement strengthened the student voice and influenced positive changes in learning and teaching. While some reported improved relationships with providers, a minority found the process strained these relationships.

- **Overall experience:** Most respondents had a positive overall experience and would encourage future participation for student contacts. However, concerns were raised about the time commitment required, which impacted other student priorities.

Introduction

1. This report presents key findings from a survey of TEF student contacts, conducted by the OfS, about their involvement in the TEF 2023.

2. Additional detail on the findings can be found in Annex A. Information on the characteristics of respondents is set out in Annex B, and the survey questions are in Annex C.

Background

3. The Teaching Excellence Framework is a scheme run by the Office for Students that aims to encourage higher education providers in England to improve and deliver excellence in teaching, learning and student outcomes.[1] It does this by assessing and rating providers for excellence above a set of minimum requirements for quality. The TEF is a desk-based expert review exercise, with a panel of academics and students appointed to conduct the assessments and make the decisions about ratings.

4. In the TEF 2023 exercise, the sources of evidence considered by the TEF panel included a written submission by the provider, data indicators produced by the OfS and, for the first time, optional evidence from a provider's students through an independent student submission. This submission could be either written or in an alternative format, such as video or audio, with a ten-page limit for written submissions and a 30-minute limit for those in an alternative format.

5. The student submission was coordinated by a nominated student contact at each provider – typically an individual with a relevant role in representing students, such as an elected sabbatical officer. If the student contact decided not to make a student submission, the provider was expected to offer them opportunities to contribute to the provider submission. The submission window for both providers and students was from 7 October 2022 to 24 January 2023. In total 227 providers participated in TEF, and a separate student submission was made from 204 of those providers.

Methodology and aims

6. The survey was open for four weeks from 30 March to 26 April 2023, which was soon after the submission deadline but before the TEF outcomes were known, to maximise the volume and accuracy of responses. The TEF student contacts at all providers that participated in the TEF 2023 were invited to take part, and the survey had a response rate of 31 per cent (74 full responses from student contacts at 70 providers, eight of whom had not made a separate student submission). The survey captured each respondent's provider and role and was therefore not anonymous, which might have affected the responses.

7. The survey sought views and feedback on the guidance and support provided to student TEF contacts by the OfS, their motivations for getting involved and how the process worked for them, and any impacts of their involvement in the TEF within their provider. The findings will be used to inform the OfS's future operational planning and policy development.

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[1] More information on the TEF is available at OfS, About the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF).

Findings

Resources and support

8. Nearly all respondents used the student submission guidance provided by the OfS, which was the most used resource and rated the second most helpful. Respondents found the guidance useful and clearly written but wanted sight of it earlier and more clarity about the OfS's expectations of what the submission should include, and the role providers can play in supporting the process.

9. Feedback suggested the template provided could be more detailed, to help with structuring the submission, and that it would be helpful to include content examples with the template or guidance. More advice on how to collect, organise and use existing data to inform the submission, and examples of how to get students involved, were also suggested.

10. Around three-quarters of survey respondents had referred to the OfS's guidance on the TEF (Regulatory advice 22) and attended the launch webinar. The guidance had mixed ratings and feedback in terms of its helpfulness to student representatives, with several commenting it was not easy to engage with. The launch webinar was rated lowest on helpfulness. Comments suggested this was because it mainly repeated what was already included in the guidance.

11. Though only around a third of respondents accessed OfS email or phone contacts, such access was rated the most helpful resource and all comments about it were positive. Around half of respondents attended an OfS online drop-in session, which received mixed ratings and feedback in terms of helpfulness (though there were limited suggestions for improvement).

Student submission timing and length

12. Most respondents found the timeframes to produce the submission very challenging, and a minority felt there wasn't enough time to do the submission alongside their workloads. The timing of the submission window was also difficult for respondents. The guidance was released in early October, a busy time of the academic year when some respondents were new in post. Christmas holidays also affected the availability of some staff, who some student contacts relied on to provide or interpret data for their own submission. A few respondents described feeling stressed or overwhelmed.

13. Around two-thirds of respondents felt the page limit for their submission (or time limit for their alternative format submission) was about right. Just under a third felt it was too short. Where participants felt the page limit was a challenge, several said this lay partly in deciding what to exclude.

Other challenges and what worked well

14. Aside from managing timing and resources, the most common areas of challenge were in handling existing data or insights and working with the student outcomes aspect of the framework. In particular, respondents indicated they had struggled with the amount of resource and expertise required to collate and work with existing data, particularly where the data was not prepared for this purpose. Comments suggested this is an area where respondents had most appreciated support from their provider.

15. Several respondents noted the challenge of drawing conclusions across the whole provider, for example when data was only partially available from different courses, and some highlighted that they found the student outcomes area particularly tricky because student representatives don't generally focus on this area directly.

16. The most frequently raised examples of what worked well, which respondents felt could be shared in guidance to future student submitters, related to actions taken at the start of, or very early in, the process. These included: collating relevant existing insights or data in one place and getting to grips with it before starting other data collection; clarifying early the support available from the provider (respondents found dedicated resource funding especially helpful); and agreeing ways of working with the provider, including regular communication.

Provider support and ways of working

17. Respondents mostly described a very positive experience of being supported by, and working with, their provider. While nearly two-thirds felt they were free to say what they wanted in their submission, just under a third felt that was only somewhat true.

18. Support from providers that respondents had found particularly helpful and appreciated included: general advice and support; communicating regularly and working together; data and information provision (with several also highlighting analyst resource); and having sight of the provider's submission. As noted in the first finding, comments also suggested the OfS could set clearer and stronger expectations of how providers should support student submissions, and good practice relating to communications.

Views on the aims and impact of TEF involvement

19. Nearly all respondents wanted their involvement to give an accurate representation of the student experience at their provider. Many also wanted it to drive improvements, with several saying they hoped it would improve partnership working. Most respondents did not agree that they wanted to be able to voice disagreement with the provider, and there were mixed views on whether respondents wanted to help the provider get the highest rating possible.

20. A large majority of respondents felt their involvement had definitely or somewhat strengthened the voice of students in their discussions with providers about learning and teaching. Several comments highlighted that the process had also strengthened the student representatives' understanding of the student experience, their relationships with students, or both.

21. The vast majority agreed that involvement in the TEF had helped student contacts influence positive changes in learning and teaching at their provider. Some respondents commented that the process had highlighted areas for improvement. Several reported that work had started to tackle these areas, and some had seen positive change that addressed the issues identified.

22. Nearly all respondents felt their TEF involvement would have influenced their provider's TEF rating, including its accuracy. The majority also felt they had influenced their provider's submission.

23. When asked whether their involvement in TEF had made their relationships with providers more difficult, over three-quarters of respondents felt it had not. However, this leaves just under a quarter who agreed it had made relationships more difficult to different extents. Where

comments were positive, respondents reported more collaborative working and improved communication.

Overall experience and wider views of TEF

24. The vast majority of respondents agreed it was definitely or somewhat true that their overall experience of TEF involvement was positive and that they would encourage others to participate in future.

25. Most respondents agreed that a more accurate provider rating would help future students make informed choices, though a few comments expressed doubts about the value of TEF ratings in applicants' decision making. Eight comments indicated concern that the respondents' involvement had taken time away from their other priority student activities.
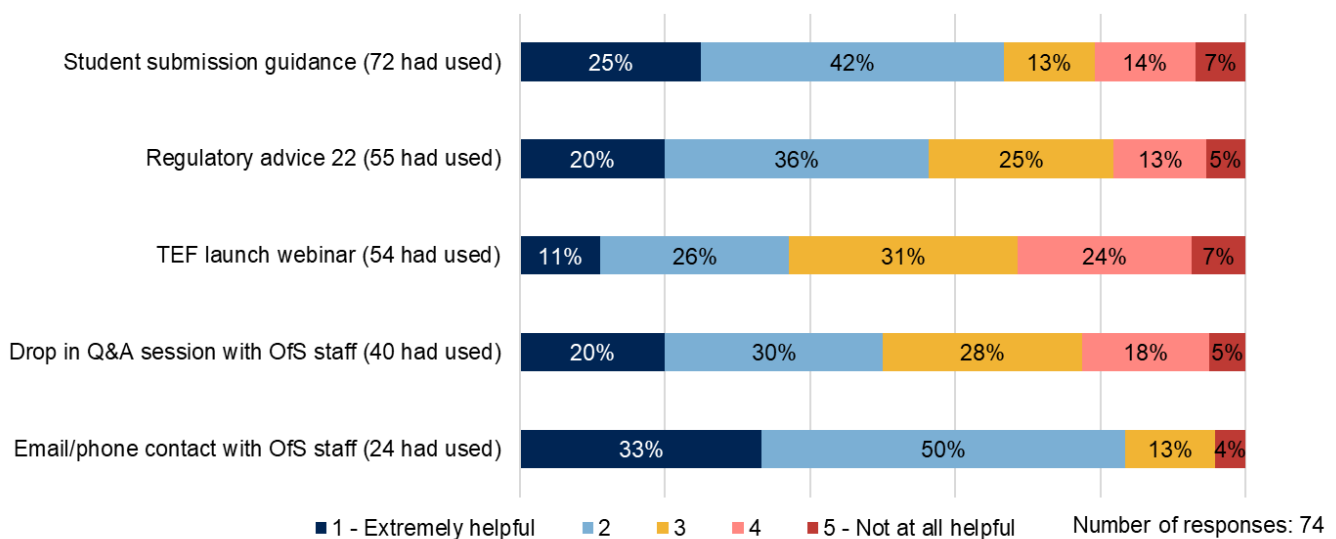
Annex A: Detailed findings

Resources and support

Overview of resources used and views of helpfulness

1. Respondents were asked to rate the helpfulness of different forms of OfS guidance and support, including Regulatory advice 22, student submission guidance, the TEF launch webinar, drop-in question-and-answer sessions with OfS staff, and email or phone contact with OfS staff.

2. Nearly all respondents (97 per cent, 72 respondents) used the student submission guidance, and this was the most used resource. Just under three-quarters of respondents attended the webinar (73 per cent, 54 respondents) and referred to Regulatory advice 22 (73 per cent, 54 respondents). Around half (54 per cent, 40 respondents) attended an OfS drop-in session. Just under a third (32 per cent, 24 respondents) accessed OfS email or phone contacts.

3. Overall, in terms of helpfulness, direct email or phone contact with OfS staff was rated the most helpful form of support, closely followed by the student submission guidance (see Figure A1). The TEF launch webinar was the resource that received the lowest helpfulness rating, and text responses suggested this was due to it mostly repeating material in the student submission guidance. The following sections provide further detail on the views given on resources.

Figure A1: Rated helpfulness of resources used by student contacts

Resource	1 - Extremely helpful	2	3	4	5 - Not at all helpful
Student submission guidance (72 had used)	25%	42%	13%	14%	7%
Regulatory advice 22 (55 had used)	20%	36%	25%	13%	5%
TEF launch webinar (54 had used)	11%	26%	31%	24%	7%
Drop in Q&A session with OfS staff (40 had used)	20%	30%	28%	18%	5%
Email/phone contact with OfS staff (24 had used)	33%	50%	13%	4%	

Number of responses: 74

Student submission guidance (and template)

4. Respondents rated the student submission guidance, which nearly all respondents had used, as the second most helpful resource (see Figure A1). This resource received the most feedback (c 85 comments throughout the survey), covering both positive points and areas to improve. Many of the positive comments about the guidance highlighted that respondents found its content useful and clearly written.

5. The most commonly suggested improvements to the guidance were: wanting sight of the guidance and the template earlier at a time that avoided their busier periods (e.g. when

students return); and wanting more clarity on what the OfS was looking for in the submissions, including through a more detailed template or more content examples, and on the OfS's expectations of the role providers could play in supporting student representatives.

6. Three text feedback comments welcomed the option to make their submission in an alternative, non-written format, such as a video. Several comments felt the guidance assumed prior knowledge of the TEF. Individual comments mentioned finding the content difficult to digest, with one having the experience of being misdirected by advice from a sector body (outside the OfS) and not finding alternative formats viable because of a lack of guidance to them. One respondent with dyslexia found they needed additional support to engage with the guidance notes.

7. Although the template was not specifically rated, there was quite substantial feedback through optional comments from 12 respondents that it was too broad to be useful to help structure the student submission. Though only one person commented they found the template useful, another highlighted the freedom was appreciated.

8. Other suggested areas for improvement included: more advice on how to collect, organise and use existing data to inform the submission; and examples of how to get students involved.

> 'I think the guidance could have been clearer on what exactly should have been included.'
>
> 'I think it's clear everyone involved would have liked a bit more time, either guidance released earlier or a later deadline.'
>
> – Respondent quotes

Launch webinar

9. Though nearly three-quarters of survey respondents attended the webinar, this was rated lowest on helpfulness, with only 37 per cent rating it 1 (extremely helpful) or 2 (the next highest rating) on a five-point scale (see Figure A1).

10. Though few respondents commented on this overall, there were several positive comments appreciating the launch webinar. One respondent felt it would have been more useful if it had taken place before they had read the guidance, as there wasn't additional detail provided. Another felt OfS staff had not been able to provide more detail on exactly what they were looking for.

> '…didn't find that [launch webinar] very helpful since I had already read through the guidance a few times. I think if I would have started the process with the launch webinar I would have felt quite differently, and I'm glad it was there for reference.'
>
> – Respondent quote

Regulatory advice 22

11. Just under three-quarters of survey respondents used the formal guidance on the TEF (aimed primarily at providers and panel members), which had mixed ratings and feedback about its helpfulness. Overall, a small majority (56 per cent) rated it as helpful (either 1 or 2) (see Figure A1).

12. There were only four comments about the guidance. One indicated that the document was very helpful. Three other respondents felt this guidance was not easy to engage with, with two student TEF panel members who engaged in more detail through their panel role suggesting it should be translated into a more digestible format.

Drop-in question-and-answer session with OfS staff

13. Around half of respondents attended an OfS drop-in session which, like Regulatory advice 22, had mixed feedback in terms of its helpfulness. 50 per cent rated it 1 or 2 on a five-point scale (see Figure A1).

14. Four respondents made positive comments on the helpfulness of the drop-in sessions. Two of these appreciated the peer contact and two liked the opportunity to speak to the OfS.

15. Suggested improvements included: more opportunities to attend (including for more than one contact per provider); more discussion in the sessions; and earlier communications to avoid missing key information about the drop-ins.

Email and phone contact with OfS staff

16. Though only around a third of respondents accessed OfS email or phone contacts, this access was rated the most helpful resource, with 83 per cent rating it 1 or 2 (see Figure A1).

17. There were only four comments related to the direct contact with the OfS, all very positive. One respondent simply appreciated knowing support was available if needed.

> 'The response times via email were great and saved a lot of headaches our end.'
>
> – Respondent quote

Student submission timing and length

Feedback on the timing for the student submission

18. Most respondents (73 per cent, 48 respondents) found the timeframes challenging. Of these, 55 per cent said it was a challenge, but they were satisfied with the final submission. 18 per cent (12 respondents) felt that, while they were satisfied, there was not enough time to produce the submission to a satisfactory standard. Just over a quarter of respondents (27 per cent, 18 respondents) said there was plenty of time to produce their submission (see Figure A2).

Figure A2: Views on the amount of time given by the OfS to produce the student submission

There was not enough time to produce the submission to a standard I was satisfied with. — 18%

The amount of time was a challenge, but I was satisfied with the final submission. — 55%

There was plenty of time to produce the student submission. — 27%

Number of responses: 66
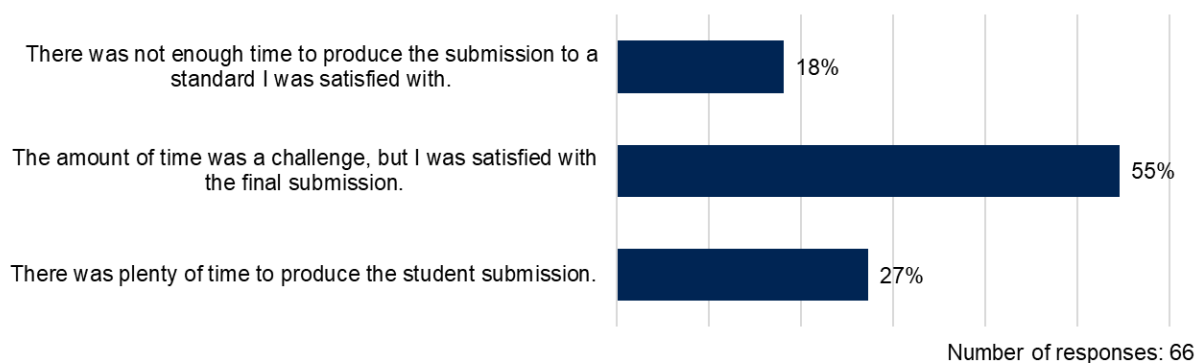
19. The short timeframe was the challenge most frequently raised (41 comments) across all the survey text feedback. These comments were about the amount of time student representatives needed to produce the submission, with a minority highlighting that they did it alongside their existing responsibilities. Many respondents strongly felt there was not enough time overall to prepare for and complete the submission alongside their workloads. Several respondents from smaller providers highlighted feeling that they struggled more than their counterparts at larger providers to respond within the required timescales.

20. Additionally, the timing of the submission window itself was felt to be difficult, as the guidance was released in early October at student representatives' busiest time – when the academic year starts, and when some are also new in post. Also, as the Christmas holidays fell before the deadline, this reduced the actual working time available. Other issues raised about timing included: that the submission deadline fell within student representatives' election period; and that the OfS should consider where a provider's staff were taking industrial action. Another felt the timing was difficult in terms of getting students to participate.

21. Three respondents described the student submission experience alongside their role as stressful or overwhelming. One other respondent emphasised the OfS should not underestimate the additional pressure the submission places on student representatives alongside their existing workload.
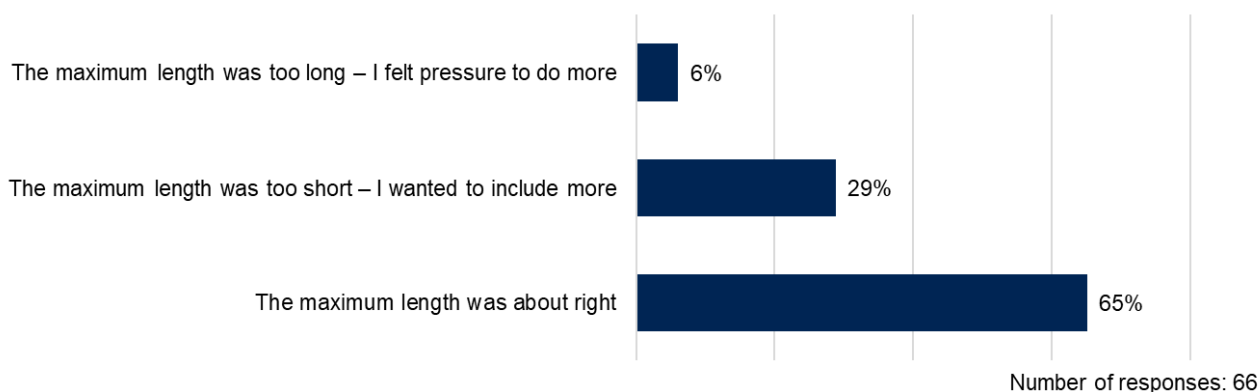
> 'Students' unions like ours are run by a small team with incredibly limited budget and resource. The timeframe to submit TEF was incredibly short, which took valuable time away from our student-facing activities. It would be helpful if far more time was given.'
>
> – Respondent quote

Views on submission length

22. Around two-thirds of respondents (65 per cent, 43 respondents) felt the page limit, or time limit for alternative submissions, was about right (see Figure A3). Just under a third felt that it was too short and wanted to include more. Only four respondents (6 per cent), who were all from specialist providers, said the page or time limits for their submissions were too long and they felt pressure to do more.

Figure A3: Views on the maximum limits for student submissions

Response	Percentage
The maximum length was too long – I felt pressure to do more	6%
The maximum length was too short – I wanted to include more	29%
The maximum length was about right	65%

Number of responses: 66

23. Six respondents directly raised the page limit in their comments as a challenge they encountered in producing their submission (of 38 responses to Q11). Three of these felt they had more valuable content than they could include. One found the editing process very time-consuming, though another two found the page limit made them determine what was important to include. One respondent felt the time they spent cutting down their submission could have been better used in data collection.

What worked well for student representatives

24. Respondents commented on a number of elements of the student submission experience they felt worked well. The more frequent suggestions, and those respondents felt could be included in future guidance for student representatives, included: getting to grips with existing data early before planning any additional data collection; collating and storing relevant existing data in one place; working with and having regular communication with provider staff, including clarifying early the support available from the provider; and having others to support the task, which might include other student representatives, or a funded research partner or intern.

25. Other individual suggestions included: timing student data collection (e.g. interviews) before the winter break so the student contact could focus on the submission after the break; using benchmarked data in the TEF data dashboard to identify areas to explore in student surveys and focus groups; gaining input on the submission from student representative committees or groups; and using the TEF assessment criteria to focus the content and structure of the submission.

'Basically, I would recommend that future students get to grips with reports on anything linked to student experience in the planning stage of the process, before starting any of their own data gathering.'

'I think being in active communication routinely with the institutional lead for their submission made it easier to complete for us.'

– Respondent quotes

Challenges

Data-related challenges

26. Aside from the timing and resources, he most common area of challenge (16 comments) related to handling data. The main challenge raised was the amount of resource and expertise required to collate and work with existing data for the TEF submission, particularly where the data was not prepared for this purpose. Comments throughout the survey highlighted how this was an area where respondents had most appreciated support from their provider, and that they would like further support to access and work with the TEF data dashboard.

27. Several respondents found some data was only partially available from different courses, or in different formats, which made it tricky to draw conclusions across the provider. Several respondents also noted the General Data Protection Regulation and data-sharing restrictions. One respondent highlighted difficulty dealing with discrepancies between their own knowledge of student experience and the National Student Survey (NSS) data. Two respondents felt there was a preference for quantitative data, which was under-valuing qualitative data and the tacit knowledge of student representatives.

'Perhaps our biggest challenge was the vast discrepancies in the way student experience data was gathered, stored and shared at course and school level. It was difficult to compare data and offer the same type/amount of commentary for different areas at the university because some courses had/shared plenty of useable data and others were unwilling to share/didn't have the datasets available.'

'There was also a focus on ensuring everything was backed up with data and whilst I understand there is a need to ensure it was a true reflection of the student experience, the [students' union]'s day-to-day role is to represent students and we pick up feedback on a near daily basis so there are some things we just "know" and the focus on data made this a more challenging piece of work than it should have been.'

– Respondent quotes

Other challenges

28. Six respondents highlighted they found the student outcomes TEF assessment area was not easy to address. Several comments noted that student representatives don't generally directly focus on student or graduate outcomes or deal with the related data.

29. Three respondents felt that not having early sight of the provider submission, or the provider not having early sight of their submission, had made the work more challenging.

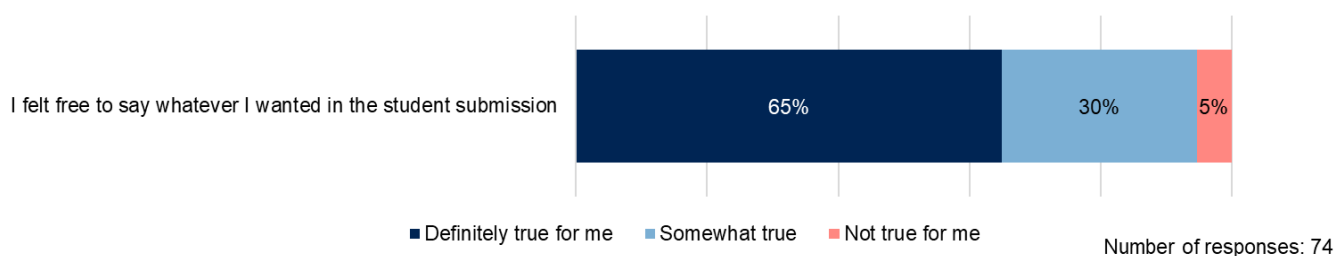## Provider support and ways of working together

30. Respondents were asked optionally to comment on any support from their provider that was particularly helpful, or additional support they would have liked.

31. The vast majority of comments described a positive experience of working with their provider and covered support they had found helpful and appreciated. The most frequently raised areas

in which they had received support were: general advice and support; communicating regularly and working together, including having sight of the provider's submission; data and information provision; and access to data analyst resource.

32. Five respondents commented on support they would have wanted, which included: funding for additional resource; better internal staff briefing so academics were not surprised when approached; access to data and analytics support; sight of the provider's draft educational gains section of their submission.

33. Only 5 per cent (four respondents) of respondents felt they were not able to say whatever they wanted in their student submission. Nearly-two thirds (65 per cent, 48 respondents) agreed it was definitely true they could say what they wanted and just under a third (30 per cent, 22 respondents) felt it was somewhat true (see Figure A4).

Figure A4: Respondent views of their independence in the student submission

I felt free to say whatever I wanted in the student submission

| 65% | 30% | 5% |

■ Definitely true for me ■ Somewhat true ■ Not true for me

Number of responses: 74

> 'Our university were fantastic and provided all the data analytic support that we needed. They offered financial support as well as wellbeing and personal support. Our university staff sat with us and explained both our gathered data/trends but also official data. We were also allowed to attend all of their TEF meetings to understand their narrative, provide our suggestions and ensure that we were holding them accountable.'
>
> 'We received funding for a research intern from the university which was beneficial. The university also offered us support whenever we needed, and I was in the TEF working group.'
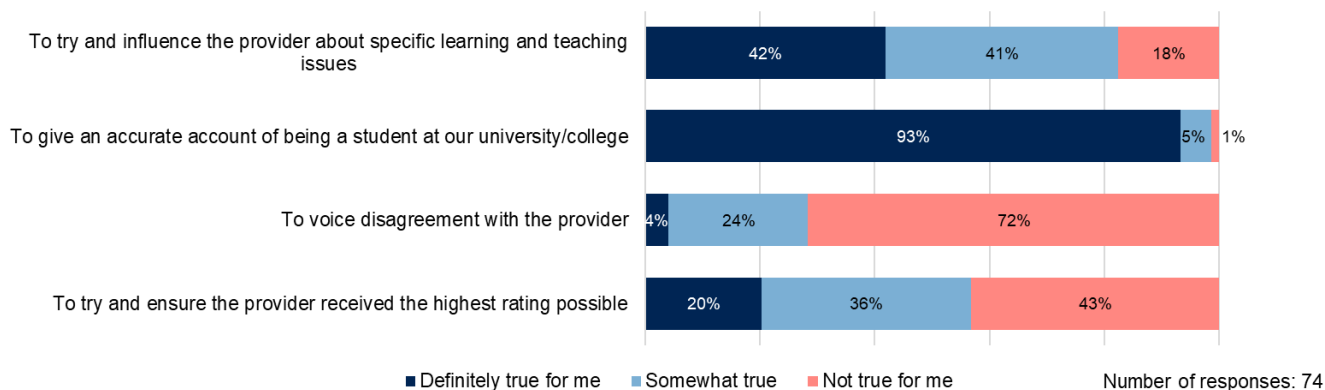>
> – Respondent quotes

What respondents wanted from TEF involvement

34. Nearly all respondents said that they wanted to give an accurate representation of the student experience at their provider through their participation, with 93 per cent (69 respondents) agreeing that it was definitely true for them (see Figure).

35. The next most popular desired impact was to try to influence the provider about specific learning and teaching issues, with 42 per cent (31 respondents) saying this was definitely true and 41 per cent (30 respondents) saying it was somewhat true.

36. Over half (57 per cent, 42 respondents) said it was definitely or somewhat true that they wanted to ensure their provider got the highest possible rating. The least selected option was to voice disagreement with their provider.

Figure A5: What respondents wanted to achieve through TEF participation

	Definitely true for me	Somewhat true	Not true for me
To try and influence the provider about specific learning and teaching issues	42%	41%	18%
To give an accurate account of being a student at our university/college	93%	5%	1%
To voice disagreement with the provider	4%	24%	72%
To try and ensure the provider received the highest rating possible	20%	36%	43%

Number of responses: 74

37. Optional text responses to this question echoed the survey ratings, with most comments (17 out of 34) emphasising that respondents wanted to ensure the TEF panel had a true and accurate representation of the student experience, including the student voice. Ten respondents highlighted that they wanted their TEF participation to drive improvements within the provider. Four respondents wanted to collaborate and build partnership working with their provider.

38. One comment highlighted that although their students' union boycotts the NSS, because they perceive that it marketises higher education, they wanted to take part in the TEF student submission process as they felt it was important to share the 'real' student experience with their provider and the OfS.

> 'I wanted to give an accurate and fair representation of university life that our members could recognise and cause improvements where they were needed, whilst celebrating the positives.'
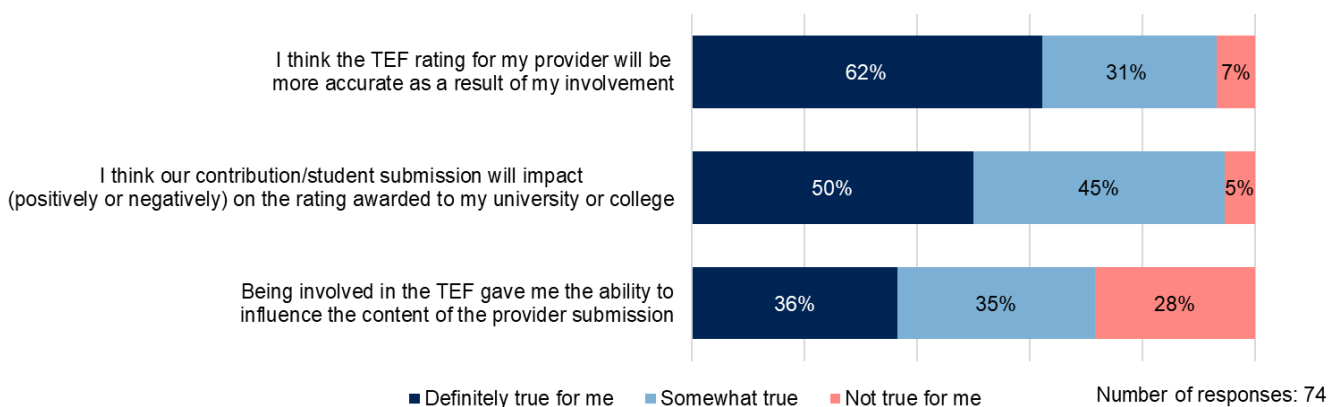>
> – Respondent quote

Views on the impact of TEF involvement

Impact of involvement on the TEF assessment

39. Nearly all respondents felt their TEF involvement would to some extent have influenced their provider's rating, including its accuracy, and the majority felt they had also influenced their provider's submission (see Figure A6).

Figure A6: Respondent views of their influence on the TEF

	Definitely true for me	Somewhat true	Not true for me
I think the TEF rating for my provider will be more accurate as a result of my involvement	62%	31%	7%
I think our contribution/student submission will impact (positively or negatively) on the rating awarded to my university or college	50%	45%	5%
Being involved in the TEF gave me the ability to influence the content of the provider submission	36%	35%	28%

■ Definitely true for me   ■ Somewhat true   ■ Not true for me   Number of responses: 74

40. Seven text comments shared mixed views on whether the student submission would impact their provider's TEF assessment (five positive, two uncertain or negative). One felt their uncertainty was due to the fact that the provider might appeal, and a lack of clarity on the weighting of student submissions.

> 'I definitely think that the student submission will have a positive impact on the TEF rating, especially considering it provides a very different view than the NSS results.'
>
> – Respondent quote

Impact of involvement on provider relationship

41. The survey comments were mixed in terms of the effects on the respondents' relationship with their provider. Five reported positive changes, including more collaborative working and improved communication. Two included negative changes, where the process was detrimental to working relationships with providers. One comment said there had been both positive and negative changes and five reported relationships were unchanged.

42. When asked whether TEF involvement had made their relationships with providers more difficult, over three-quarters of respondents felt it had not. However, a quarter of respondents agreed that it was definitely or somewhat true.

> 'Ultimately it made my relationship with the university both more collaborative and more confrontational, but this may well have been a fairly unique experience given my particular institution.'
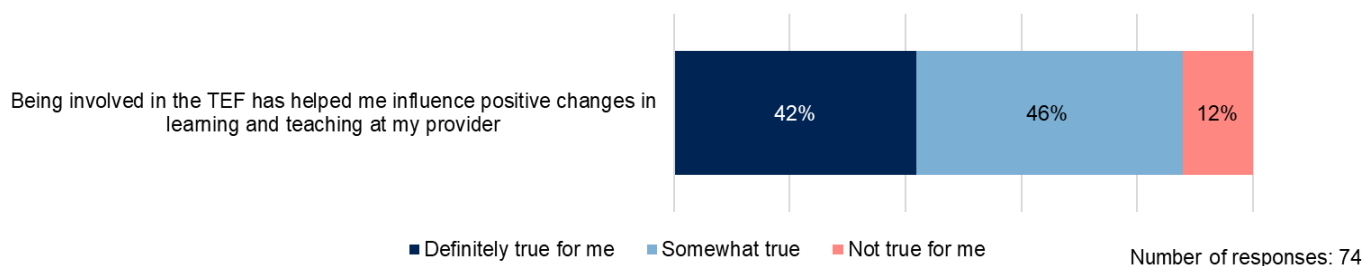>
> 'Our student TEF submission has strengthened our relationship with the uni, especially with the [Pro-Vice-Chancellor] Education and Vice-Chancellor as they were both very happy with our submission, which was presented to them after submission to ensure we could not be influenced or change anything. They are appreciative of our willingness to get involved in TEF and have our say and this has resulted in strong working ties between the author of the student submission and senior members of the university.'
>
> – Respondent quotes

Impact of involvement on driving positive change within the provider

43. The vast majority (88 per cent, 65 respondents) agreed that their involvement in TEF had helped them influence positive changes in learning and teaching at their provider (see Figure A7).

Figure A7: Respondent views of their participation's impact on positive changes in learning and teaching

Being involved in the TEF has helped me influence positive changes in learning and teaching at my provider	42% / 46% / 12%	

■ Definitely true for me ■ Somewhat true ■ Not true for me

Number of responses: 74

44. Across the survey, nine respondents provided positive comments about the impact of their TEF involvement in driving changes within their provider. Seven comments were positive that the process had highlighted areas for improvement. Several also indicated that their provider had started work to tackle these areas. Two comments said that they had seen positive change that addressed the issues identified.

'Our submission definitely served to highlight issues that students feel passionately about, but we haven't yet seen concrete change in any direction.'

'As a [sabbatical] officer, being part of the TEF submission was really positive. I feel like we've been able to communicate with some of the executive team to make headway in addressing some of the deeper-rooted challenges around student experience data and student voice.'
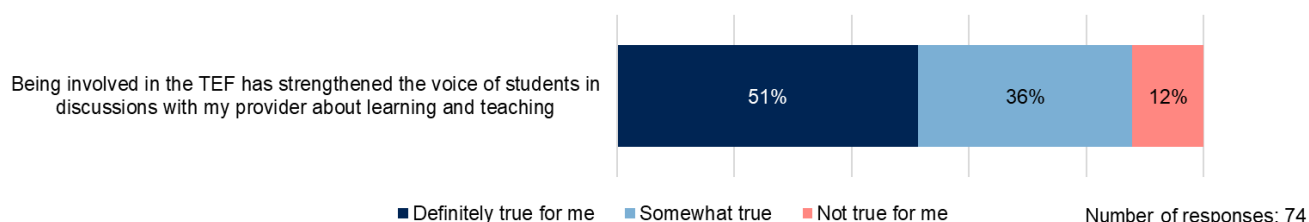
'We have seen systematic improvements already.'

'After our submission, a number of senior academics got in touch to explore parts of our submission further. They wanted to know how things could be improved from our perspective, and it was positive to see such a quick response.'

– Respondent quotes

Impact of involvement on the student voice

45. A large majority of respondents felt their involvement had definitely or somewhat strengthened the voice of students in their discussions with providers about learning and teaching (see Figure A8).

Figure A8: Respondent views of their participation's impact on the student voice in their provider

Being involved in the TEF has strengthened the voice of students in discussions with my provider about learning and teaching

Definitely true for me	Somewhat true	Not true for me
51%	36%	12%

■ Definitely true for me ■ Somewhat true ■ Not true for me

Number of responses: 74

46. Respondents' comments highlighted examples where they felt the process had strengthened the student voice within their provider. Several respondents felt the process had improved their understanding of the student experience, their relationships with students or both, and one shared that being involved in the TEF had encouraged their students' union to consider not boycotting the NSS in the future.

'I think it's also increased communication amongst students and the confidence for students to approach their fellow representatives to carry and champion their issues to bring about change.'
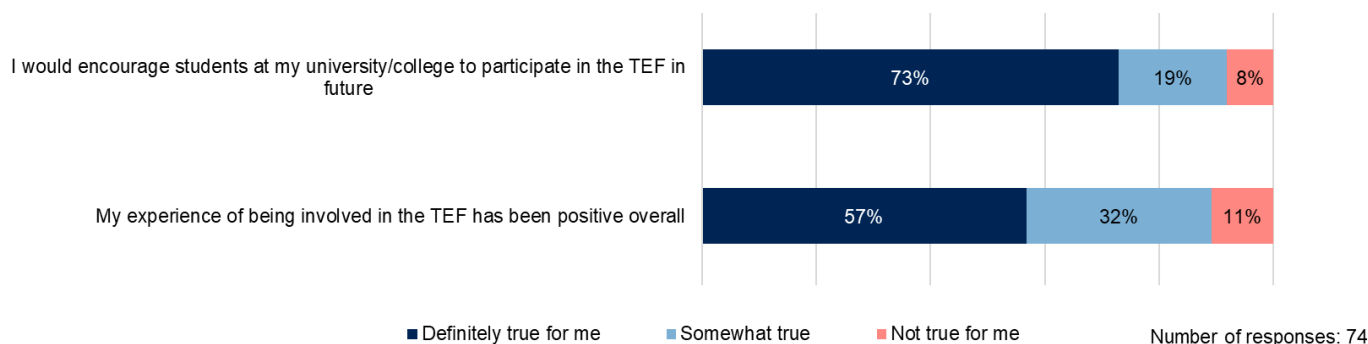
'We are particularly pleased with the project focused on student involvement in co-creation and raising the profile of student voice.'

– Respondent quotes

Overall experience and opinions of the TEF

47. Around 90 per cent of respondents agreed it was definitely or somewhat true that their overall experience of TEF involvement was positive, and that they would encourage others to participate in future (see Figure A9).

Figure A1: Respondent views of their overall experience of participating in the TEF

I would encourage students at my university/college to participate in the TEF in future

Definitely true for me	Somewhat true	Not true for me
73%	19%	8%

My experience of being involved in the TEF has been positive overall

Definitely true for me	Somewhat true	Not true for me
57%	32%	11%

■ Definitely true for me ■ Somewhat true ■ Not true for me
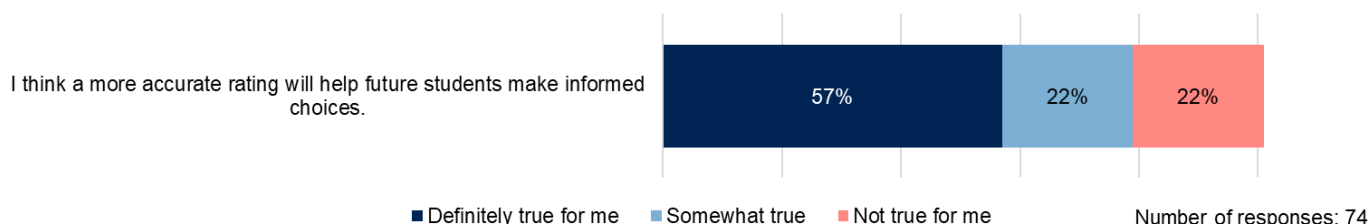
Number of responses: 74

48. When asked for optional further feedback on their involvement in the TEF, many respondents made points covered elsewhere in this report. Experiences were mixed, consistent with the feedback on timing, resources and other challenges throughout the survey. The more positive feedback was largely in support of the student submission, including in relation to impact and appreciating the importance of accurately representing the student voice. One respondent felt

that as the TEF was focused on excellence, they were limited in terms of being able to highlight developmental areas for their provider within their submission.

49. Most respondents (78 per cent, 58 respondents) agreed that a more accurate rating would help future students make informed choices (see Figure A10). However, two respondents expressed doubts about the value applicants place on TEF ratings in their decision making, and another felt that rating providers on a three-tier scale cannot fully capture the diversity of their provision.

Figure A2: Respondent views of whether a more accurate TEF rating helps future students make informed choices

I think a more accurate rating will help future students make informed choices.	57%	22%	22%

■ Definitely true for me   ■ Somewhat true   ■ Not true for me   Number of responses: 74

50. In terms of unintended consequences of the process overall, eight comments indicated concern that their involvement had taken time away from their other student priority activities.

'I think the addition of the student submission is so important in providing a more holistic view of any school. I think it's well worth the effort and I do hope it continues in the future!'

'It was an amazing learning experience, as it allowed me to look into the "behind-the-scenes" of academic bodies and the processes and ideas that go behind their communication with their student bodies. I would wholeheartedly recommend participation to any student representative.'

'TEF has been a huge part of my workload in being a sabbatical officer and whilst it has provided me with an excellent opportunity to expand my skillset, gain experience and make connections, it has really affected my ability to fulfil my manifesto goals as I just haven't had time to do so. We don't have enough resourcing at our small [higher education institution] to get someone to really help me with this, so it has been difficult juggling being the student lead for TEF and my actual job as a sabb officer.'

'I don't think that the TEF is the best way to help students make informed choices about their university, as every institution is different and ranking them all on the same three-tier scale cannot be indicative of the full range of their provision, regardless of how accurate the results are.'

– Respondent quotes

Annex B: Respondent characteristics

1. The majority of respondents (82 per cent, 61 respondents) were their provider's main student TEF contact. Other respondents included the alternative TEF contacts (15 per cent, 11 respondents), and two respondents had 'other' roles (e.g. policy author supporting the main contact).[2]

2. Over half of respondents (57 per cent, 42 respondents) were students with sabbatical roles and just over a quarter (26 per cent, 19 respondents) were active students, with 18 per cent (13 respondents) in staff roles.

3. The sample of providers represented by the respondents was broadly representative of the whole population of participating TEF providers, with notable slight underrepresentation for large Level 4 and 5 providers (see Figure B1).

Figure B1: Respondent providers' characteristics by student typology compared with all participating TEF providers
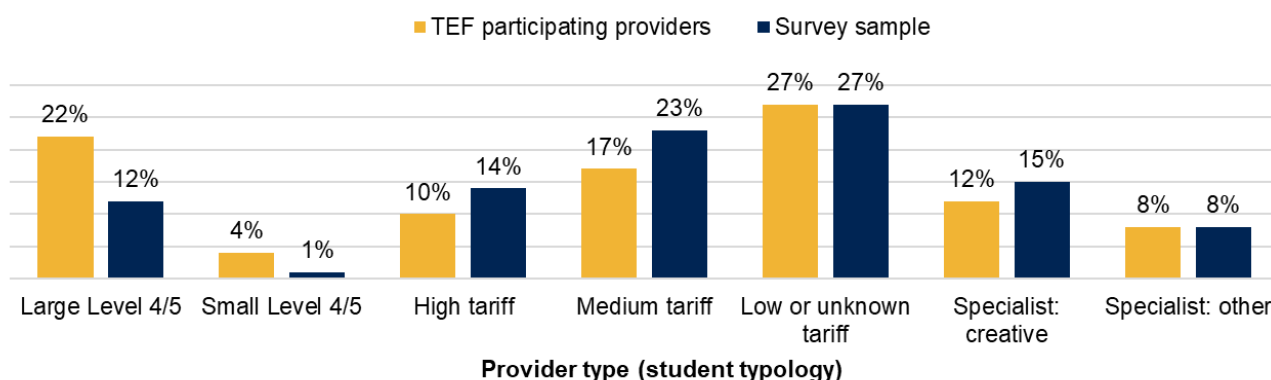
4. Most respondents' providers had taken part in the TEF previously (i.e. in 2017 to 2019); only six were new to the TEF. The vast majority of respondents (89 per cent, 66 respondents) had prepared a separate independent student submission, with only a small proportion contributing via the provider's submission.

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[2] The TEF student contact was the person who could make a student submission on behalf of a 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. Providers could also nominate an 'alternative student contact' to support the main student contact. More information on the student contact roles is available in the TEF 2023 student submission guidance at OfS, TEF student submission guide.

Annex C: Survey questions

Section 1: Your details

Q1. Your university or college (select from drop down)

Q2. Your TEF role:

- TEF main student contact

- TEF alternative student contact

- Other (please specify)

Q3. Which of the following best describes your day-to-day role:

- Sabbatical officer or equivalent (i.e. not studying in current year)

- Non-sabbatical student representative (i.e. balancing representative role with studies)

- Former student/former student representative

- Current student who volunteered (no formal representative role)

- SU staff member

- Other member of provider staff

- Other (please describe)

Section 2: Guidance and support from the OfS

Q4. Which of the following resources did you make use of, and how helpful did you find them. For each, scale: 1-5; 1= Extremely helpful, 5 = Not at all helpful, also option for 'N/A didn't use':

- Student submission guidance

- Regulatory advice 22 (provider TEF guidance)

- 19th October TEF launch webinar

- Student contact drop in Q&A sessions with OfS staff

- Email/phone contact with OfS staff

- Any other OfS guidance or support you found useful (specify)

Q5. (Optional) Please provide any additional comments about the guidance and support provided by the OfS that you made use of. (Free text)

Q6. (Optional) Was there any additional support from the OfS that you would have found helpful? (Free text)

Q7. (Optional) Was there any support you received from your university of college which you found particularly helpful, or additional support from your university or college that you would have liked to receive. (Free text)

Section 3: Student submission

Q8. Did you prepare and submit a separate student submission? Y/N (IF 'no', skip to Section 5)

Section 4: Preparing the submission

Q9. Which statement best reflects your view on the amount of time provided by the OfS to produce your submission (between the publication of the guidance in September and the submission deadline in January)?

- There was plenty of time to produce the student submission

- The amount of time was a challenge, but I was satisfied with the final submission

- There was not enough time to produce the submission to a standard I was satisfied with.

Q10A. We set a maximum page limit of 10 pages for a written submission (and suggested a 30min limit for video or audio submissions) – which statement best reflects your view:

- The maximum length limit was too short – I wanted to write more

- The maximum length limit was about right

- The maximum length limit was too long – I felt pressure to write more

Q10B. Any other comments on the time and effort involved (free text)

Q11 (Optional) Please provide any additional details about challenges you encountered producing your submission.

Q12. (Optional) Was there anything that worked particularly well for you that we could include in guidance for future students?

Section 5: Reflection post-submission

Please indicate your level agreement or disagreement with the following statements about your participation in the TEF

Q13A. Motivation for participating

- The aim of our student submission/contribution to the provider submission was to try and ensure our university/college received the highest rating possible

- We wanted to write the student submission/contribute to the provider submission because we disagreed with the provider on some issues

- We wanted the student submission/contribution to the provider submission to give an accurate account of being a student at our university/college

- By writing the student submission/contributing to the provider submission we wanted to try and influence our university/college about specific learning and teaching issues.

Q13B. (Optional) Please provide any additional comments on anything you wanted to achieve through your participation

Q14A. Influence on the TEF

- Being involved in the TEF gave me the ability to influence the content of the provider submission

- I think our contribution/student submission will impact (positively or negatively) on the rating awarded to my university or college.

- I think the TEF rating for my provider will be more accurate as a result of my involvement

- I think a more accurate rating will help future students make informed choices

Q14B. (Optional) Please provide any additional comments on the potential impact of being involved in the TEF, on your university or college's TEF assessment

Q15A. Impacts on students and their education

- Being involved in the TEF has helped me influence positive changes in learning and teaching at my university or college

- Being involved in the TEF has strengthened the voice of students in discussions with my university or college about learning and teaching

- Being involved in the TEF has made relationships between my university/college and student representatives more difficult.

Q15B. (Optional) Please provide more detail on any impacts you think that being involved in the TEF has had so far.

Q16. Your overall experience

- I felt free to say whatever I wanted in the student submission

- My experience of being involved in the TEF has been positive overall

- I would encourage future students at my provider to participate in the TEF

Q17. (Optional) Please use the text below to provide any further feedback you would like us to have about your involvement in TEF 2023. (Free text)