

TEF subject-level pilot evaluation – Provider perspectives

Report to the Office for Students by IFF Research

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1 Executive summary

- 1.1 This study aimed to capture evidence about the experience of higher education providers taking part in the second Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) subject-level pilot implemented in the 2018-19 academic year. The research was designed to address a number of questions, which can be broadly categorised into two themes of 'process' and 'outcomes'.
- 1.2 Under process, the research explored how higher education providers incorporated student voice into their TEF submission, the extent to which they found the evidence and assessment procedures to be robust and generally what burden the submission process placed on the provider. In terms of outcomes, key questions were asked about the current and potential future impact of subject-level TEF should it be rolled out across the higher education (HE) sector, including the extent to which it will drive enhancements in teaching and learning, and support diversity of provision, widening participation and social mobility.
- 1.3 Here we summarise the evidence captured under these themes.

Process

Meaningful input from students

- 1.4 Student voice was represented through two key roles: student representatives and student contributors. **Just over half of student representatives (56%) said the role had provided a meaningful opportunity for students to engage with the process.** Qualitative feedback found a lack of clarity around the declaration form completed by student representatives and its objectives, with several students commenting that it needs to be less of a tick-box exercise.
- 1.5 Engaging students more widely was challenging. **Around one in three (36%) TEF main contacts said that it had been difficult to engage student representatives, and nearly double this proportion (65%) cited difficulty engaging student contributors.** Undoubtedly the timing of the process did hamper efforts to engage students. **Where providers did have more success engaging students, this appeared to stem from proactive attempts made by academic staff to communicate with and encourage their students, as opposed to approaches from other departments or students.**

Robust evidence and assessment processes

- 1.6 **The subject-level TEF metrics were, on the whole, found to be complex.** Larger, more established higher education providers were better prepared and able to handle the complexity of the exercise, often identifying a specific individual who was tasked with focusing on the data analysis before sharing that insight with other contributors.

A minority of respondents spoke positively about the data and the insights they gleaned from it.

- 1.7 **Measures from the National Student Survey (NSS), including teaching on my course, assessment and feedback, and academic support, were seen as most relevant.** In contrast, Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) data on sustained employment/further study and median earnings/higher study were seen as least relevant.
- 1.8 **There was broad support for all the criteria used in the assessments.** Feedback, resources and rigour/stretch were viewed as the most relevant.
- 1.9 **Providers had mixed views on the Statement of Findings and its usefulness.** Some said the narrative element of the Statement of Findings helped to provide context around the metrics, whereas others felt that their accompanying narrative submission was overshadowed by the data, with the perception that explanations and mitigations of the metrics were not consistently taken into account by the assessment process¹. Some commented on perceived inconsistencies across subject areas in the decision-making; others said it was difficult to disaggregate learnings by subject area given the groupings, and others struggled to marry inconsistencies between provider-level and subject-level ratings.

Institutional burden

- 1.10 A number of providers remarked on the length of time it took to prepare their subject-level TEF submission. **Over half (56%) of academic contributors spent at least a week contributing to their institution's subject-level TEF process; 25% spent at least a fortnight.**

For further information on the assessment process, please refer to the TEF Subject-level pilot guide (pp 51-58): https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/media/57eb9beb-4e91-497b-860b-2fd2f39ae4ba/ofs2018_44_updated.pdf [PDF].

Outcomes

Driving enhancement

- 1.11 In terms of current impact, **46% of student contributors** said that subject-level TEF has already had a positive effect on the learning environment, **with 42%** saying there has been a positive effect on teaching quality and widening participation.
- 1.12 31% of academic contributors reported a positive impact of subject-level TEF on teaching quality and activities, while 25% reported a positive impact on the learning environment. **Over half (58%) also stated more broadly that subject-level TEF would act as a tool for internal enhancement leading to continuous improvement.**

Influencing prospective student choice

- 1.13 **Student contributors demonstrated a preference for subject-level TEF over provider-level TEF, with 89% saying that it is more useful than provider-level TEF. More than half of student representatives (56%) agreed.** Asked to explain their reasoning, students often focused on subject as being the primary concern for prospective students ahead of where to study. Staff were more sceptical about the potential for subject-level TEF to influence the choice of prospective students.

Supporting diversity of provision

- 1.14 There was some scepticism as to whether the TEF recognises diversity and innovative forms of excellence across a diverse sector. **Only 23% of academic contributors and 14% of TEF main contacts agreed that subject-level TEF would – in its current form – support diversity of provision.**

Supporting widening participation and social mobility

- 1.15 Staff and students were broadly split as to whether subject-level TEF will support widening participation and social mobility. **Around a third of staff (36% TEF main contacts, 31% academic contributors) agreed that subject-level TEF would have a positive impact on supporting widening participation and social mobility.** Meanwhile, around two-fifths of student representatives and contributors felt there had *already* been a positive effect as a result of subject-level TEF on widening participation.

Effects on provider behaviour

- 1.16 There were a number of points where the research focused on learnings from the pilot and how higher education providers might do things differently in the future or what they would do to prepare for subject-level TEF should it be rolled out. **The responses – particularly among more established higher education providers – typically focused around efforts to better align the subject-level TEF process with a provider's own existing internal quality assurance and enhancement processes, thus reducing the aforementioned level of burden and complexity.**

2 Background and methodology

Background

2.1 The Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) was introduced in 2016 by the government to:

- better inform students' choices about what and where to study
- raise esteem for teaching
- recognise and reward better teaching
- better meet the needs of employers, business, industry and the professions.

2.2 The TEF assesses excellence in teaching at higher education providers. The following types of higher education providers that participated in the second subject-level pilot are as follows: universities, further education (FE) colleges, specialist universities, and those providers who, prior to August 2019, were defined as alternative providers².

2.3 To date, TEF has operated at a voluntary 'provider level', which means that it has assessed the general performance across a provider, producing a single rating for the whole provider of Gold, Silver, Bronze, or a Provisional award for providers who meet national quality requirements but do not yet have sufficient data to be fully assessed.

2.4 In the 2017-18 academic year the Department for Education (DfE) introduced the first TEF subject-level pilot. This ran alongside the government's subject-level TEF consultation, which put forward detailed proposals on the design of subject-level TEF. The scheme was designed to provide ratings for each subject within a provider.

2.5 The second TEF subject-level pilot was carried out in the 2018-19 academic year by the Office for Students (OfS) alongside, but independently from, the provider-level TEF Year Four exercise. Participation in the pilot was voluntary. In September 2018 the OfS asked for expressions of interest to take part from all eligible UK universities and colleges and selected a representative sample of 45 of these to take part.

2.6 Providers involved in the second year of TEF subject-level pilot were assessed on the following:

- **Evidence**, comprising common data (including contextual data and TEF metrics) supplied by the OfS and provider and/or subject submissions.
- **Assessments** based on independent peer-review.

² For definitions of each provider type refer to the glossary (pp. 86-87). It should be noted that this research categorises higher education providers into four broad groups: Further Education College (FEC), University, Specialist University, and alternative provider (AP). Although these categories formed the historic basis for the regulation of higher education providers, the Office for Students (OfS) no longer distinguishes between provider types in this way.

2.7 In January 2019, the OfS commissioned IFF Research to undertake an evaluation of the 2018-19 subject-level TEF pilot focusing on the experience of providers. This report presents the results of the evaluation.

2.8 The themes that this evaluation sought to address include:

- Meaningfulness for students – how the exercise engages students and whether the model generates subject-level ratings that are more meaningful and useful for students than the outputs of provider-level TEF alone.
- Driving enhancement – how the model incentivises and drives a focus on enhancement and improvements to learning and teaching and student outcomes for all students.
- Supporting diversity of provision – the capability of the model to recognise diverse and innovative forms of excellence across a diverse sector.
- Supporting widening participation and social mobility – how the model encourages providers to deliver positive outcomes for students from all backgrounds.
- Robust evidence and assessment processes – how well the model allows panels to make robust assessments, including how the metrics and submissions are used.
- Effects on provider behaviour – including the extent to which it avoids driving unintended consequences and minimises vulnerability to gaming.
- Institutional burden – the proportionality of cost of participation for providers, through, for example, time used by staff in writing and coordinating time spent on the process.

Methodology

Summary

2.9 The research covered a number of activities, across a range of audiences, which can be broadly grouped into four distinct strands. The table below summarises this activity, in chronological order.

Evaluation activity	Timing	Coverage
Strand 1: Online surveys exploring experience of TEF process		
Online survey of TEF main contacts	March – April 2019	Views on process and impact of subject-level TEF submission, including views on available guidance and the assessment framework
Online survey with TEF student representative	April – May 2019	Views on the effectiveness of student engagement in the pilot, and its impact
Online pulse survey with academic contributors	April – May 2019	Views on the submission process and its impact for their department(s)
Online pulse survey with student contributors	April – May 2019	Views on their engagement with subject-level TEF, and its meaning for them
Strand 2: Post-submission workshops		
Workshop groups with TEF main contacts and student representatives at post-application event	April 2019	Scoped out themes emerging from the online surveys
Strand 3: In-depth interviews		
In-depth telephone interviews with TEF main contacts and academic contributors	June – July 2019	Explored emerging themes among individual HE providers, focusing on nuanced issues they faced, and solutions they found.
Strand 4: Statement of Findings online surveys		
Statement of Findings online survey with TEF main contacts	July 2019	Reactions to the Statement of Findings, and any final reflections
Statement of Findings online survey with academic contributors	July 2019	Reactions to the Statement of Findings, and any final reflections

2.10 As the table above indicates, there were four audiences for the research. These are defined below:

- **TEF main contact:** the nominated OfS contact for an institution who oversaw the subject-level TEF submission process.
- **TEF student representative:** each institution participating in the pilot was expected to demonstrate meaningful student engagement with both provider- and subject-level TEF and to that end was asked to nominate a student representative, such as a student union officer or relevant sabbatical officer who would be involved and

contribute to the process. Part of their responsibility would be to sign a declaration to say that students had been given the opportunity to feed into the TEF process.

- **Academic contributors:** typically heads of department or faculties, they led on the writing of departmental submissions on behalf of their institution.
- **Student contributors:** were engaged in the subject-level TEF process and will have contributed to discussions about the quality of teaching for one or more subjects, and potentially the learning environment.

Strand 1: Online surveys exploring experience of TEF process

2.11 A separate survey was designed for each of the four key audiences of the research: TEF main contact, academic contributor, student representative and student contributor. The OfS shared drafts of the surveys with appropriate TEF and student contacts to ensure that they were clear. The TEF main contact survey was open between March and April 2019, while the remaining three surveys were open between April and May 2019.

2.12 The survey of **TEF main contacts** covered:

- Their perception of how others in their institution engaged with the subject-level TEF pilot.
- Barriers and facilitators to engagement with TEF.
- Views on the greater emphasis on student voice.
- Views on the OfS-produced guidance materials.
- Views on the data received from the OfS to support the submission.
- Broader reflection on their final submission including complexity and challenges.
- Views on the assessment framework, including relevance of core metrics.
- Impacts of involvement in subject-level TEF pilot.

2.13 The survey with **academic contributors** covered:

- Involvement in the subject-level TEF pilot, including time spent and individuals engaged.
- Ease and difficulty of writing and co-ordinating subject-level TEF pilot submissions.
- Views on whether the process allowed them to accurately portray the teaching quality and education they provided.
- Impacts of involvement in subject-level TEF pilot.

2.14 The survey with **student representatives** covered:

- Whether they felt the process for subject-level TEF delivered on its aims.
- Their experience of involvement including the challenges faced.
- Engagement with other students, including barriers.
- Views on the OfS-produced guidance materials.

- Engagement with staff.
- Views on the student declaration form.
- Impacts of involvement in subject-level TEF pilot.

2.15 The survey with **student contributors** covered:

- Motivations for engaging with the subject-level TEF pilot, including how they became aware of it.
- Engagement with subject-level TEF pilot, including the challenges faced.
- Views on whether they felt the submission(s) was an accurate portrayal of the teaching quality and education provided.
- Views on the OfS-produced guidance materials.
- Impacts of involvement in subject-level TEF pilot.

2.16 The OfS shared with IFF contact details for all TEF main contacts and student representatives involved in the pilot for subject-level TEF. We contacted these individuals directly with a unique survey link. No contact details were held for academic contributors and student contributors, so 'open' survey links for each were sent to each TEF main contact, and they were then asked to share these with relevant individuals within their institution.

2.17 Table 2.1 presents the number of responses achieved and institutions represented across the four audiences. As this shows, nearly all (42 out of 45) TEF main contacts responded to the survey, ensuring very strong representation across the population of institutions participating in the TEF subject-level pilot. We achieved 237 responses from academic contributors, and 25 from student representatives (from a base of 42). A total of 50 student contributors responded to the survey. The evaluation has found that engaging students in subject-level TEF has been a challenge for institutions, which would ultimately have a bearing on engaging them in the evaluation process.

Table 2.1 Survey responses achieved

Audience	Eligible sample	Completed surveys	Institutions represented	Proportion of institutions represented
TEF main contact	45	42	42	93%
Academic contributor	Unknown	237	29	64%
Student representative	42	25	25	56%
Student contributor	Unknown	50	19	42%
Total	-	354	42	-

2.18 It is important to consider the extent to which responses received are representative of the subject-level TEF population (no weighting was applied to the data). There is no population data on individuals' participation, so this assessment has to be conducted against provider population statistics. These are shown in Table 2.2. The sample profile deviates most from the population among academic contributors and student contributors. These two samples are dominated by respondents from universities, and also from providers that did not participate in the first subject-level TEF pilot. It should also be noted that one particular university comprised 17% of the academic contributor responses and 20% of the student contributor responses. Their responses are, however, typically in line with those at other institutions.

Table 2.2 Profile of responses

	Population		TEF main contact	Academic contributor	Student representative	Student contributor
<i>Base</i>	45		42	237	25	50
	N	%	%	%	%	%
University	27	60	62	89	72	94
Further education college	12	27	26	7	24	4
Alternative provider	6	13	12	3	4	2
Participated in first SL TEF	14	31	26	19	36	8
Did not participate in first SL TEF	31	69	74	81	64	92

Strand 2: Post-submission workshops

2.19 On April 1st and April 2nd 2019, the OfS hosted a post-submission event in Birmingham. This event, attended by the majority of TEF main contacts and student representatives, was timetabled after HE providers had completed their subject-level TEF pilot submission and was designed to gather feedback on the process.

2.20 IFF hosted four workshops across the two days of the event, with separate sessions for TEF main contacts and student representatives. Coverage built on initial feedback gathered from the online surveys, with a view to exploring some of the issues encountered in more depth.

2.21 The TEF main contact workshop used various activities to cover:

- Engagement with academic contributors and student contributors.
- Metrics: relevance, usefulness and accessibility.
- Time-challenges created by engaging in the subject-level TEF pilot.
- Unintended consequences of engaging in the subject-level TEF pilot.
- (Anticipated) benefits of engagement with the subject-level TEF pilot for: the institution, students and UK society.

2.22 The student representative workshop incorporated the following elements:

- General experience of involvement in the subject-level TEF pilot submission.
- Engagement with other students.
- Engagement with staff – what worked etc.
- The impact of the second TEF subject-level pilot, both for themselves and other students.

Strand 3: In-depth interviews

2.23 Following completion of strands 1 and 2, IFF and the OfS reviewed the feedback in depth, with a view to identifying particular ‘cases’ where good practice had been demonstrated, or where there were learnings to be made from issues that HE providers faced.

2.24 As a result of this review, eight HE providers were selected for further in-depth interviews to explore their particular experience of engaging with the subject-level TEF pilot. This included one further education college and one alternative provider. Interviews were conducted through June and July 2019.

2.25 Three broad discussion guides were created for TEF main contacts, academic contributors and student representatives. However, each one was tailored so that we were able to follow-up particular avenues of interest for each HE provider. Across all guides, content included:

- Student engagement with second TEF subject-level pilot.
- Staff engagement with second TEF subject-level pilot.
- Institutional challenges, including time taken, senior leader involvement, alignment of subject-level TEF processes to existing internal quality assurance (QA) processes, interdisciplinary provision, any data-related challenges.
- Drivers of dissatisfaction.

2.26 In total we achieved 17 interviews across the eight HE providers:

- Eight interviews were achieved with TEF main contacts, one for each provider.
- Nine interviews were achieved with academic contributors, across four providers.

Statement of Findings online survey

2.27 The OfS returned statements of findings to HE providers in the week commencing 1st July 2019, revealing their subject-level TEF ratings (Gold, Silver, Bronze or no rating).

2.28 A total of three different types of statements were released, as OfS sought to test which type was most suitable. Two were subject-level only, and one provider-level.

2.29 IFF designed online surveys for TEF main contacts and academic contributors to explore their view of the Statement(s) of Findings they received. The online surveys were disseminated on July 15th 2019 to all TEF main contacts, who were asked to fill in the main contact survey and distribute the academic contributor survey to relevant staff.

2.30 While there were separate surveys for TEF main contacts and academic contributors, they were very close in design to allow comparison of responses between the different audiences. Coverage included:

- Which type of statement of findings they received.
- Overall satisfaction with the presentation of ratings, per-aspect ratings and the accompanying narrative, and how well they represent the provision at their institution.
- Agreement with statements on the content and format of each type of statement of findings they received
- Which statement of findings they consider to be their preferred format
- How each type of statement of findings might be used, and by whom.
- What actions will be taken as a result of the content of the statement of findings
- Reflections on how their experience of participating in the second TEF subject-level pilot might impact future TEF exercises.

2.31 A total of 27 TEF main contacts and 66 academic contributors responded to the survey.

Report conventions

2.32 Throughout this report, unweighted base figures are shown on tables and charts to give an indication of the statistical reliability of the figures.

2.33 In some cases, figures in tables and charts may not always add to 100 percent due to rounding (i.e. 99 percent or 101 percent).

2.34 The core findings from the quantitative survey are based on TEF main contact responses (42), student representatives (25), academic contributors (237) and student

contributors (50). Where the findings are broken down by previous involvement with subject-level TEF and provider type, the base sizes fall particularly low. Therefore, where any differences are drawn out from these results, they should be treated as indicative.

Report structure

2.35 The key findings are covered across seven broad chapters:

- Chapter 3 covers overall reflections on subject-level TEF from both an institutional and student perspective, considering the potential impact for students, departments and higher education providers alike should subject-level TEF be rolled out across the higher education sector.
- Chapter 4 focuses on engagement of staff, the ease of engaging staff, methods used and barriers.
- Chapter 5 looks at student voice in the second TEF subject-level pilot. It is split into two sections, the first part focuses on the role of the student representative, including the value of the student declaration, and suggestions for improving the role of student representative. The second part turns the attention on student contributors, their engagement and barriers to their involvement in the process.
- Chapter 6 considers the effectiveness of guidance, covering both the guidance materials specifically as well as the overall support provided by the OfS to HE providers involved in the second pilot.
- Chapter 7 looks at the use of data that the OfS provided, covering usefulness, timeliness and challenges.
- Chapter 8 covers the submission and assessment framework. This includes the range of measures that contribute to the overall process for completing submissions, including time commitment requirement, the assessment criteria, accuracy of the final submission as well as the inclusion of student voice.
- Chapter 9 shows the views of TEF main contacts of the changes made to the subject-level TEF between the first and second pilot exercises.
- Chapter 10 presents the findings from the Statement of Findings survey, which focuses on the attitudes towards the three different types of statements used for the second subject-level TEF pilot.
- Chapter 11 is a summary of the overall findings from the research addressing the key objectives for the OfS.
- Appendix A: Glossary
- Appendix B: Example templates for the three types of Statement of Findings

3 Overall reflections on subject-level TEF

- 3.1 This chapter reports on the impact of subject-level TEF, both immediate and perceived future benefits, for students, institutions and the wider higher education sector. The analysis considers the value of subject-level TEF versus provider-level TEF. It concludes by looking at what have been the key learnings for institutions involved in the second pilot.

Key findings

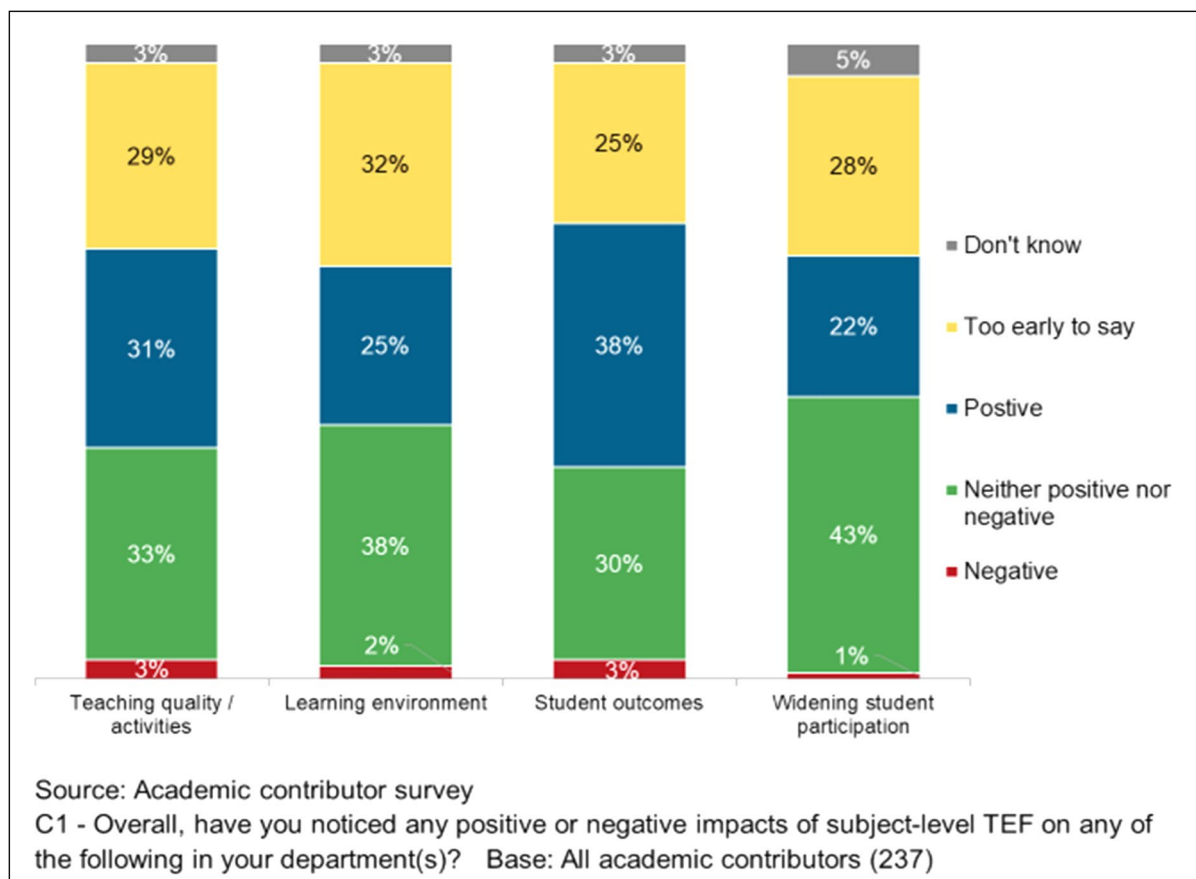
- One in three academic contributors said that subject-level TEF is valuable for (a) their institution and (b) their department. Around one in four saw value in the scheme for the higher education sector as a whole. Around one in three academics think it is too soon to tell what the impact of subject-level TEF is.
- Students contributors were very positive about the potential for subject-level TEF over provider-level to influence prospective students. Staff were more sceptical.
- In terms of current impact, student contributors considered that subject-level TEF had the most positive impact on the learning environment; whereas student representatives were most likely to cite widening participation as the area of most impact.
- TEF main contacts were asked what the key learnings were from participating in the pilot process. The most common responses were around operationalising the subject-level TEF process (79%); finding ways of embedding subject-level TEF into existing QA and teaching enhancement processes (76%) and understanding the performance of their own subjects against those in the wider sector (76%). The point about embedding the requirements for subject-level TEF within existing internal QA processes came through strongly in the depth interviews as institutions look for ways to streamline processes and reduce the added burden to staff of subject-level TEF.

Impact of subject-level TEF – staff

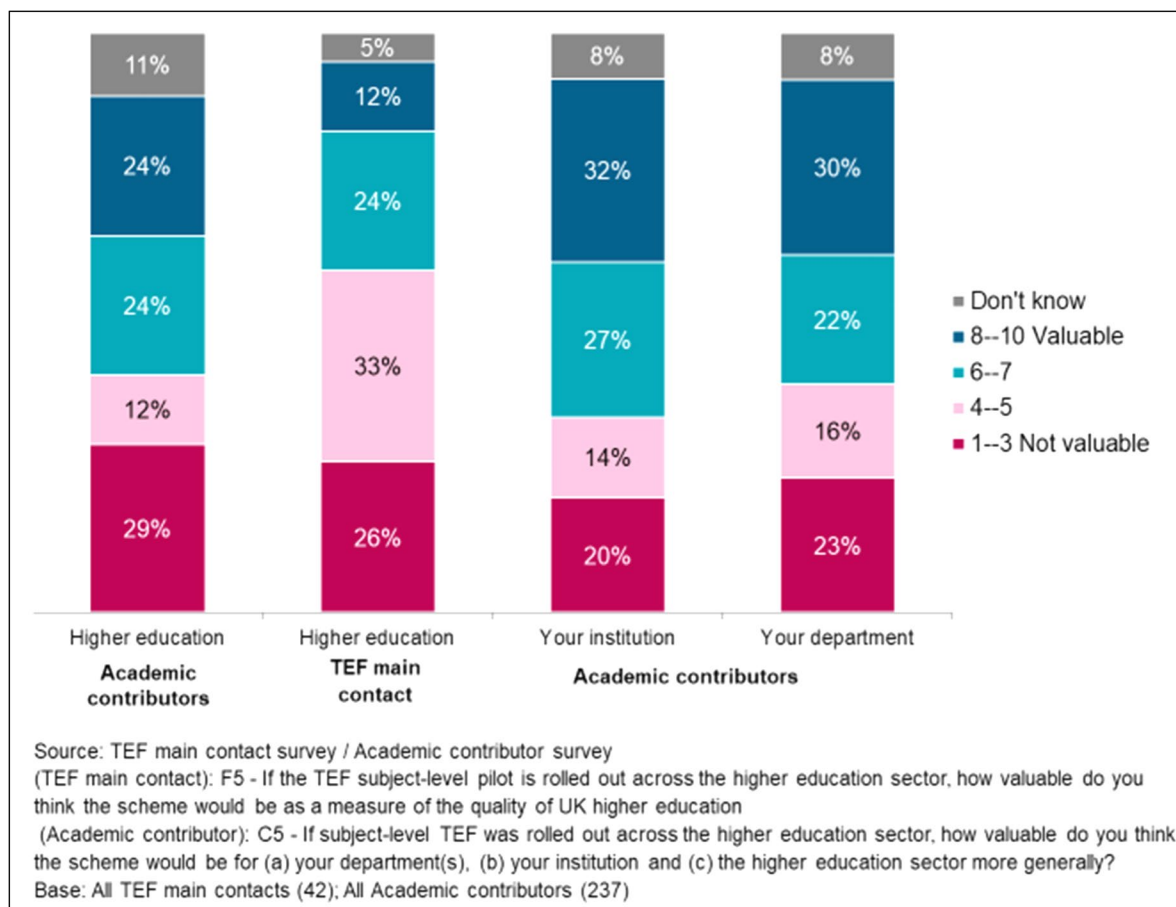
- 3.2 Academic contributors were asked about the impact that subject-level TEF has had on their department(s) in respect of teaching quality/activities, learning environment, focus on student outcomes and widening student participation.
- 3.3 Across these measures, between one in three and one in four academic contributors said it was too early to tell. The proportion saying 'neither positive nor negative' was also considerable. Where academic contributors had referenced an effect, it tended to be at least somewhat positive rather than negative (indeed, very few had experienced negative impacts).

- 3.4 As shown in Figure 3.1, student outcomes saw the largest positive response with almost two in five academic contributors saying they had noticed a 'positive' effect of subject-level TEF (38%). The smallest positive effect was for widening student participation where only one in four said they had seen a positive effect (22%).

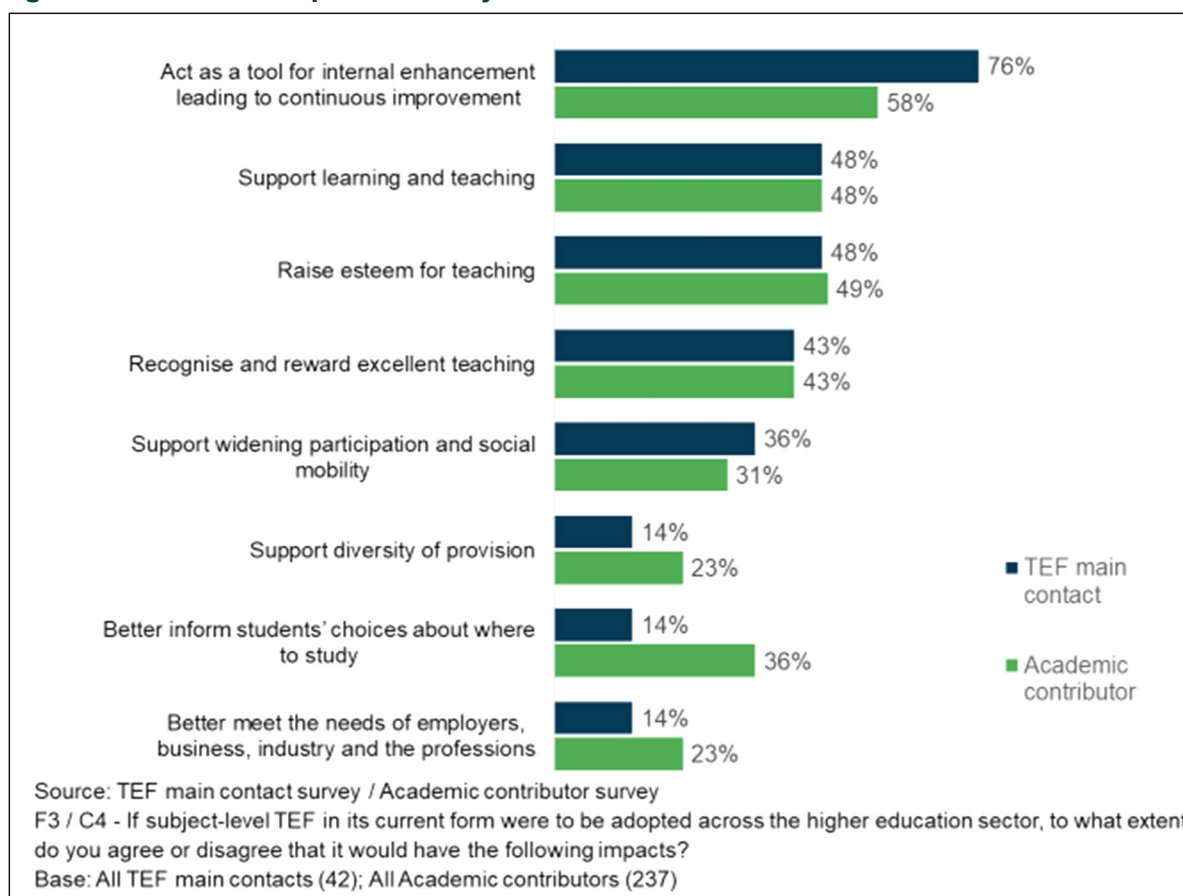
Figure 3.1 Local impact of subject-level TEF across four key measures



- 3.5 Staff were asked how valuable subject-level TEF would be for departments, institutions and higher education overall if it were rolled out across the sector.
- 3.6 Around one in four (24%) academic contributors said it would be valuable if the scheme were rolled out across the sector, giving a score of between 8 and 10 on a ten-point scale (48% gave a score of 6 to 10). TEF main contacts were less optimistic; only one in eight (12%) gave a score of between 8 and 10, as shown in Figure 3.2 (36% gave a score of 6 to 10).
- 3.7 Academic contributors were also asked about the potential impact for (a) their department and (b) their institution. Around one in three (32%) saw value in the scheme for their institution, giving a score of between 8 and 10; a similar proportion (30%) felt that subject-level TEF would be of value to their department specifically.

Figure 3.2 The value of subject-level TEF for institutions and higher education sector

- 3.8 TEF main contacts and academic contributors were supplied a list of eight potential impacts of subject-level TEF and asked the extent to which they thought these might occur.
- 3.9 As Figure 3.3 illustrates, the most commonly anticipated impact related to subject-level TEF was acting as a tool for internal enhancement leading to continuous improvement (76% of TEF main contacts; 58% of academic contributors). Close to half reflected on the direct impact it would have on teaching, be this in terms of better support, raised esteem, or recognition of excellent teaching. TEF main contacts and academic contributors were most split over the impact it would have on student choice. While only a small minority (14%) of TEF main contacts anticipated that subject-level TEF would better inform student choice about where to study, over a third (36%) of academic contributors felt it would.

Figure 3.3 Potential impacts of subject-level TEF

3.10 There were some differences in response by provider type, although patterns were not always consistent between TEF main contacts and academic contributors, which is perhaps as much an indication of the low base size as of their particular role within the institution (indeed this analysis should be treated with some caution as a result). Typically, staff at further education colleges were most positive about the impact of subject-level TEF. Both TEF main contacts and academic contributors at these institutions were more likely to anticipate that it would better inform student choice and meet employer needs than the average, while academic contributors at these institutions were also more likely to note the impact of subject-level TEF as supporting diversity of provision, supporting widening participation and social mobility, and acting as a tool for internal enhancement.

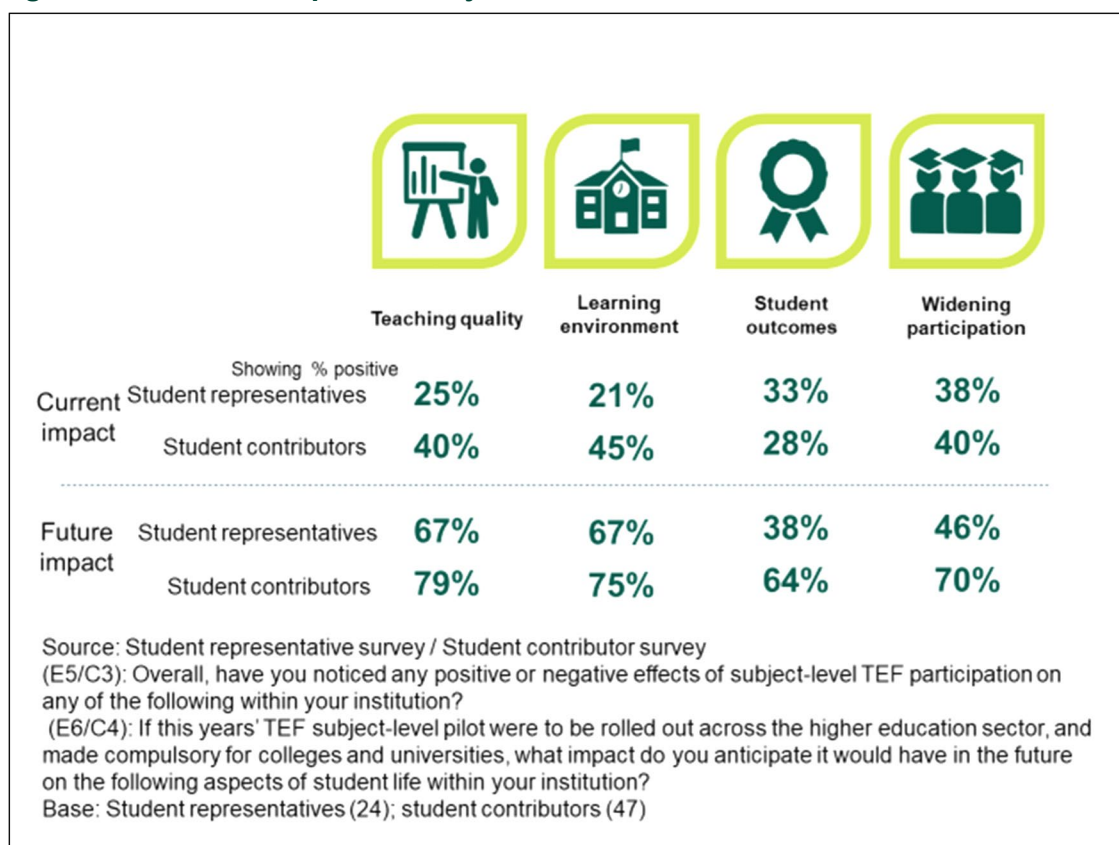
Impact of subject-level TEF – students

3.11 Students involved with the second subject-level TEF pilot were asked what impact they felt subject-level TEF would have on future students looking to make a decision about what, or where, to study.

3.12 The outlook among students was generally more positive than staff. Three-quarters of student contributors (78%) expected subject-level TEF to have a positive effect on student applications. This figure was lower for student representatives (44%).

- 3.13 Students were asked whether they had noticed any positive or negative effects, so far, of subject-level TEF on the key areas of teaching quality, learning environment, student outcomes and widening participation.
- 3.14 Student representatives were most likely to identify widening participation as an area where subject-level TEF has already had a positive effect (36%), followed by student outcomes (32%). Longer term, however, they considered that the TEF would have a greater impact on teaching quality and the learning environment (64% said both of these areas would likely be positively affected by subject-level TEF in the future).
- 3.15 Student contributors were generally more positive about the effects of subject-level TEF. They were most likely to identify the learning environment as the area where subject-level TEF has already had a positive effect, cited by 46% of respondents. Thinking about the future, around eight out of ten (80%) student contributors cited teaching quality as the area for greatest positive impact for subject-level TEF.

Figure 3.4 Potential impact of subject-level TEF



Value of subject-level TEF compared with provider-level TEF

- 3.16 Academic contributors were asked about the impact of subject-level TEF on (a) their department and (b) the choices of prospective students. More than half of academic contributors said that subject-level TEF would be more useful than provider-level TEF

for their department: 26% reported that subject-level TEF would be *much more useful* (26%), with a further 35% stating it would be *slightly more useful*.

- 3.17 Just under half of academic contributors felt that subject-level TEF would be more useful for student choice than provider-level TEF (22% answered *much more useful*, and 25% answered *slightly more useful*).
- 3.18 Students were also asked about the relative usefulness of subject-level TEF versus provider-level TEF.
- 3.19 Nearly all (89%) student contributors considered subject-level TEF to be *more useful* than provider-level TEF. This sentiment was shared albeit to a less extent among student representatives, where just over half (54%) reported that subject-level TEF was *more useful* than provider-level TEF.
- 3.20 When asked why subject-level TEF is perceived to be more useful, the responses focused on the idea that prospective students are more likely to know what they want to study rather than where they will continue their education.

“The philosophical reasons to why students go to university is for the teaching, thus the TEF is instrumental in ensuring this is held in the same regard as research. Secondly, students (on the whole) choose their course/programme of study before provider. Therefore, being able to assess providers within subjects (and against each other) would be more beneficial and lead to greater student choice.”

Student representative, Alternative Provider

“Students tend to know what course they wish to study at university so to see the score of it will inform their decision. Having provider-level TEF isn’t consistent across all courses.”

Student representative, University

“Most of the time, prospective students are more concerned about what they are going to study than where they are going to study it. Therefore, a subject-level TEF rating will be the focus for prospective students, rather than a provider level rating.”

Student representative, Specialist University

- 3.21 Around one in eight (13%) student representatives said that subject-level TEF was less useful than provider-level TEF; no student contributors said that subject-level TEF was less useful.
- 3.22 The reasons given for subject-level TEF being less useful varied, but ranged from the grouping of subjects being too wide, confusion between provider and subject-level ratings where they may be contradictory, and the fact that students will ultimately pick a course that they particularly want to study irrespective of the rating.

“Honestly, a student may be presented with a silver and a bronze course, but if the bronze course has units on there that they prefer then they will pick it.”

Student representative, University

“I think it would be more useful if it was a subject-level rating on its own, but if the ratings are different this will just lead to confusion. I believe it should be one or the other.”

Student representative, Specialist University

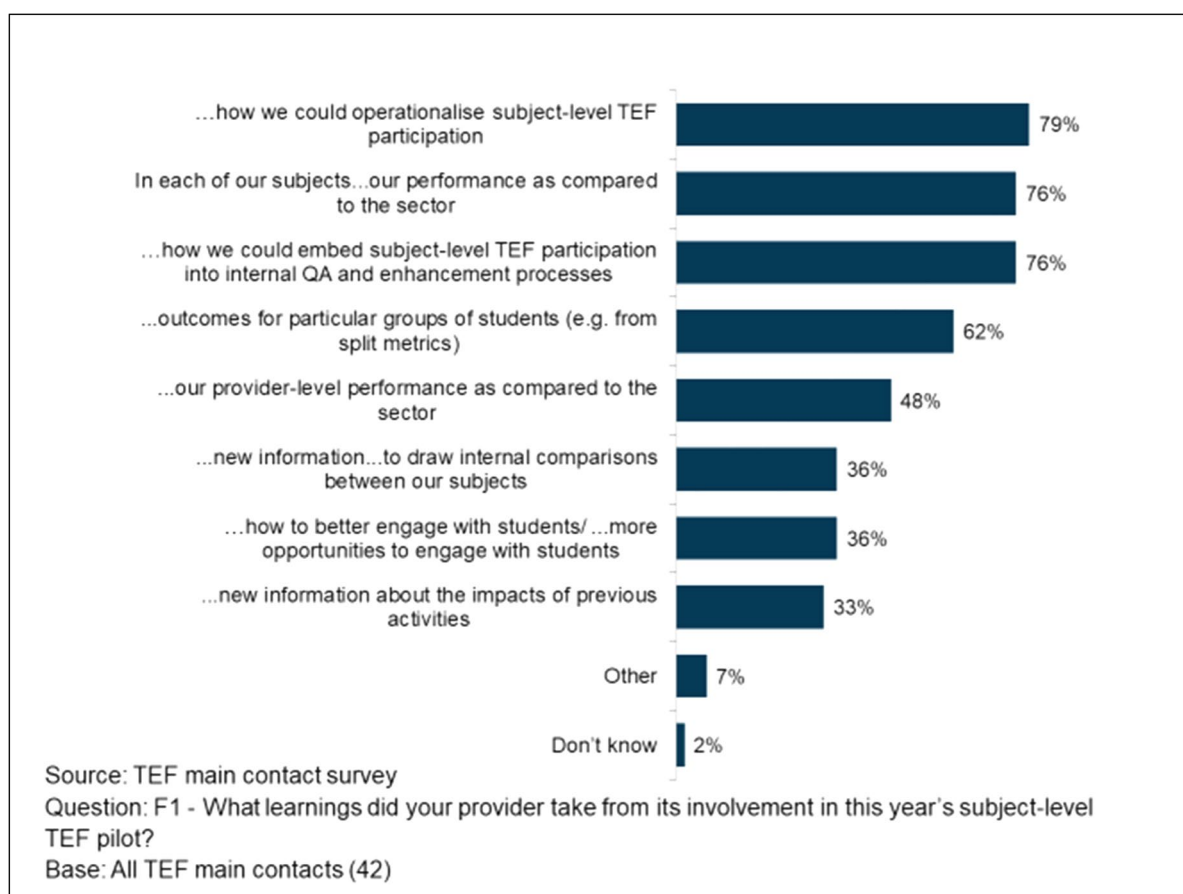
“Because the subjects are too widely based, they are not specific.”

Student representative, Specialist University

Learnings from the pilot

3.23 The key learning from involvement in the second TEF subject-level pilot related to operationalising participation in the subject-level TEF process (79% of TEF main contacts cited this as a learning). This is likely to reflect the key stakeholders that were surveyed, mainly the TEF main contacts who were responsible for overseeing the coordination and submission(s) for an institution. Other senior leaders, such as Vice Chancellors, might have had a different perspective on the process and the key learnings. It is important, therefore, to bear in mind that the findings reflect one institutional perspective rather than a holistic account of an institution’s experience.

3.24 The second most important learnings were a greater understanding of the performance of their own subject compared with the wider sector, as well as how to embed subject-level TEF into existing quality assurance and enhancement processes (both at 76%). Figure 3.5 illustrates the learnings from the pilot.

Figure 3.5 Learnings from the TEF subject-level pilot process

3.25 The desire to ensure that the subject-level TEF process is fully aligned with existing processes came through strongly in the in-depth interviews.

“We altered our programme enhancement processes to map onto the TEF data”.

TEF main contact, University

“What we've subsequently done is change our systems to match the TEF format, so we've actually been able to duplicate the same data.”

TEF main contact, University

“I would say we had already tried to align our internal QA processes, but I think going through the pilot has helped us to embed that even more.”

TEF main contact, University

3.26 In contrast to universities, which are often larger and more established, learnings for other providers were more focused on collecting a broader range of metrics and establishing a more standardised process across departments going forward.

4 Engaging staff in subject-level TEF

4.1 This chapter covers how staff members in participating higher education providers responded to the TEF subject-level pilot, focusing on the ease with which they were able to contribute to the process, the methods used to engage staff, and the barriers and facilitators to engagement.

Key findings

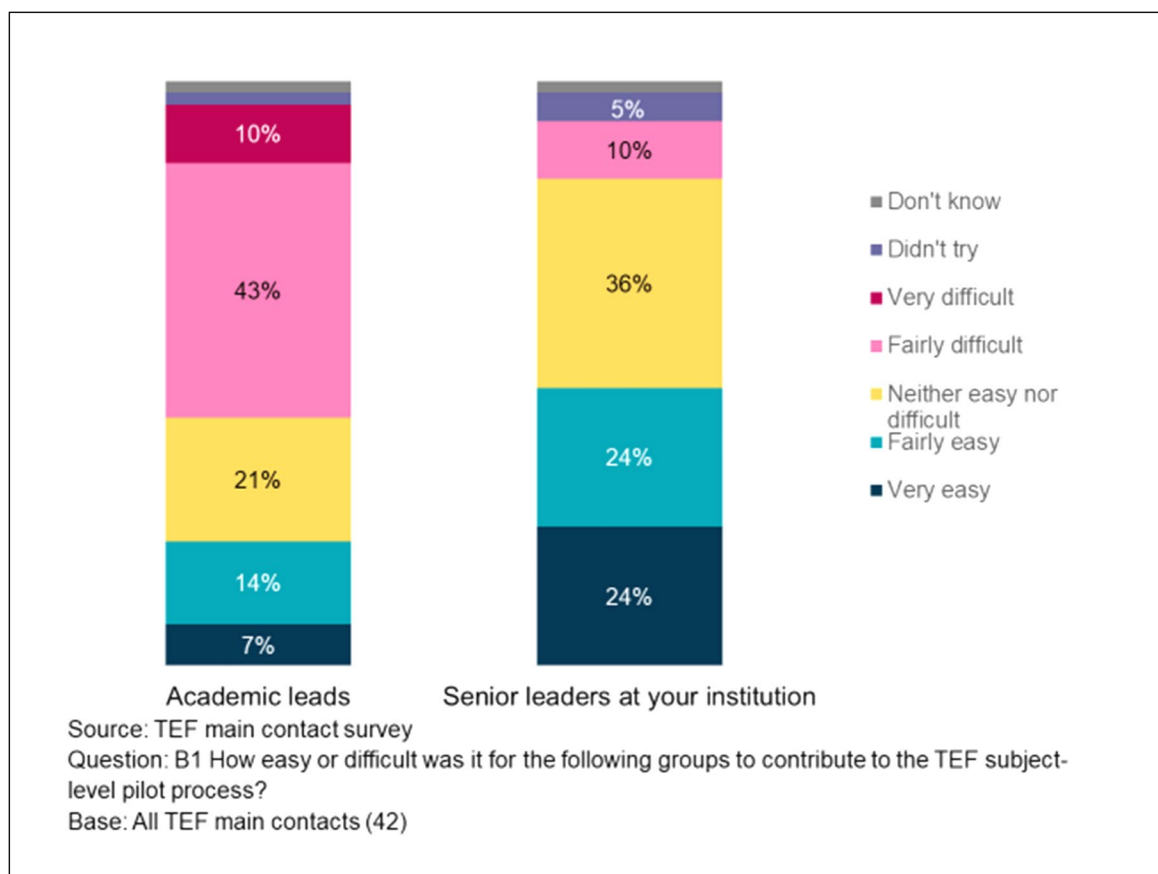
- Generally speaking, senior leaders offered sufficient levels of support to their providers' teams responding to the subject-level TEF exercise.
- In contrast, it was harder to engage academic contributors. Only one in five TEF main contacts said it was easy to engage academic contributors. There were a number of reasons why engaging academic contributors was difficult, but almost universally they all mentioned time.
- Another barrier to engagement for academics was the metrics. The quantitative data determined a considerable lack of understanding of the metrics. Insight from in-depth interviews shows that a lack of understanding was only part of the issue, with some academics expressing concern about the validity of some of the metrics as a measure of teaching quality. *"Some of our academic staff are sceptical about the metric-driven nature of the initial hypothesis and the validity of metrics focused on satisfaction and employment outcomes as proxies for teaching quality"* (TEF main contact, University). Challenges with data, for example concerns that data is not benchmarked regionally and, consequently, seen as biased in favour of London and the big cities, increase scepticism towards the data.
- Sufficient resources to explain the process was most important for engaging academic contributors; for senior leaders it was the commitment to engaging with teaching enhancement. For both groups, an understanding of the process was the second highest factor cited as facilitating engagement.
- When asked how engagement by staff could be improved, many of the suggestions offered concerned the guidance materials, including making it more focused and accessible.

Ease of contributing to TEF subject-level pilot

4.2 TEF main contacts were asked to consider the ease with which other members of staff within their institution contributed to the TEF subject-level pilot process. A slim majority stated that academic contributors found it difficult (43% *fairly difficult*, 10% *very difficult*). As shown in Figure 4.1, only 7% reported that academic contributors found it *very easy* to contribute and a further 14% *fairly easy*.

4.3 In contrast, TEF main contacts were considerably more positive regarding the engagement from senior leaders, although their burden in terms of contributing to the TEF subject-level process is likely to have been lighter than academic contributors. Indeed, 24% reported that senior leaders found it *very easy* to contribute, and a further 24% reported that it was *fairly easy*.

Figure 4.1 Ease with which staff members contributed to the TEF subject-level pilot process



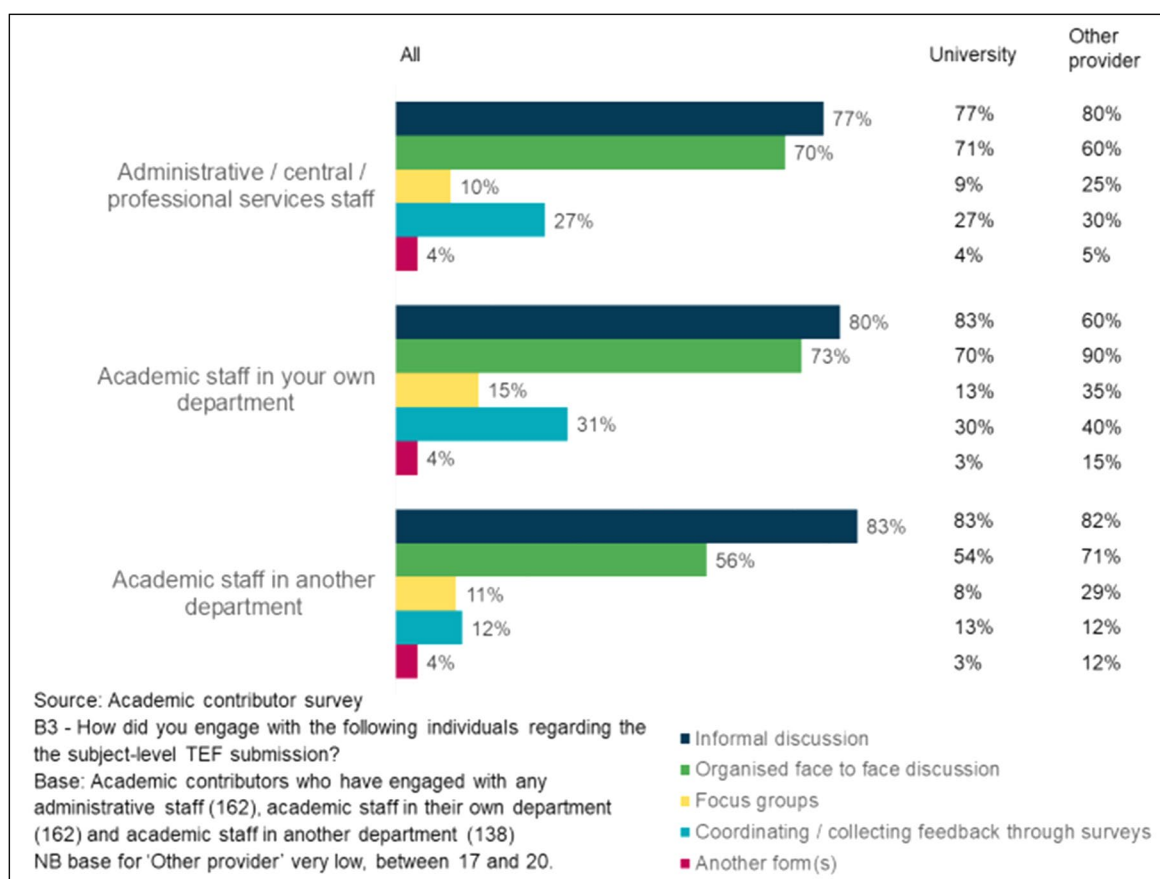
4.4 While it is a small sample size, it is worth noting that no TEF main contacts within further education colleges or alternative providers reported that their academic contributors found it easy to contribute to the TEF subject-level pilot process. Instead, they were most likely to report that academic staff found it *fairly difficult* to contribute (64% and 60% respectively). A similar, if less extreme, pattern occurred with respect to senior leaders, where those at universities tended to find it easier to contribute as well. Additionally, those providers that were new to the TEF subject-level pilot also tended to find it more difficult to contribute (for example, TEF main contacts reported that 64% of senior leaders at institutions already familiar with the TEF subject-level pilot found it either *very easy* or *fairly easy* to contribute to the process, compared with just 42% of those new to the pilot).

Methods used to engage staff

4.5 Across all departments, academic contributors typically communicated with other staff members through informal (ad-hoc) discussions – either face-to-face or through electronic means. More organised face-to-face discussion were also relatively common, although less so among those engaging staff in other departments.

4.6 The use of formal feedback channels such as surveys was typically used by less than a third of academic contributors, while only a small proportion utilised focus groups. Percentage figures pertaining to this summary are identified in Figure 4.2. This also presents the same findings split by universities and other providers. While these figures should be treated as indicative due to a low base at this level, they do suggest that other providers found a greater use in running focus groups to engage staff.

Figure 4.2 Method of engagement with other participants in subject-level TEF



Barriers to staff engagement

4.7 TEF main contacts who reported that certain audiences found it difficult to engage with subject-level TEF were subsequently asked why this might be.

4.8 Time was clearly the most prominent barrier for academic staff (91% of TEF main contacts cited this issue). The complexity of the metrics also caused difficulty: 77% of TEF main contacts felt that staff not understanding the metrics was off-putting, and

68% reported that academic staff had concerns about the process/metrics that inform subject-level TEF.

- 4.9 In some cases, convincing academic contributors of the benefits of the process was found to be challenging. At the post-submission workshop some participants commented that it was difficult to persuade some colleagues to focus on the pilot ahead of other commitments because they could not see what the point of it was.
- 4.10 Only four TEF main contacts said they found it difficult to engage with senior institution leaders. Three of these were from universities and one from a further education college. Of these, three cited lack of time and three concerns about the process/metrics as to the key barriers.

Aids to staff engagement

- 4.11 A common theme across the in-depth interviews was the willingness of senior management to 'buy-in' to the subject-level TEF process. The benefits of the programme, such as potentially aiding the institution's reputation, helping to improve internal evaluation processes, or providing clearer focus on areas for improvement, were appreciated at an institutional level and this fed down to teaching staff.
- 4.12 TEF main contacts who found it easy to engage senior leaders cited their general commitment to teaching enhancement as key to their engagement with subject-level TEF (95%).
- 4.13 Of the nine TEF main contacts who reported that it had been *easy* to engage academic contributors in the TEF subject-level pilot, having 'sufficient resources/capacity' to explain the process was seen to be very important and mentioned by eight TEF main contacts. All nine were from universities. This was followed by 'understanding the process' and 'a commitment to engaging with teaching enhancement', mentioned by six TEF main contacts.
- 4.14 The post-submission workshops did throw up some suggestions for ways to make engagement of academics easier. These included incentives such as providing food, money or TEF main contacts taking on extra work in the write-up; but there were questions over how sustainable these techniques might be.

5 Incorporating the student voice into subject-level TEF

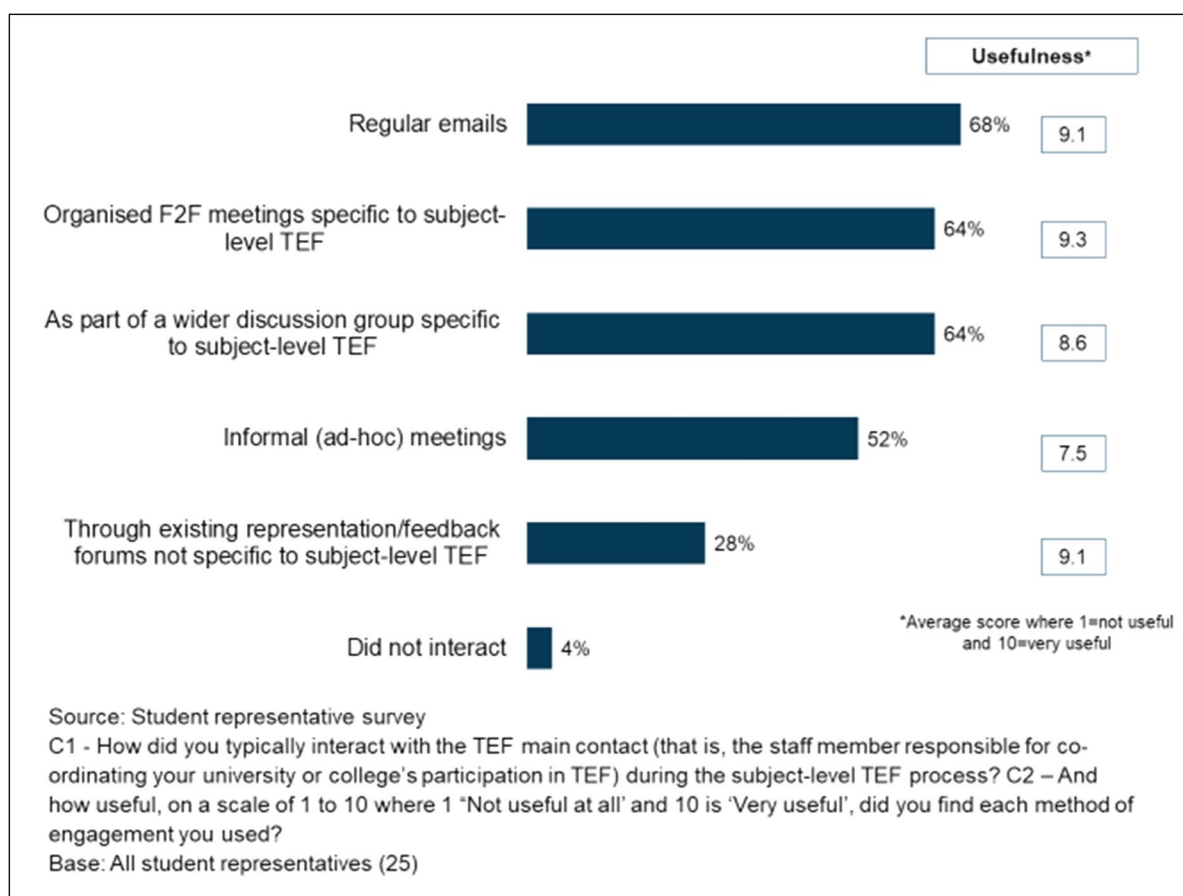
- 5.1 One objective for the second TEF subject-level pilot was to increase the student voice in the process. This chapter covers how students with participating institutions responded to the second TEF subject-level pilot, focusing on the ease with which they were considered able to contribute to the process, the methods used to engage students, and the barriers and facilitators to engagement.
- 5.2 It looks first at the student representative, whose role it was to confirm if the student voice had been meaningfully engaged in the second year TEF subject-level pilot, before moving on to the role of student contributors, whose thoughts on teaching quality and learning environment were sought.

Key findings

- Around one in three (36%) TEF main contacts said that it had been difficult to engage student representatives, and nearly double this proportion (65%) cited difficulty engaging student contributors.
- The key barriers to engagement were time, and that students could not see any benefits for themselves in getting involved with the process. Very few students said they were ideologically opposed to provider-level TEF in any form (16%), and fewer were opposed to subject-level TEF specifically (just 4%). Insight from both the discussion groups and the in-depth interviews supported these findings.
- The most common forum for encouraging other students to contribute to the subject-level TEF process was promotional activities through the Students Union.
- One of the key tasks for student representatives was completing the student declaration form. Only one in three student representatives felt that the student declaration was a successful way of providing students with an opportunity to engage with subject-level TEF.
- Suggestions for improving the role of student representatives centred around training, more specific guidance and support and being made to feel more part of the process.
- Engaging student contributors proved even more challenging. The most common way of engaging them was through organised face-to-face discussions, followed by emails and focus groups.
- Those who contributed to the process were most likely to be motivated by the feeling that this was an opportunity for the student voice to be heard.

The role of the student representative in the subject-level TEF pilot process

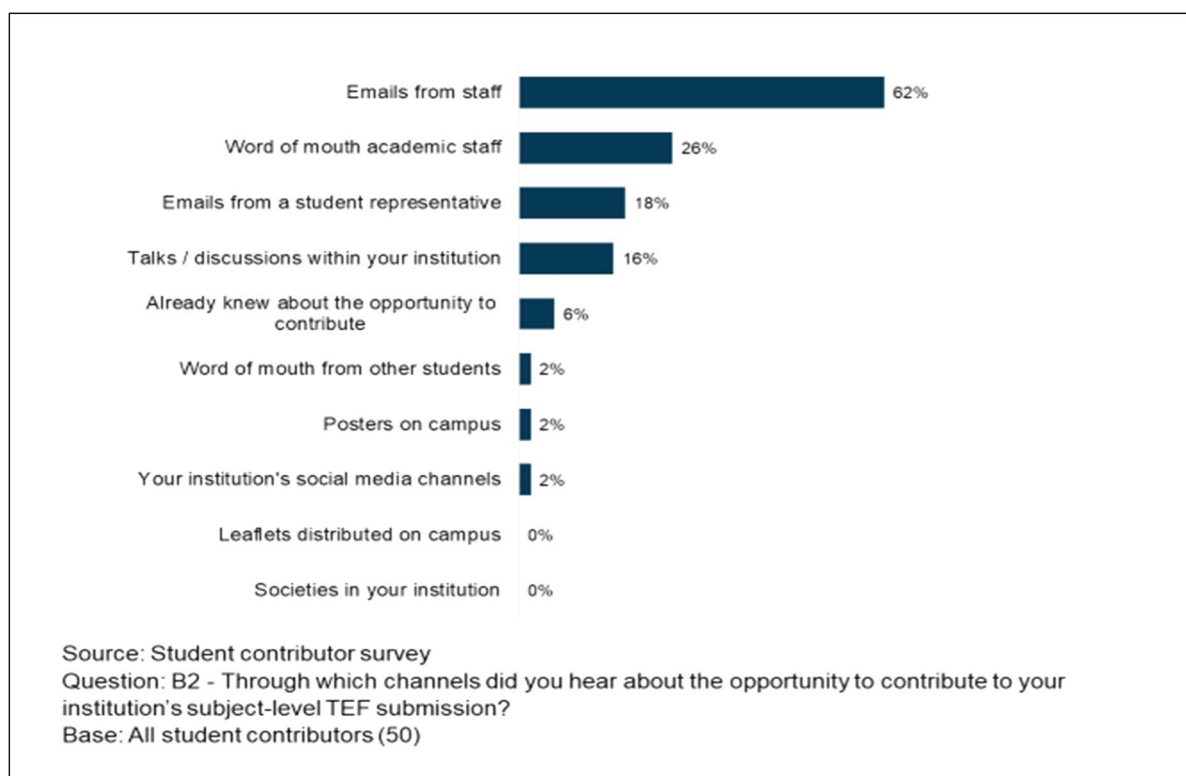
- 5.3 Each institution participating in the pilot was expected to demonstrate meaningful student engagement with both provider- and subject-level TEF and to that end were asked to nominate a student representative, such as a Student Union officer or relevant sabbatical officer who would be involved and contribute to the process.
- 5.4 Student representatives were asked on a scale of 1-10 how successful they felt the role of lead student representative has been as a way of providing a meaningful opportunity to engage students with subject-level TEF. For the most part they answered positively: 38% gave a response of 8-10, with a further 32% responding 6-7.
- 5.5 Student representatives were asked how often they engaged with the TEF main contact. Half of all respondents (50%) said they communicated with the TEF main contact on a weekly basis, 38% said fortnightly and 12% said monthly or less frequently.
- 5.6 Around two-thirds of student representatives cited the use of regular emails (68%), organised face-to-face meetings (64%) and wider discussion groups (64%) as key ways in which they engaged with the subject-level TEF process; as illustrated in Figure 5.1. Just over half (52%), also, had informal meetings.
- 5.7 Only one in four (28%) student representatives engaged via existing feedback channels not specific to subject-level TEF. There were suggestions from the post-submission workshop that the TEF subject categorisation made it difficult to align it to existing student representative structures in place at faculty level, which may explain why more institutions did not use existing feedback mechanisms.
- 5.8 Student representatives were also asked how useful they found these forms of communication. Nearly all who used emails and organised face-to-face meetings found these useful, with average scores of 9.1 and 9.3 out of 10. Despite their limited use, existing feedback channels or forums were also deemed to be highly useful (9.1). As shown in Figure 5.1, wider discussion groups and informal meetings were considered less useful.
- 5.9 When looking at modes of engagement by provider type, students at further education colleges appeared to use fewer forms of communication with their TEF main contact. For example, only 33% of student representatives at further education colleges reported use of regular emails compared with 73% at universities (noting the very low base).

Figure 5.1 Engagement between student representatives and the TEF main contact

Engaging other students

- 5.10 Student representatives were more likely to state that it was difficult than easy for other students in their university or college to engage with the second TEF subject-level pilot.
- 5.11 Two in five student representatives said it was *very difficult* (16%) or *fairly difficult* (24%) for students at their university or college to engage with the second TEF subject-level pilot; this compares with around one in three who said it was *very easy* (12%) or *fairly easy* (20%) for students to engage. Half of those attending further education colleges reported it was either very or fairly easy. The base size here is only six; consequently, the findings should be treated as indicative.
- 5.12 Around one in six student contributors (18%) mentioned being contacted by a student representative. Emails from staff were the most common way that student contributors heard about subject-level TEF, with more than three in five reporting that this method (62%) was how they heard about the opportunity to contribute to their institution's submission. Word of mouth (26%) was the next most prevalent means.
- 5.13 As Figure 5.2 shows, printed material raised awareness of TEF in only a few cases; just 2% mentioned posters and nobody mentioned leaflets.

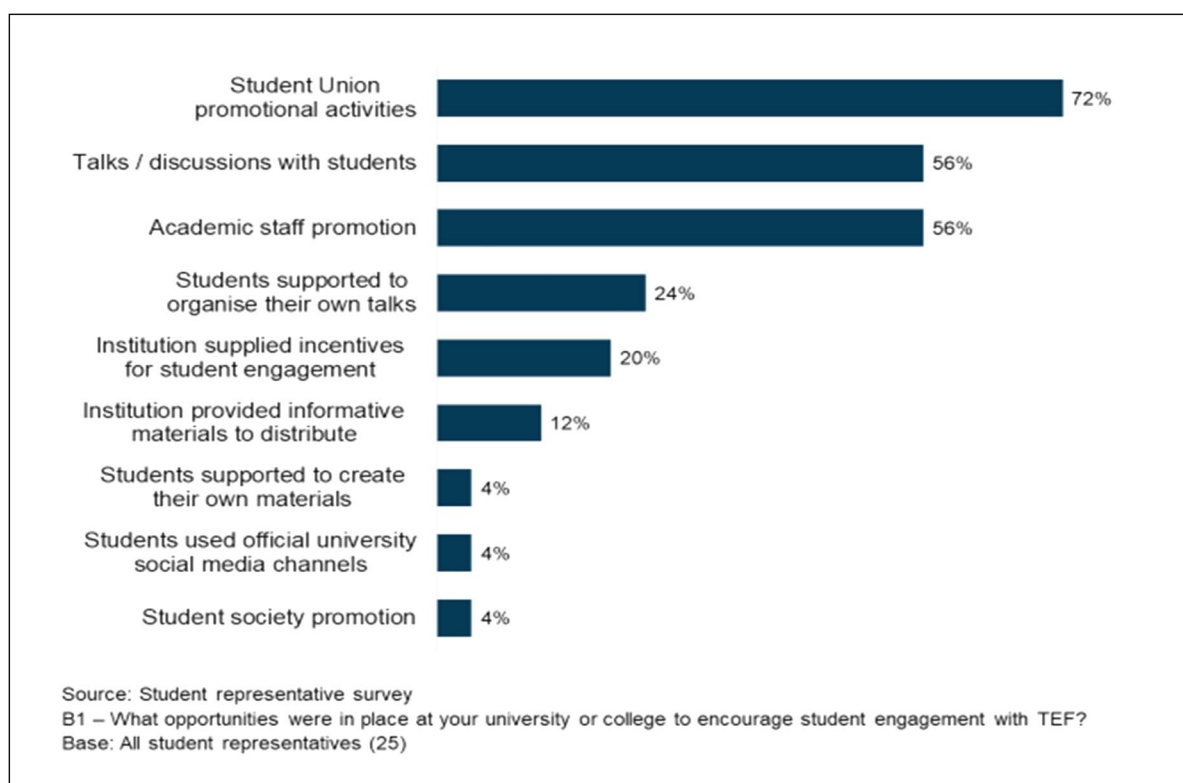
Figure 5.2 Channels through which student contributors heard about subject-level TEF



5.14 Student representatives were asked a similar question about what opportunities were in place to encourage student engagement with subject-level TEF. The response was somewhat different: the most common channel for encouraging engagement of student contributors was promotional activities through student organisations (72% of student representatives reported this), as shown in Figure 5.3. Talks or discussions with students and promotion by academic staff were reported by just over half of student representatives (56%). The offering of incentives was not commonplace with only one in five student representatives reporting that these were offered to students to encourage them to engage with subject-level TEF (20%). The distribution of informative materials was even less common – only 12% of respondents reported these.

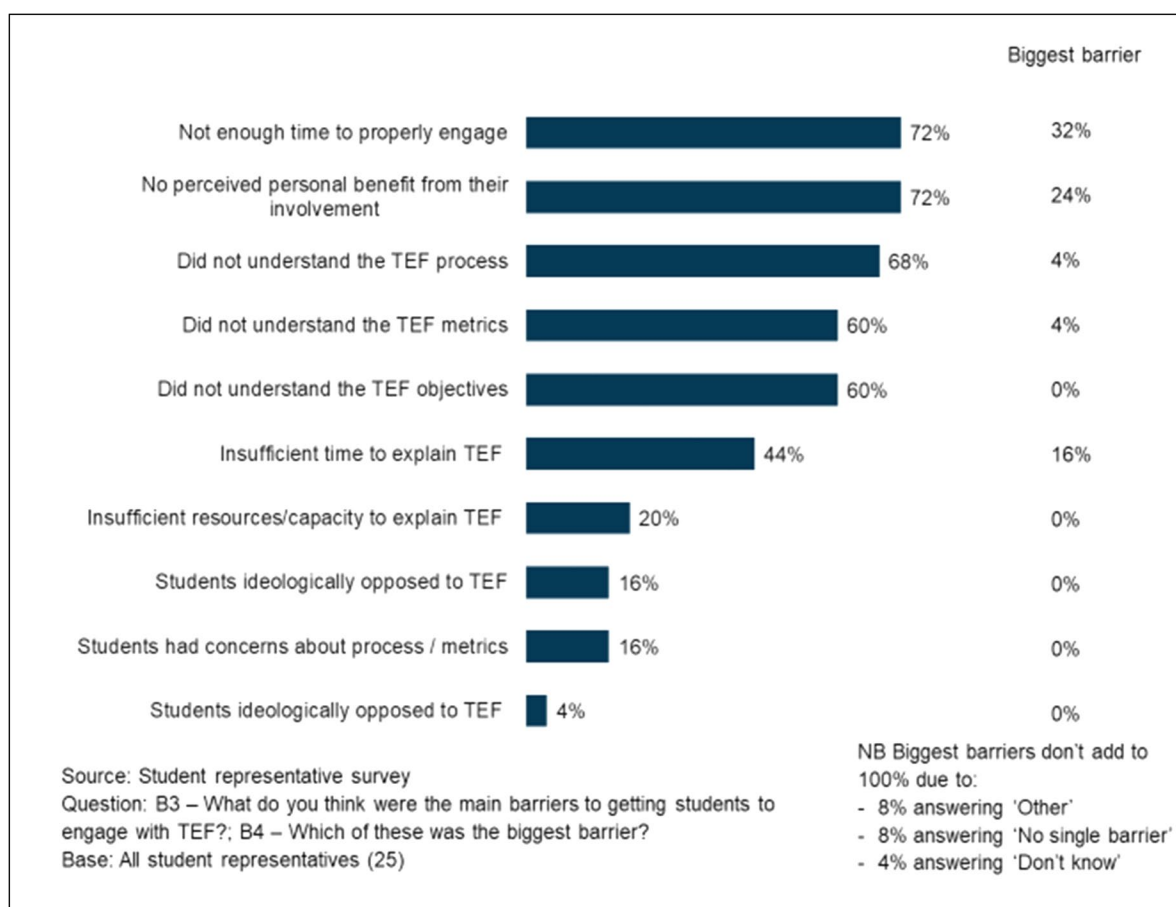
5.15 Just under a quarter (24%) of student representatives reported that students were supported to organise their own talks. Less than 5% stated that they had the chance to create their own materials, used social media or promoted subject-level TEF through student societies.

5.16 Opportunities were relatively similar across different provider types although one noticeable area of difference was the increased likelihood for further education colleges to support students in giving their own talks. 67% of student representatives at further education colleges reported this compared with just 7% at universities and none at specialist universities.

Figure 5.3 Opportunities for engaging students with subject-level TEF

Barriers to engagement

- 5.17 The most prohibiting factors to student contributor engagement (according to student representatives) were ‘not having enough time’ and there being ‘no perceived benefit to involvement’. These reasons were each cited by 72% of respondents. Several respondents in the in-depth interviews commented that the timescale of the process created time pressures as a lot of the work needed to be done during the exam season.
- 5.18 A lack of understanding was another common barrier (68%), while 60% cited that (potential) student contributors ‘did not understand the metrics’, or the objectives, as shown in Figure 5.4.
- 5.19 Some respondents in the post-submission workshop commented that it was not only getting students to engage that was difficult, but also to get detailed, useful feedback that was not ‘narrow and tokenistic’.

Figure 5.4 Main barriers to student engagement with subject-level TEF

Student declaration form

5.20 The role of student representative includes signing the student declaration form. The student declaration form is an evidential mechanism designed to show that students have been offered the opportunity to engage with subject-level TEF in a meaningful way. The submission should include details of how students have been involved and indicate any sections that have been authored by students.

5.21 Just over half (56%) of student representatives felt that the student declaration provided a meaningful opportunity to engage with subject-level TEF, providing a score of 6 or more on a 10-point scale (32% answered 8+).

5.22 Student representatives at further education colleges were less likely to say that the student declaration provided a meaningful opportunity to engage than those at universities. Just 17% of student representatives at further education colleges reported this compared with 53% of those at universities and 67% of those at specialist universities.

5.23 Student representatives were asked how easy or difficult it was to complete the student declaration form. 72% said they found it easy, giving a score of between 6 and 10, in contrast one in four (24%) said they found it difficult, giving a score of between 1 and 5.

5.24 Student representatives were asked an open question about how the student declaration form could be improved. The most common theme, mentioned by half of those responding, related to the idea of clarifying both the objectives of the student declaration and making sure that that questions do not overlap. One mentioned that there might be more sense in responding to this in an interview format.

“The student declaration needs to be clearer in what it is asking...the questions were very vague and this didn't help when filling the declaration out.”

Student representative, Further Education College

“Define its impact and purpose.”

Student representative, University

“Less vague questions, actually change it to an interview.”

Student representative, University

5.25 The second most common theme related to the limitations of the form, principally that the ‘tick-box’ approach did not allow full expression of their views.

“It could be less of a tick-box exercise. It could ask about how the experience was and any difficulties we faced, rather than just ask about what we did to engage students. It could also ask how successful our student engagement was, and what can be done to improve it.”

Student representative, Specialist University

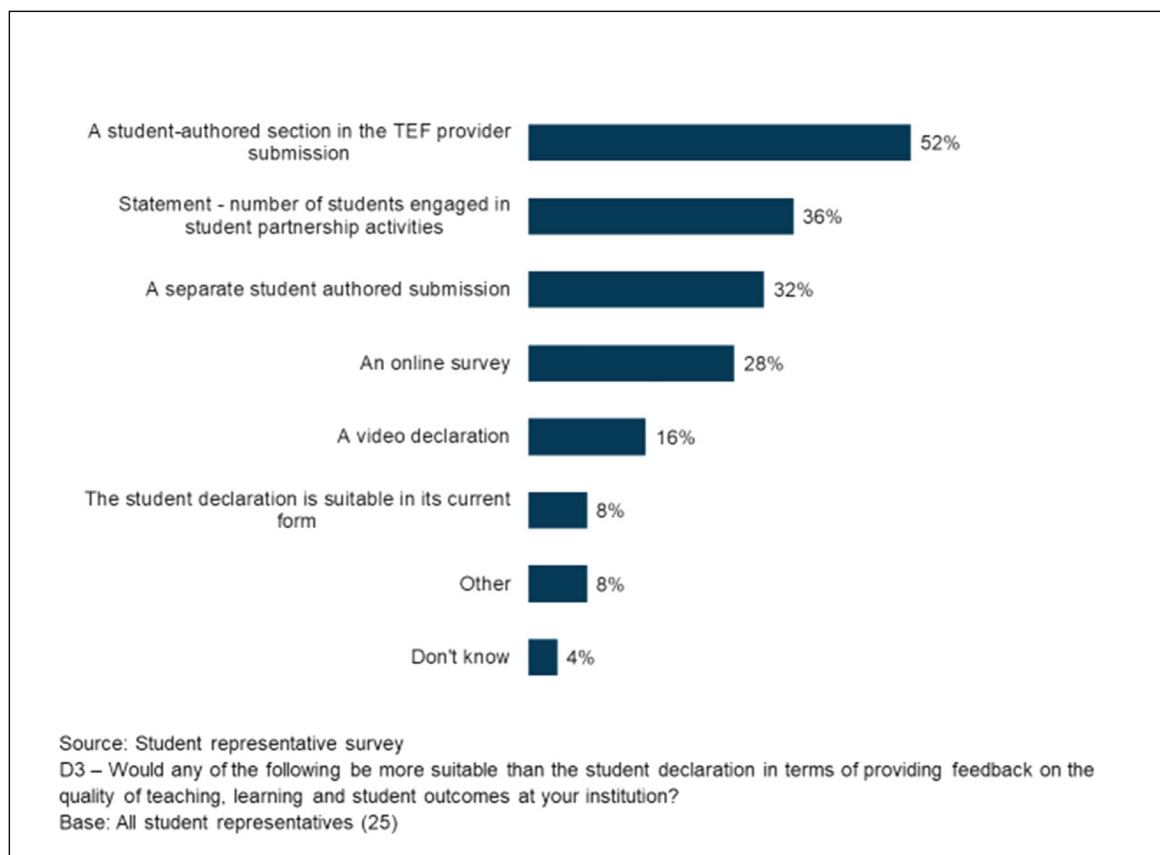
“Make it a space to comment on the quality of student engagement as well as whether the final submission reflected the student feedback. Also allow space for comment on the actual content of the submission.”

Student representative, University

“It seems to be a tick-box exercise. It would have been more useful to have had one support person from the OfS on-going rather than a questionnaire at the end.”

Student representative, University

5.26 Student representatives were also asked about possible alternatives to the student declaration in its current format. The option of a ‘student-authored section in the provider-level TEF submission’ was most popular, gaining the support of just over half of student representatives (52%), as shown in Figure 5.5. Around one in three supported ‘a statement of the number of students engaged in student partnership activities’ across the university or college (36%), and ‘a separate student authored submission’ (32%). Notably, only 8% reported that the student declaration was suitable in its current form.

Figure 5.5 Possible alternatives to the Student Declaration

Suggestions for improving role of student representative

5.27 Almost all student representatives had suggestions for improving their role within this process. The most prevalent theme of these related to greater support. This manifests in three main areas – more training, more specific guidance and support, and being made to feel more involved in the process.

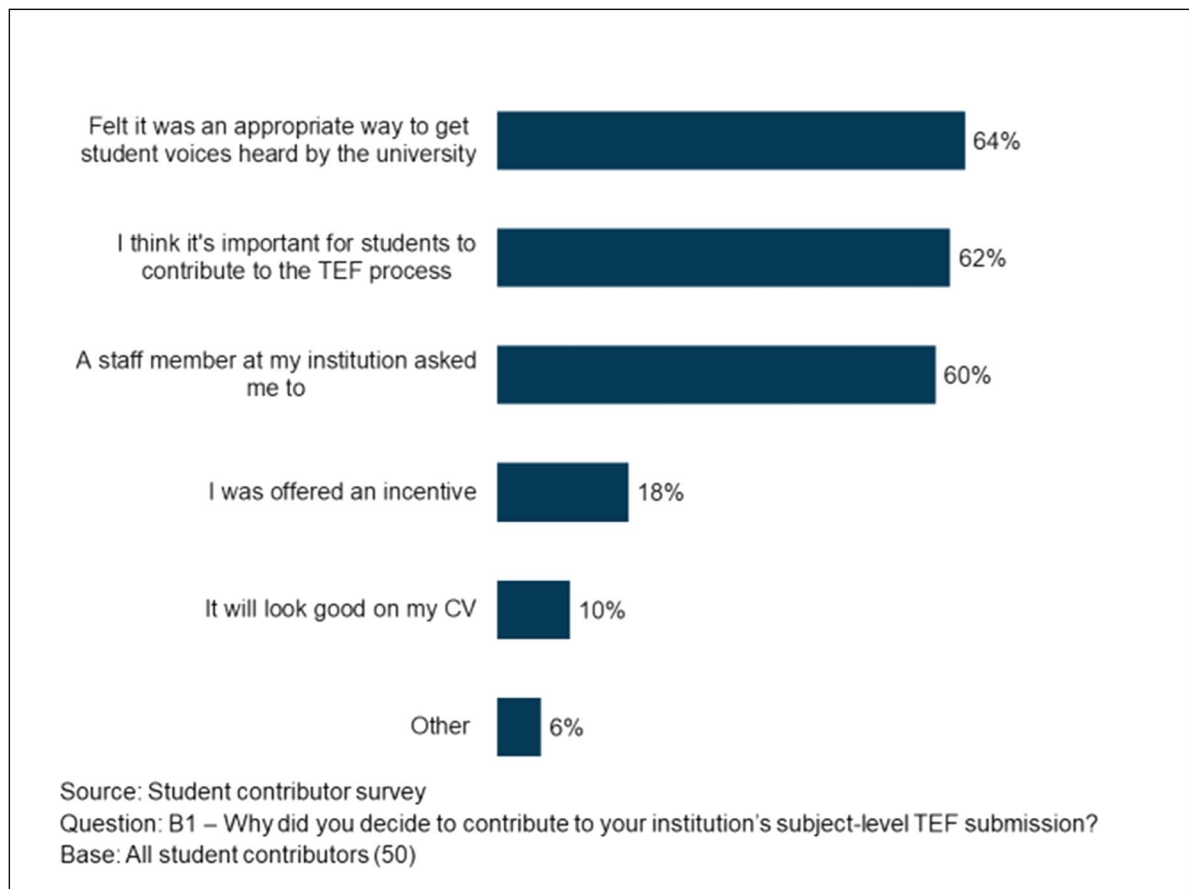
5.28 In terms of training, some student representatives felt that this would be beneficial in order to better understand the metrics and process as a whole, allowing them to make a more meaningful contribution. As one student put it, “*webinars/training opportunities (would) help with understanding the process and the metrics to allow the lead student representative and other students engaging in the process to do so as partners*”.

5.29 More specific guidance in order to clarify the student representative role and support to help them fulfil it were also areas that some students felt could be improved. This might include involvement in specifying the guidance or further help in trying to enlist the participation of other students. It was felt that face-to-face contact between the student and regulator – such as seen in some Ofsted mechanisms – would be most beneficial but that meetings or ‘check-ins’ via skype could also be useful.

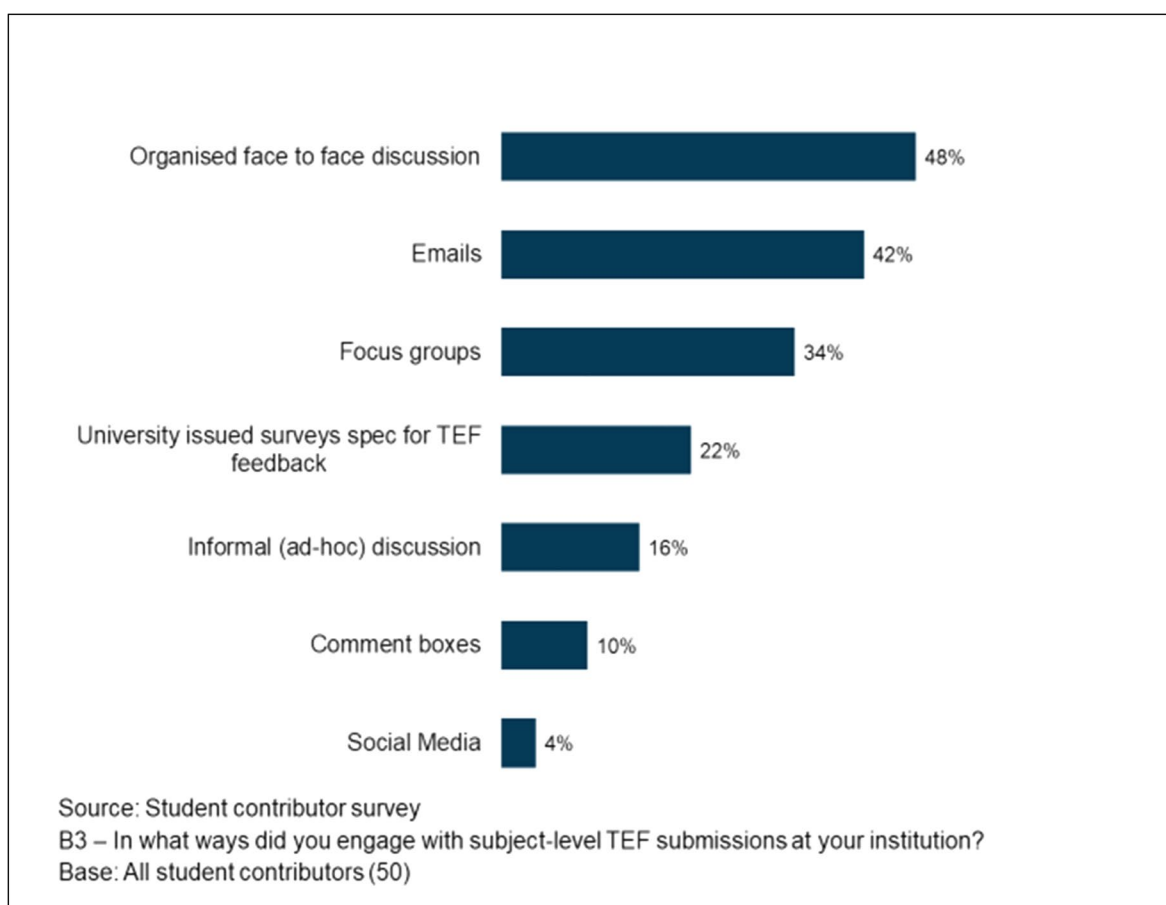
- 5.30 One student representative said that the process should “*ensure that lead student representatives are communicated with throughout the process*”. Others echoed this sentiment and felt that this could help them feel a greater involvement in the process and contribute to a greater extent. For some this could have been through more events or better-targeted events, while others thought this could involve greater explanation of the metrics to make their contribution feel less like a ‘tick-box’ exercise. By receiving greater autonomy and being made to feel more like a partner, some student representatives felt they would be able to give more meaningful feedback and dispel the sense that they were not being listened to, which was the case for some.
- 5.31 Other suggestions included the sharing of best practice examples, a better timescale, and clarity around the student declaration and other requirements.

Engaging student contributors in the subject-level TEF pilot

- 5.32 This section moves on from the role of the student representative to focusing on the role of student contributors. The role of student contributors was designed to provide feedback within the second TEF subject-level pilot on one or more of the following: quality of teaching for a particular subject, the learning environment and student outcomes.
- 5.33 Getting engagement from student contributors was generally difficult, with 65% of TEF main contacts respondents finding it *very difficult* or *fairly difficult* to engage students beyond the student representative to provide feedback that could be incorporated into the submission. Only a small minority found it either *very easy* or *fairly easy* (12%).
- 5.34 Student contributors who engaged with the process were most likely to be motivated by the notion that this was an opportunity for ‘the student voice to be heard’ by the university (64%). A similar proportion (62%) felt that it was ‘important for students to contribute to the TEF process’; that this was their responsibility. A significant proportion also contributed to the process having been ‘asked to by a member of staff’ (60%).
- 5.35 Reasons more closely linked to the idea of a student receiving a direct benefit, such as incentives or career opportunities, were less likely to be cited for engaging with the process, as shown in Figure 5.6.

Figure 5.6 Student motivations for engaging in subject-level TEF

5.36 This section explores how student contributors engaged with the subject-level TEF process. Just under half of student contributors (48%) took part in organised face-to-face discussions. Emails were the second most-used form of engagement (42%), followed by focus groups (34%). Student contributors were unlikely to engage through less formalised means such as informal ad-hoc discussions, comment boxes or social media, as shown in Figure 5.7.

Figure 5.7 Methods of engagement used to engage student contributors

5.37 When asked about the areas in which they provided feedback, a large majority of student contributors (94%) said they commented on the quality of teaching. Three-quarters (74%) offered feedback on the learning environment, while 64% offered views on student outcomes.

Barriers to student engagement

5.38 Student contributors were asked what the main challenges were that they faced in relation to engaging with the second TEF subject-level pilot. A key theme to emerge concerned the difficulty of getting other students to engage with the process.

“Many students are part-time with work and family commitments so it was difficult for them to find the time to engage with the process.”

Student contributor, Further Education College

“As a student, I did not have enough time to gather feedback. I was always unsure of what was expected, and this led to inconsistency across other subjects.”

Student contributor, University

5.39 There was little consistency in terms of other challenges raised, which included lack of time, having to comment on only part-drafted submissions, lack of knowledge, lack of clarity around what questions are asking, and difficulties caused by the grouping of subjects.

“The architecture, planning and construction departments are very different from each other – creating a cohesive narrative of experiences was very difficult.”

Student contributor, University

5.40 One in five student contributors said they did not feel they encountered any challenges, with some adding that they found the process straightforward.

5.41 When asked about ways in which subject-level TEF could be improved or streamlined, the main themes to emerge were around clarity of the process and its objectives.

“A better explanation on what is wanted from student feedback.”

Student contributor, University

“I think a specific guidance document for student participators could be produced. To clarify their role slightly more!”

Student contributor, University

5.42 Another theme to emerge related to the nature of the dialogue between students, staff/institution and even with the reviewing panel. Amongst some students who engaged in the process there seemed to be a desire to use the TEF process as a springboard to engage in two-way dialogue with staff that could lead to genuine improvements for their provider. But this seems to be lacking currently given the way in which students have, so far, been engaged.

“I wish that students could give feedback, then the university react to the feedback in the report rather than the university posting what students thought within the report.”

Student contributor, University

“I think it would be beneficial for those who review the TEF submission to meet the staff and students behind the work. It's hard to truly get an appreciation for an institution through a Word document. Although there are quotes and feedback included, this doesn't show the person behind all the hard work and support.”

Student contributor, University

6 Effectiveness of guidance

6.1 This chapter covers the use of guidance materials for subject-level TEF provided by the OfS for the second TEF subject-level pilot. These materials were designed to support all key contributors to the process, including TEF main contacts, student representatives, student contributors and academic contributors. This chapter captures their perceptions of the usefulness and relevance of the mix of materials created by the OfS. The final section contains suggestions for how the guidance materials could be improved.

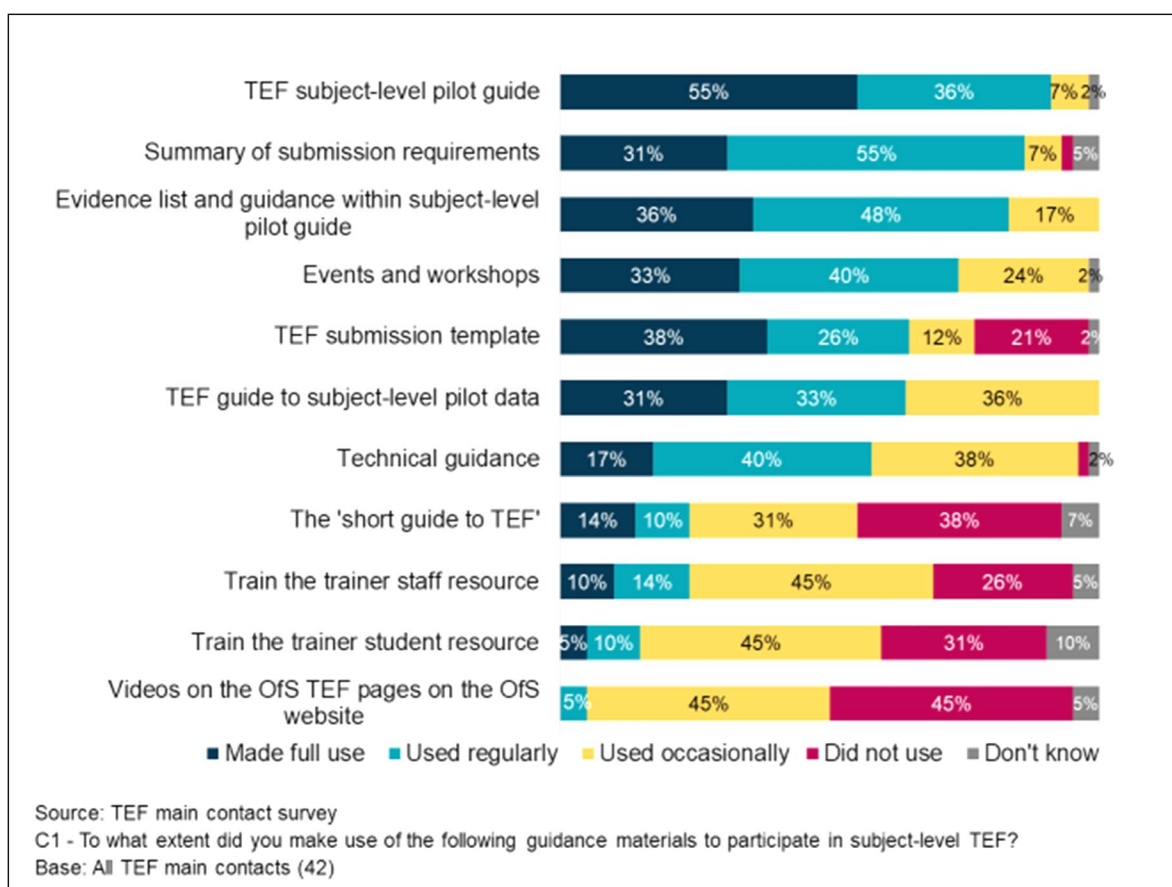
Key findings

- Amongst TEF main contacts, the most widely used piece of guidance was the *TEF subject-level pilot guide*. The *Summary of submission requirements* was also widely used, along with the *Evidence list and guidance*.
- The videos on the OfS web pages were the least used.
- As with staff, students were most likely to use the *TEF subject-level pilot guide*, followed by events and workshops. Some of the materials shared with students had been adapted by their institutions to ensure they were relevant and met their needs.
- More than half of TEF main contacts agreed that the guidance materials enabled them to prepare staff at their institution for subject-level TEF and most agreed that the guidance materials were provided in a timely manner.
- When asked for suggestions to improve the process, many focused on the amount of guidance materials made available and talked about the breadth of materials as being quite overwhelming. Consequently, suggestions involved more concise and focused materials, incorporating examples of best practice.

Use of guidance materials

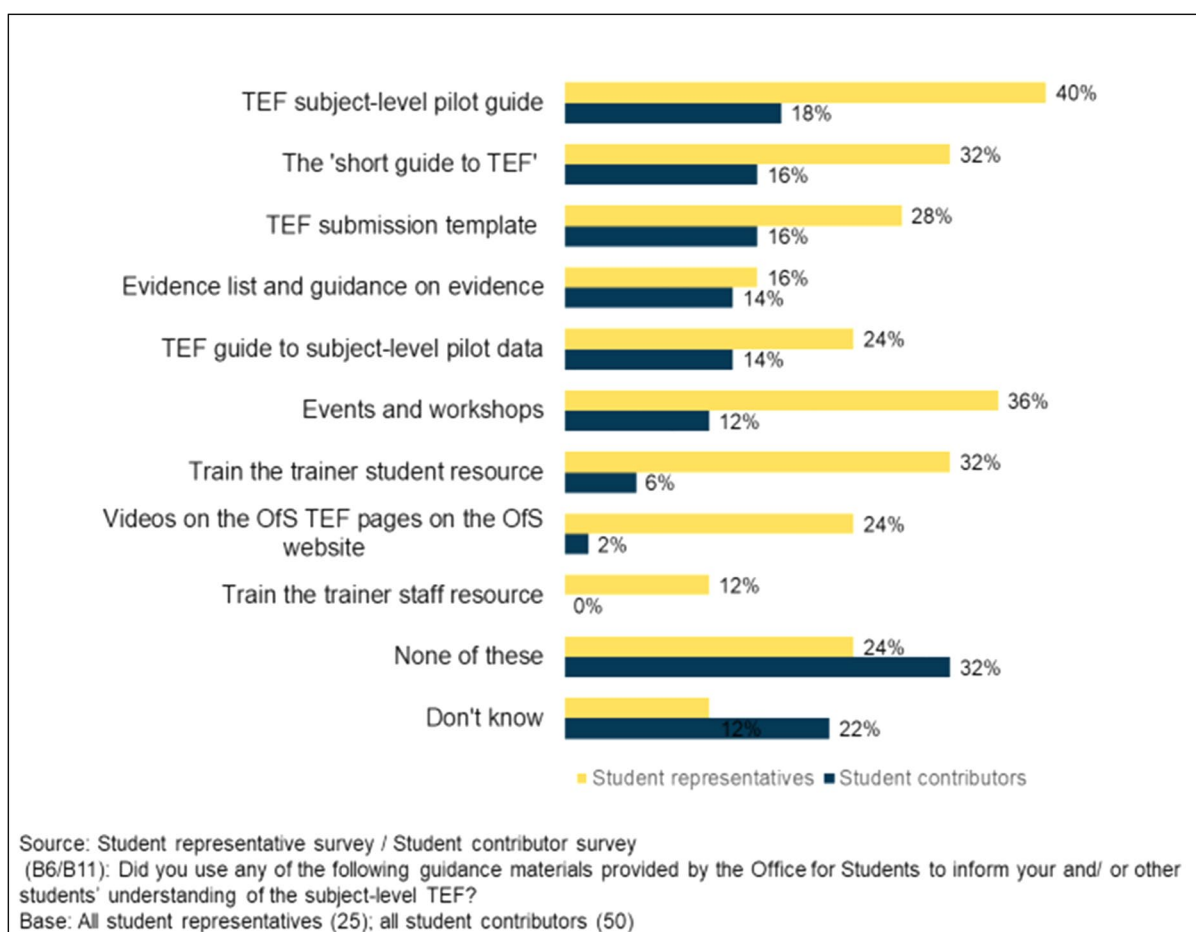
6.2 Main TEF main contacts generally made most use of materials that focused on the submission and engaged at the subject level. The *TEF subject-level pilot guide*, submission requirements and evidence lists were the sources most likely to be used, followed by events and workshops and the TEF submission template, as shown in Figure 6.1. The videos on the OfS website and the '*short guide to TEF*' were the least used, with 45% and 38% respectively of TEF main contacts reporting not having used them at all.

Figure 6.1 Use of guidance materials by the TEF main contacts



6.3 We also captured the guidance used by student representatives and student contributors. As with staff, the *TEF subject-level pilot guide* was the most used of all the guidance materials among students, followed by events and workshops, *The 'short guide' to TEF*, and the *Train the trainer student resource*.

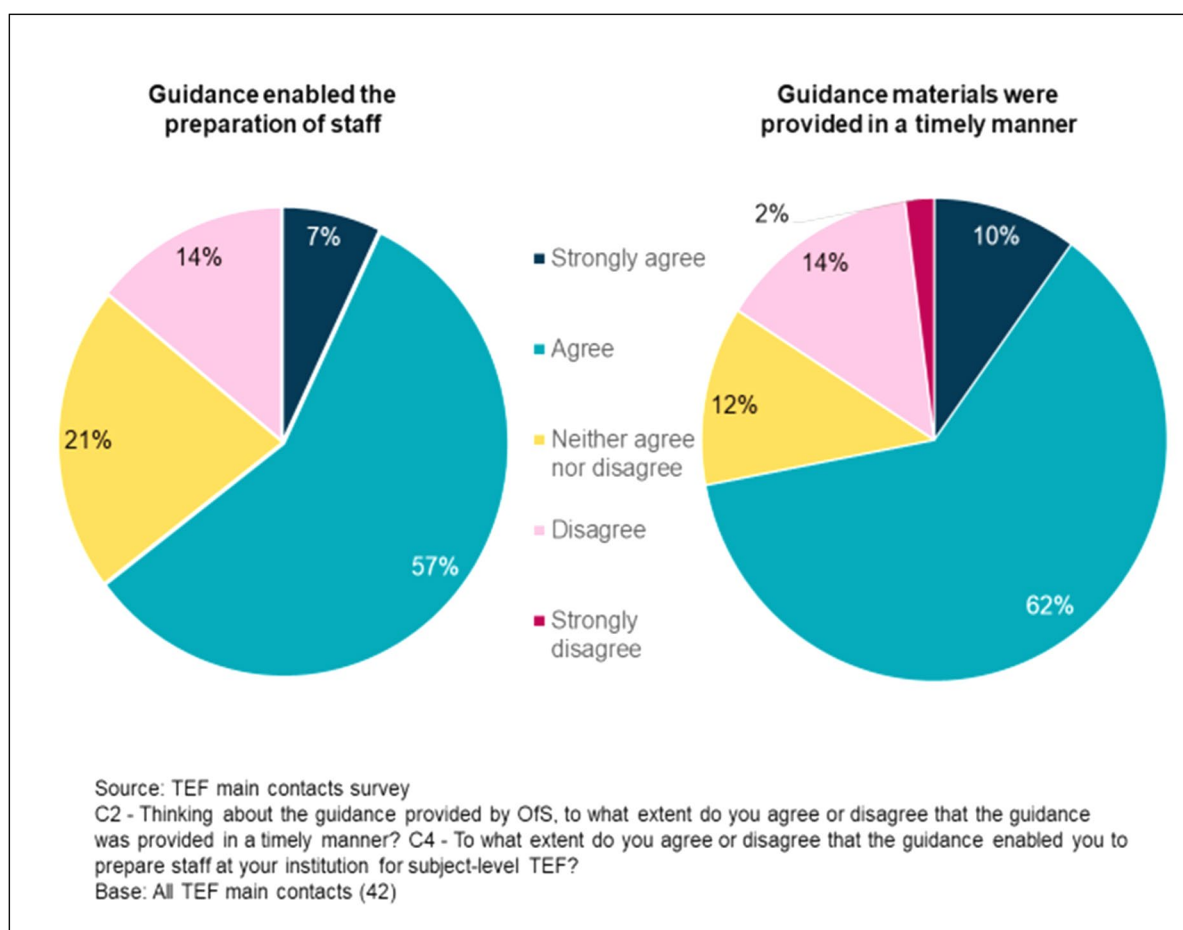
6.4 One in four student representatives (24%) and one in three student contributors (32%) did not make use of any of the guidance materials provided.

Figure 6.2 Student use of guidance materials

6.5 In some cases, the materials passed down to students had been adapted by the university for ease of understanding and accessibility. In lieu of the OfS guidance materials, the academic contributors tasked with engaging students compiled a document outlining the purpose and context of the TEF subject-level process alongside some of the more significant metrics for their institution.

Effectiveness of guidance materials

6.6 More than half of TEF main contacts agreed that the guidance materials enabled them to prepare staff at their institution for subject-level TEF; (7% 'strongly agreed'; 57% 'agreed'). Most TEF main contacts (72%) also agreed that the guidance materials were provided in a timely enough manner as to allow dissemination and time to read, as shown in Figure 6.3. Only around one in six TEF main contacts (16%) 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed'.

Figure 6.3 Guidance materials: timeliness and usefulness

6.7 Those new to the pilot were slightly more likely to disagree with both these statements. One in four institutions (23%) participating in the pilot for the first time did not feel that the guidance was provided in a timely enough manner, and 19% of the same institutions disagreed with the statement that the guidance enabled them to appropriately prepare staff at their institution for the submission process. No institutions that had participated in the first subject-level TEF pilot disagreed with these statements.

Overall levels of support provided by the OfS

6.8 TEF main contacts were generally satisfied with the level of support provided by OfS: 59% reported they were satisfied (14% 'very satisfied'; 45% 'satisfied'). Only 9% expressed some form of dissatisfaction.

6.9 None of the alternative providers or further education colleges expressed any dissatisfaction with the support provided by OfS (out of five and eleven, respectively), compared with three out of twenty-two universities who did express some degree of dissatisfaction and just one out of four specialist universities.

6.10 TEF main contacts were asked what improvements, if any, they thought the OfS could make to their guidance on subject-level TEF. Around seven in ten (69%) suggested improvements; many of these were concerned with the length and perceived excessive detail of the guidance. Some said that the breadth of materials can be counterintuitively overwhelming instead of helpful to those who were new to the pilot.

“I think they were useful, but I think they were, not necessarily complicated, but they were a bit of a hard read, to find what you needed. And I think, in terms of staff using them, they wouldn’t read them, they would just come to us.”

TEF main contact, Further Education College

6.11 The most common suggestions for improvement were: more concise and focused guidance, the inclusion of examples of good practice and/or of a completed judgement to help understand the process, more clarity and support on some technical issues, and more help on understanding requirements of different roles within the process.

“I think people were a bit unsure about how interdisciplinary degrees were counted, and so I think it is an important part of the training that’s needed, maybe some videos, or webinars, or whatever, might have been useful on that.”

TEF main contact, Further Education College

“One of the things that we found unhelpful was that the OfS doesn’t really make it clear about what the differentiation is, and where the value is for the TEF submissions using pre-existing engagement data versus direct student engagement data.”

TEF main contact, University

6.12 The clear majority of suggestions called for shorter and more manageable guidance. Some respondents felt this could be achieved by differentiating between roles to ensure people focus on what they need to know – for example at subject level. It was felt that navigating less detail would help free up time.

“Either reduce the amount of guidance or produce a list of ‘Must Reads’.”

TEF main contact, Further Education College

“Splitting the guidance documentation between provider and subject would enable them to focus on relevant information.”

TEF main contact, Specialist university

“The guidance is far too voluminous and complex to share with academic and student leads. There is a real need for a shorter, more accessible guide to the process that providers can quickly and easily customise to share with their own audiences.”

TEF main contact, University

6.13 Metrics were signposted as being too complicated for staff not used to working with data to manage, adding more time to the process, and/or taking away from the time available for writing the narrative. Some also mentioned the usefulness of highlighting any technical changes, as well as providing specific guidance for students. Help in understanding how the provider submission works with the subject narrative was also suggested.

“But I think what we found is the TEF metrics are not friendly, the methodology is not friendly to understand. Even to people who work on it on a day-to-day basis, there’s a lot of intricacies and naturally presenting it in a way that staff understand is even more difficult.”

TEF main contact, University

7 Use of OfS data

7.1 This chapter focuses on the data provided to participating institutions by the OfS to support their submissions as part of the second TEF subject-level pilot: employment maps, distance charts, additional individualised metrics data and differential attainment data. It covers the usefulness and timeliness of the data that the providers received.

Key findings

- Staff were divided on the usefulness of the contextual data that the OfS provided. More than half of TEF main contacts said that the employment maps were not useful; two in five said that they did find them of use. Similar findings were observed for the distance charts.
- TEF main contacts were positive towards the ‘additional individualised metrics’, with more than half saying they found the data very useful and a further one in three saying somewhat useful.
- Over half of TEF main contacts disagreed that the data was provided in a timely manner.
- Differential attainment data was used to varying degrees. Approaching half of TEF main contacts said that they used the data to a great or moderate extent. Around the same agreed that use of the differential attainment data added value.

7.2 The employment maps illustrate, for each subject in each institution, where graduates live after they have graduated and where the most common locations in the UK are for graduate employment in that subject.

7.3 Distance charts show for each subject in each provider, the distance from the student’s domicile to place of study, and distance from the provider to the location where the graduate enters employment.

7.4 The additional individualised metrics data for each subject show the student-level data in order to aid understanding of how indicators have been derived from the underlying data.

7.5 The differential attainment data shows the number and proportion of degrees awarded as firsts and upper seconds (2.1s) to groups of students from different backgrounds as defined by split metrics. This data is split further by time of graduation into three groups: those graduating six, four and two years ago.

Usefulness and timeliness of OfS data

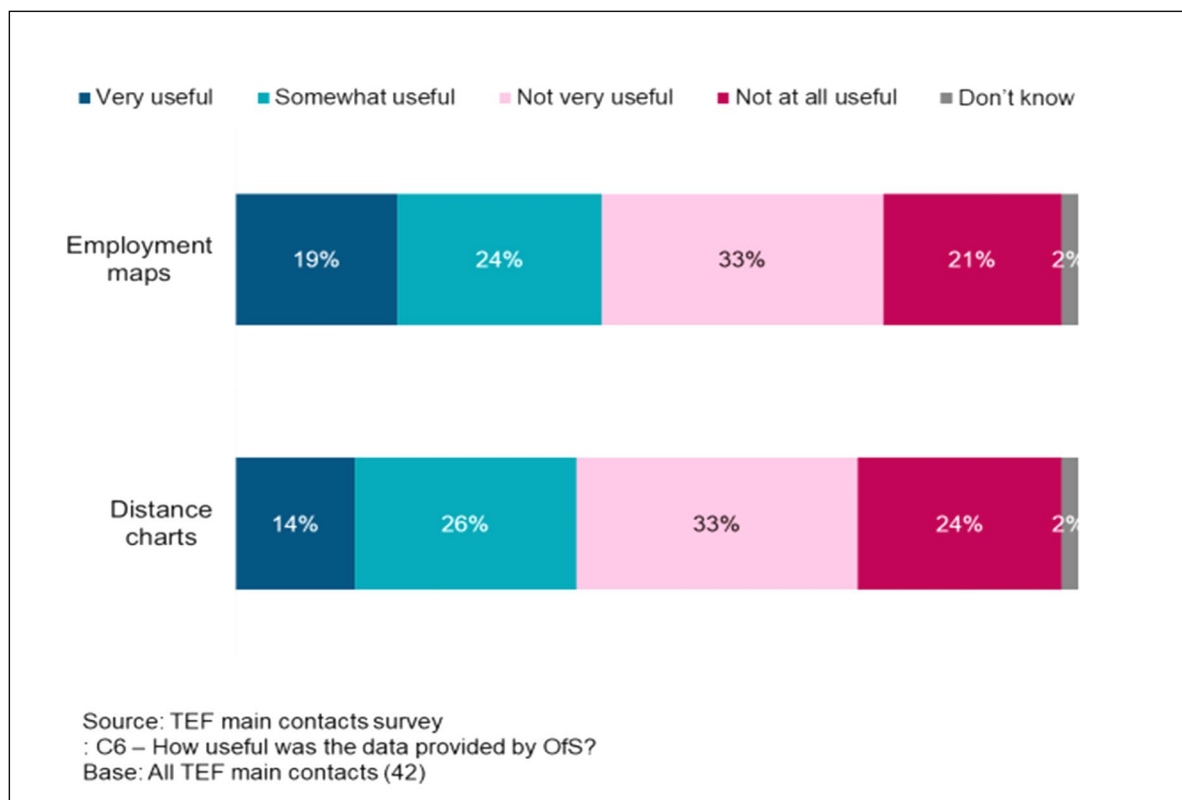
7.6 TEF main contacts were asked how useful the employment maps and distance charts were in supporting their participation in the TEF subject-level pilot. As shown in Figure 7.1, TEF main contacts were split on the usefulness of employment maps with 55% finding that they were not very useful or ‘not at all useful’ (21%) and 43% judging them to be useful to some degree (19% ‘very useful’).

7.7 Similarly, the usefulness of distance charts was polarising for TEF main contacts, with 57% stating that they were not useful’ or ‘not at all useful’ (24%) and 40% finding them to be useful to some degree (14% ‘very useful’).

“If there was a, you know, detailed guidance and how we could use [the geographical metrics] in guiding our submission or informing our staff lead, then certainly would have.”

TEF main contact, Alternative Provider

Figure 7.1 Usefulness of the OfS data



7.8 The majority of TEF main contacts found the additional individualised metrics data to be at least somewhat useful, with 55% stating that they were ‘very useful’ and 36% ‘somewhat useful’. Only 5% of contacts found them to ‘not be useful’.

“In our case, we decided the story was most important because we don’t think the metrics – or particularly NSS – we don’t think it reflects very much about the real experience. It’s just that criticism of NSS general becomes criticism about TEF.”

TEF main contact, University

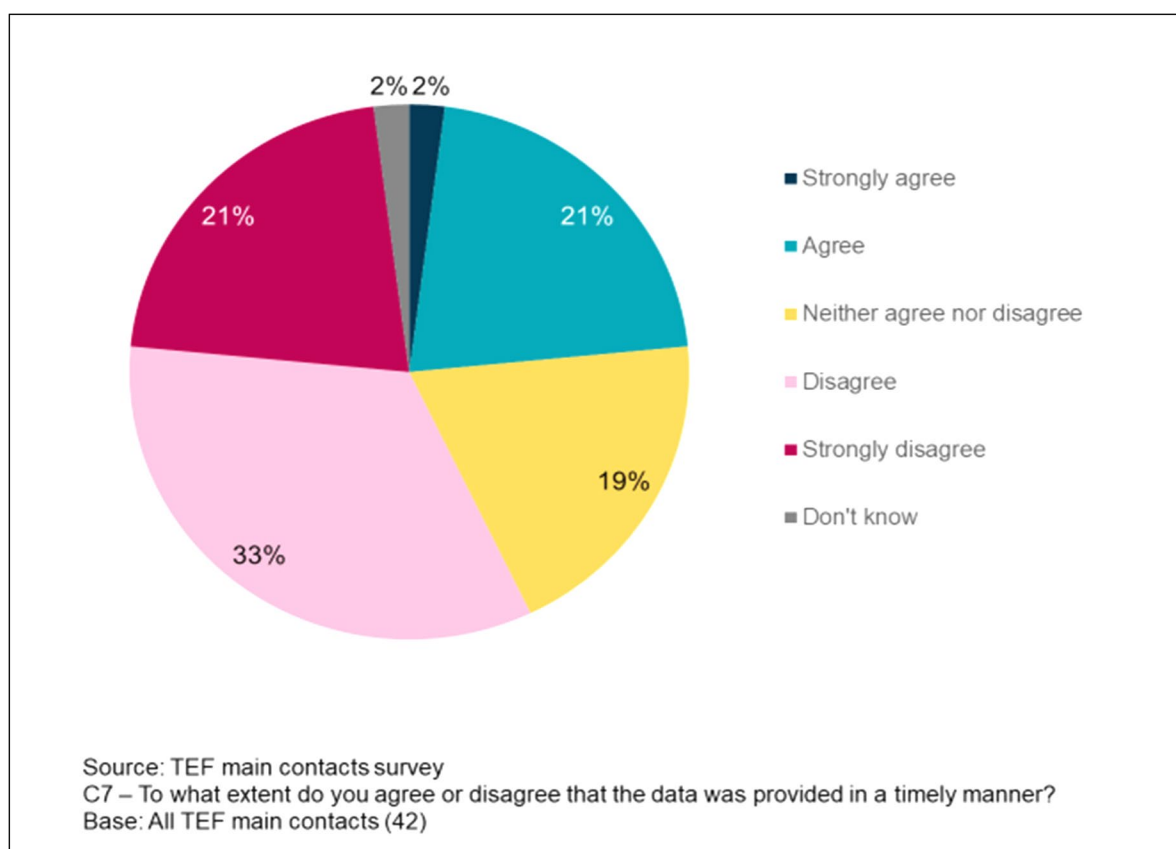
7.9 TEF main contacts were asked to what extent they agreed that the data was provided in a timely manner. A slight majority of TEF main contacts ‘disagreed’ (21% ‘strongly disagreed’, 33% ‘disagreed’) that the data was supplied in a timely manner while 21% ‘agreed’ and only 2% ‘strongly agreed’. A further 19% ‘neither agreed nor disagreed’ that the data was provided in a timely manner.

7.10 The most prevalent complaints were about the difficulties created by the metrics data being wrong in some cases when originally released, and having to be re-released, causing delays and further limiting the time available for interpretation.

“We’ve got a team of people doing a lot of work on these things. We were encouraged to, as we tried to in the narrative, shape the narrative around to explain, to mitigate, where relevant, the metrics, and then to get them re-released is really unhelpful.”

TEF main contact, University

Figure 7.2 Timeliness of OfS data

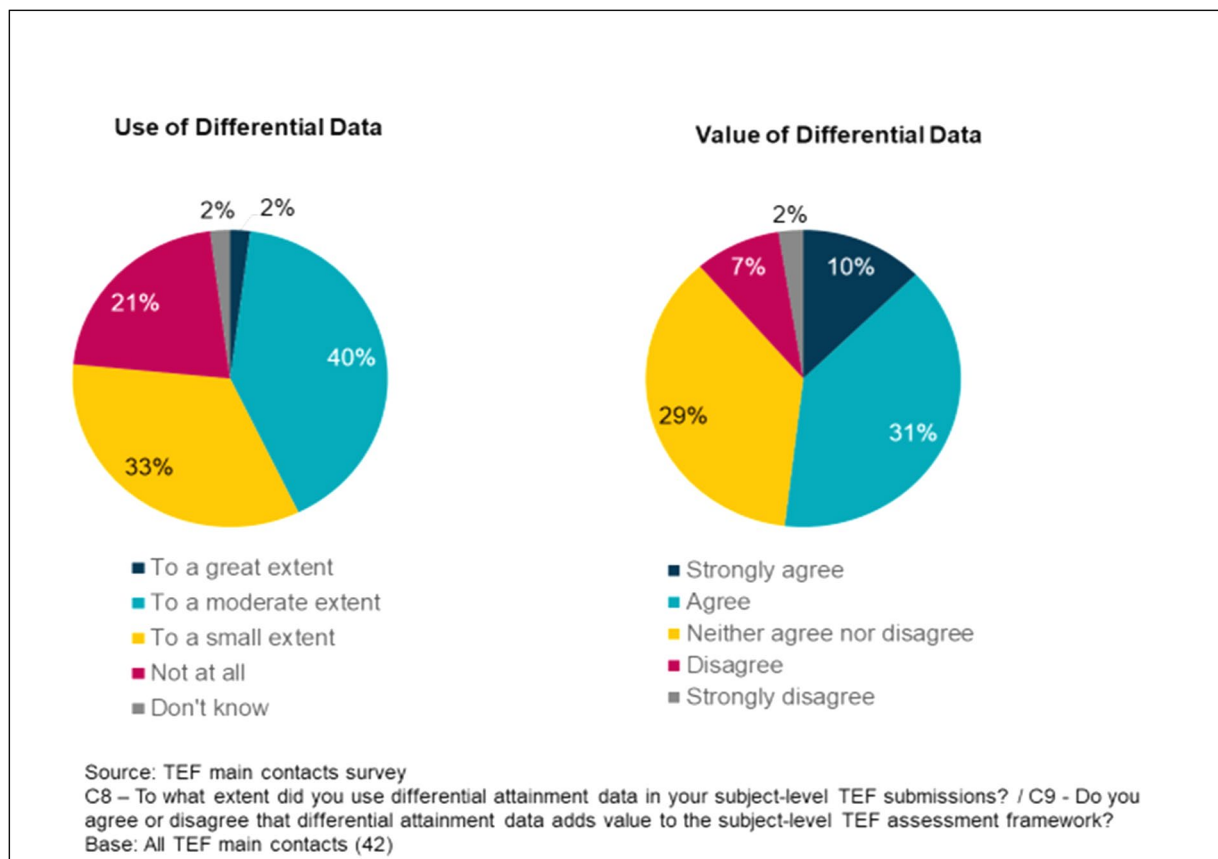


Differential attainment data

7.11 TEF main contacts were asked to what extent they used differential attainment data in their submissions. As shown in Figure 7.3, the majority of contacts made some use of the data, with 41% using it to ‘a moderate extent’ and a further 41% using it to ‘a small extent’. A small minority did not ‘use the data at all’ (11%) and only 4% used the data to ‘a great extent’.

7.12 When asked to consider to what extent they agreed that the differential attainment data added value to the subject-level TEF assessment framework, 30% agreed to at least some extent that it added value with 11% ‘strongly agreeing’. However, as shown in Figure 7.3, a significant proportion of TEF main contacts were unsure of its value with 30% ‘neither agreeing nor disagreeing’ and 19% unsure if it adds value. A small minority expressed some form of disagreement that the differential data adds value (7% ‘disagreed’, 4% ‘strongly disagreed’).

Figure 7.3 Use of differential attainment data



Challenges of using the data

7.13 One of the challenges in incorporating the data was a lack of understanding by academics of the different types of data made available to them.

“What we found is that academics could write about the teaching sections and part of the learning environment sections very well but anything about student outcomes, because they don’t work in that area they didn’t really have the understanding. So things about BME [black and minority ethnic] attainment, they didn’t understand that that didn’t include international students. They don’t understand what the DLHE [Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education] or LEO [Longitudinal Educational Outcomes] data is and so constructing a narrative where you were trying to link the educational provision to how we then deal with all of those issues and produce good employability outcomes for students is really hard.”

TEF main contact, University

This challenge was handled differently across institutions. In some cases an analyst of some kind was appointed to go through the data. For example, in one institution it was the Insight and Benchmarking manager. The TEF main contact may have had a greater or lesser involvement in the process depending on various factors, such as time and their own understanding. However, for smaller institutions that may not have access to such resource the ability to grasp the data and use it effectively was more challenging.

8 Submission and assessment framework

- 8.1 This chapter looks at the submission and assessment framework, reporting on the time commitment required throughout the process, the difficulty of the process, the accuracy of representation in the submission and also the extent to which the inclusion of student voice has improved the assessment process.

Key findings

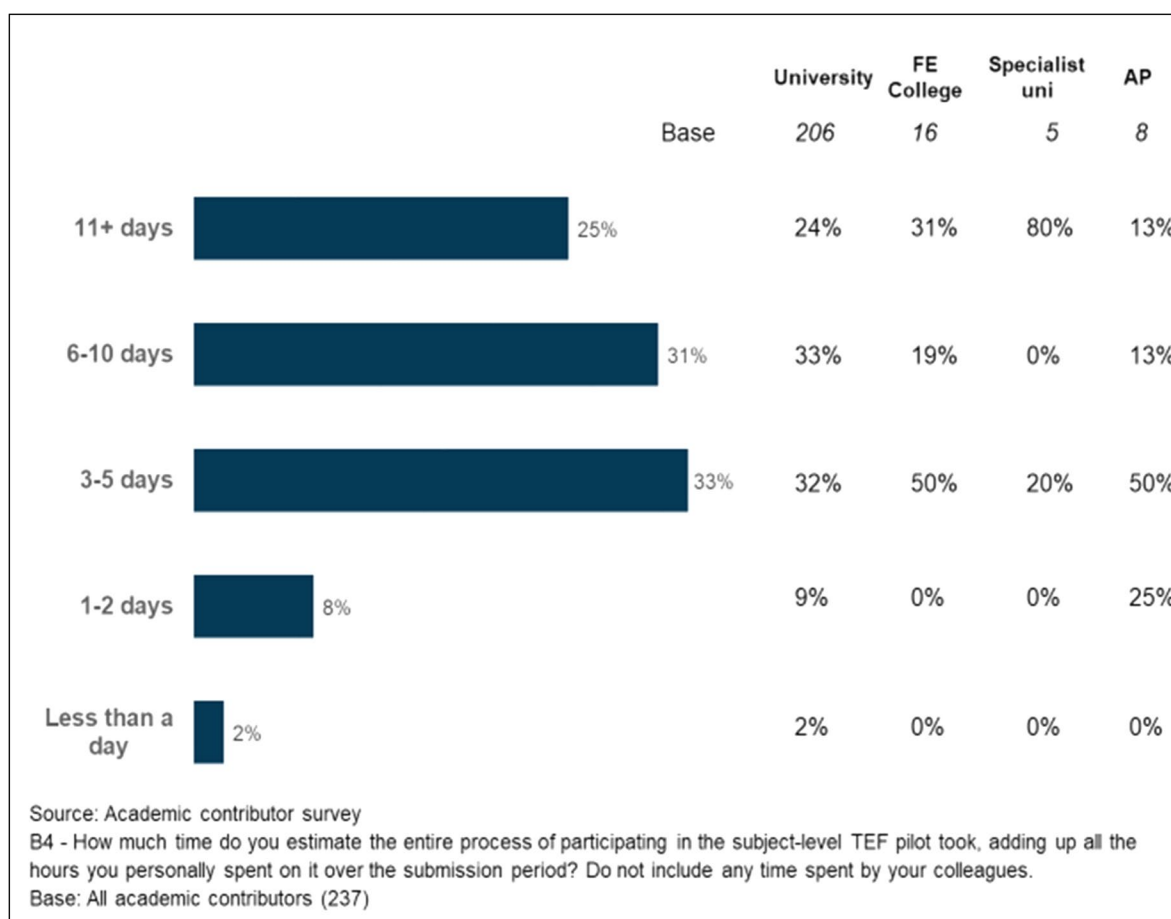
- The demands on staff time were considerable. More than half of academic contributors said that they spent between one and two weeks in total on the process; one in four said that they spent more than two weeks on subject-level TEF.
- Despite the pressures on staff to deliver on subject-level TEF in addition to their main responsibilities, there was a recognition by many that the exercise itself was worthwhile.
- The assessment criteria informing subject-level TEF were broadly felt to be of relevance. Feedback and valuing teaching were thought to be of most relevance, followed by engagement with learning. Very few TEF main contacts said that any of the criterion were of no relevance. The least relevant criterion was considered to be employment and further study.
- There was a high level of agreement amongst academics that submissions were an accurate portrayal of teaching. This is perhaps not surprising given they were responsible for the content of submissions but confirms that the process enabled them to provide an accurate representation. Confidence in the representation was shared by those students who said they got to see the submission.
- TEF main contacts broadly agreed that the inclusion of student voice in the current subject-level TEF process was a good thing. Reasons given for a negative response focused predominantly on the challenge of getting students involved.
- Reflecting on how the subject-level TEF process could be improved, four themes emerged. One was around the timescale, which all institutions found challenging. A second area was the grouping of subjects. A third area was the format of submissions. Finally, there was an appetite for clearer guidance materials.

Time commitment and difficulty of submission process

8.2 The majority (56%) of academic contributors spent at least one week contributing to their institution’s subject-level TEF process; indeed, 25% reported that they spent over two weeks, as shown in Figure 8.1. This also shows the split by provider type. While base sizes are very low, it does indicate a higher proportion than average at further education colleges and specialist universities spending at least a fortnight on the process.

8.3 As has been mentioned in Chapter 4, the time commitment was found to be substantial by many. There is a recurring theme that the timescales and timing of the submissions were problematic and that, in future years, these challenges could be offset with a more efficient process and the opportunity to implement some longer-form planning.

Figure 8.1 Time commitment required throughout the process



8.4 The burden of writing the submissions was more likely to fall on academics, which could be challenging due to other commitments. For academics focused on delivering courses, subject-level TEF could feel like an additional burden and administrative exercise that was accepted but not necessarily popular.

“I think it’s one of those things we have to do, like many of these things. Academics don’t particularly like doing the admin stuff, but we have to do it.”

Academic contributor, University

“So the timing could be crucial, I would say the timing was a challenge.”

TEF main contact, Alternative Provider

8.5 At the post-submission workshops, pressures on staff was a talking point. The time pressures led to long working hours for some members of staff. Not all were able to dedicate their contracted working schedule to this and had to work at weekends and even holidays to meet their deadlines.

“We spent our Christmas holidays doing TEF, but it was basically the only time we could, because we couldn’t do it within our existing workload structures.”

TEF main contact, Unknown

“It was intense. I was working weekends and evenings to get it done.”

TEF main contact, Unknown

8.6 While it has been considered time-consuming there is a general sense that the time spent is worthwhile; it could just be planned more effectively.

“So obviously, if you know far enough in advance, people can manage their time so it doesn’t coincide with other things”

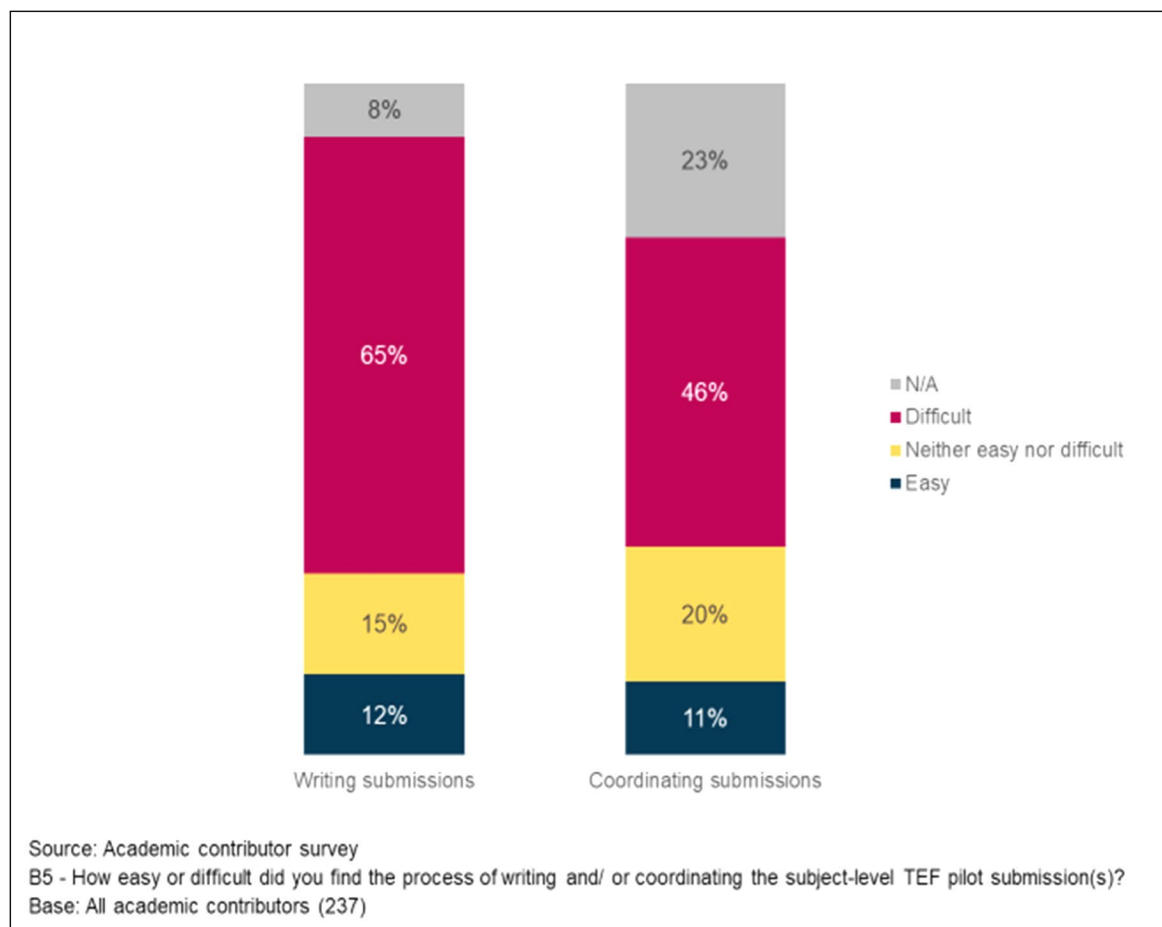
“If you want to have the best provision possible, you have to invest in it, and I think that this is a really important amount of time, and I don’t think it’s overly onerous.”

TEF main contact, University

8.7 As shown in Figure 8.2, only a minority of academics found writing submissions to be ‘easy’ (12%), however the same was true when it came to co-ordinating the submissions (11%). Almost two thirds (65%) thought that writing the submission was ‘difficult’.

8.8 On the difficulty of writing submissions, there was parity between academic contributors in universities and those working in further education colleges; across these groups around 64% said they found the process difficult. The figure was higher for alternative providers, with 7 out of 8 saying it was ‘difficult’; given the small numbers here the findings should be treated as indicative.

8.9 The difficulty of coordinating submissions was broadly similar across the different provider types.

Figure 8.2 Difficulty of the writing and co-ordinating process

8.10 Approaching two-thirds (62%) of TEF main contacts said that their institution had subjects that were out of scope for assessment or were taken out of scope. This is equal to twenty-six institutions, of which half (13) were universities, two were specialist universities, eight were further education colleges and three were alternative providers.

8.11 Just under half (45%) of TEF main contacts reported that they had encountered issues with subjects that were in scope that they felt should not be in scope. This amounted to 19 institutions, of which 11 were universities plus two specialist universities, five were further education colleges and one was an alternative provider. Typically, these issues related to metrics not being reportable, a lack of available data, and apparent errors in the data.

8.12 TEF main contacts were asked whether their institution used any external assistance in the process of completing their subject-level TEF submissions. Four institutions said that they did. All four were universities, one of which was a specialist university.

8.13 Asked why they drew upon external assistance, two said it was due to a lack of in-house capacity/time, one said a lack of in-house expertise and the fourth said they wanted to seek independent reassurance for their chosen approach.

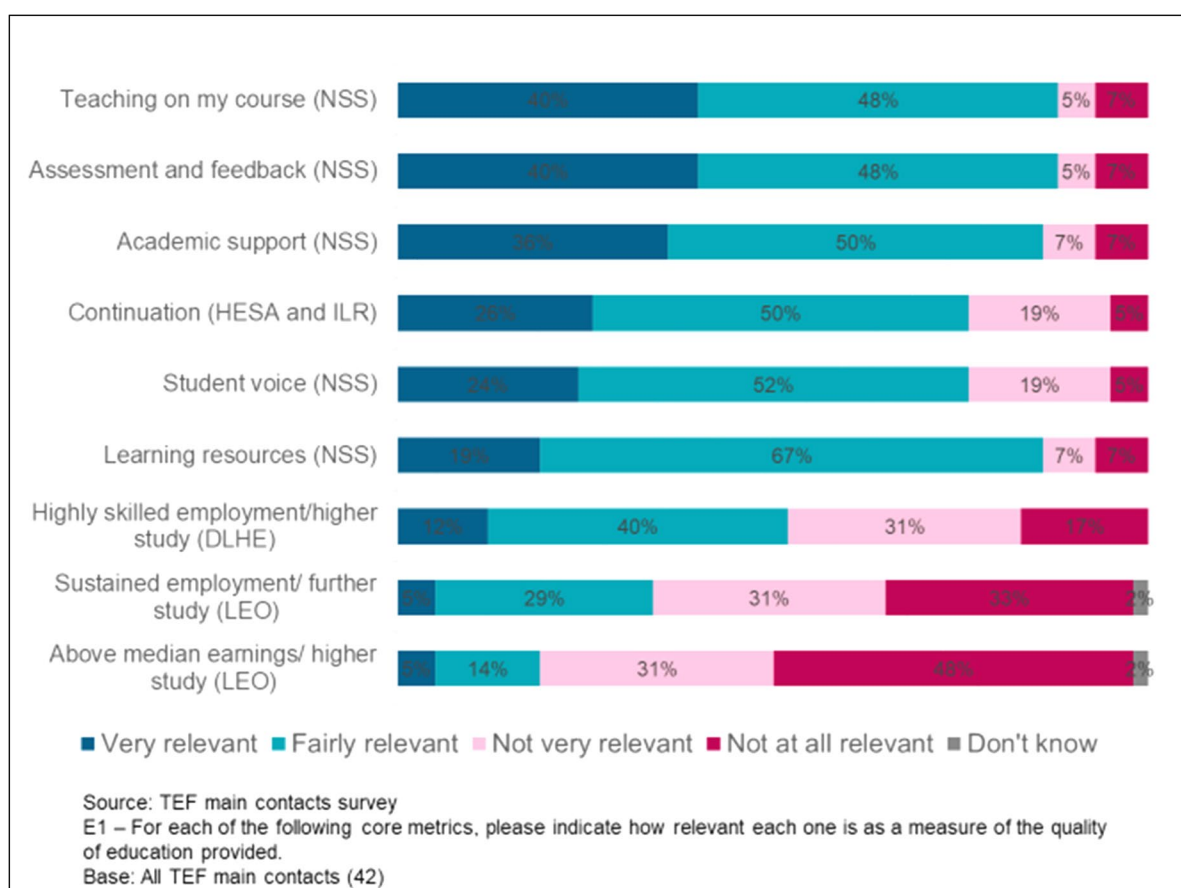
Core metrics

8.14 Of all the core metrics involved in the subject-level TEF, ‘teaching on my course’ and ‘assessment and feedback’ are seen as most relevant with 40% saying these were ‘very relevant’ and 48% ‘fairly relevant’, followed closely by ‘academic support’ and ‘learning resources’ (both 86%), as shown in Figure 8.3.

8.15 LEO data on above median earnings/higher study and sustained employment/further study are seen as least relevant. Almost half (48%) said that median earnings data is ‘not at all relevant’ with a further 31% saying ‘not very relevant’.

8.16 Strong feelings about the metrics, in particular LEO, were expressed at the post-submission workshops. The median earnings data, which was not benchmarked by region, was thought to be skewed towards London, where earnings are higher, and this consequently drove a great deal of negativity around the perceived relevance for subject-level TEF.

Figure 8.3 Relevance of core metrics



8.17 Relevance was not the only issue regarding the metrics; some people struggled with the complexity of the data, an issue that has been touched on in previous chapters. This issue really came through in the in-depth interviews.

8.18 The perceived relevance of the metrics was generally fairly consistent by provider type, as Table 8.1 shows. Staff at universities, however, typically felt the student voice was less relevant, while those at further education colleges placed a much greater weight on LEO data.

Table 8.1 Relevance of core metrics by provider type

	Alternative Provider	Further Education College	University	Specialist University	Total
<i>Base (All TEF main contacts)</i>	5 (%)	11 (%)	22 (%)	4 (%)	42 (%)
Teaching on my course (NSS)	80	91	91	75	88
Assessment and feedback (NSS)	80	91	91	75	88
Academic support (NSS)	80	91	86	75	86
Learning resources (NSS)	80	91	86	75	86
Student voice (NSS)	80	91	68	75	76
Continuation (HESA and ILR)	80	82	73	75	76
Highly skilled employment or higher study (DLHE)	40	55	55	50	52
Sustained employment or further study (LEO)	20	64	23	25	33
Above median earnings threshold or higher study (LEO)	20	36	9	25	19

Percentage figures show % answering either 'very relevant' or 'fairly relevant'. Given the small numbers here the findings should be treated as indicative.

“The geographical type metrics – I think they were quite difficult to understand and get your head around.”

Academic contributor, University

“I think it wasn't too bad once everybody had got to grips with the data, but clearly just getting to grips with the data meant a bit of training for those of us who weren't involved in the institutional ones before and needed to understand what the data meant; that did take some time I would say”.

Academic contributor, University

8.19 It is important to note, however, that some people did talk about the metrics being useful and informative.

“I think the data was really handy actually because it had it all done for us. It's a very neat package.”

TEF main contact, University

“I thought the metrics were pretty good once we got our head around them.”

Academic contributor, University

“I think people realised that some of the information was actually really quite valuable from a quality improvement point of view.”

TEF main contact, Further Education College

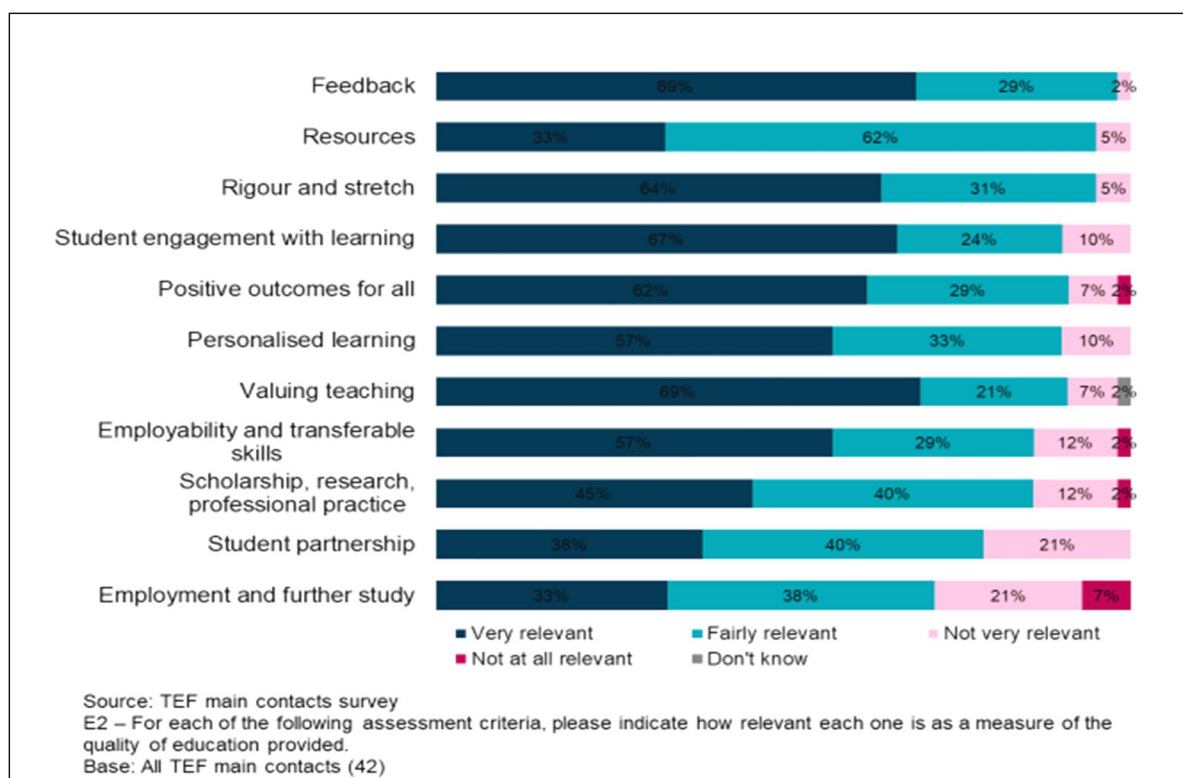
Assessment criteria

8.20 TEF main contacts were asked how relevant they considered the subject-level TEF assessment criteria. There was broadly a high level of agreement across the criteria about their relevance.

8.21 More than 90% agreed that the top three criteria, in order of the guidance, are relevant as a measure of the quality of education provided. As shown in Figure 8.4 these were ‘student engagement with learning’ (91%, saying ‘very relevant’ or ‘fairly relevant’), valuing teaching (90%), and rigour and stretch (95%).

Very few considered any of the criterion to have no relevance. Only a small minority (7%) said the employment and further study criterion was ‘not at all relevant’, with a further 21% saying it was ‘not very relevant’. One in five (21%) meanwhile felt that student partnership was also ‘not very relevant’.

Figure 8.4 Relevance of assessment criteria



8.22 Perceptions of the relevance of the assessment criteria were generally consistent across provider types with a couple of exceptions, as shown in Table 8.2. Further education colleges were most likely to state that employment and further study was a relevant assessment criterion.

Table 8.2 Relevance of assessment criteria by provider type

	Alternative Provider	Further Education College	University	Specialist University	Total
<i>Base (All TEF main contacts)</i>	5 (%)	11 (%)	22 (%)	4 (%)	42 (%)
Student engagement with learning	100	91	91	75	90
Valuing teaching	80	100	91	75	90
Rigour and stretch	100	100	91	100	95
Feedback	100	100	95	100	98
Student partnership	60	82	82	75	79
Resources	100	100	91	100	95
Scholarship, research and professional practice	80	91	86	75	86
Personalised learning	80	100	91	75	90
Employability and transferable skills	60	100	86	75	86
Employment and further study	60	82	73	50	71
Positive outcomes for all	100	91	91	75	90

Percentage figures show % answering either 'very relevant' or 'fairly relevant'. Given the small numbers here, the findings should be treated as indicative.

Accuracy of the submission

8.23 Though a majority found the submission process difficult, once it was written, most academic contributors and TEF main contacts felt that the submission gave an accurate reflection of the course (65% and 60%, respectively). Across both academic contributors and TEF main contacts, however, those at universities were more likely to disagree with this statement: 27% of TEF main contacts at universities disagreed compared with 19% overall, while 16% of academic contributors at universities disagreed compared with 14% overall.

8.24 Staff were asked to explain their response in their own words. Explanations for why the submission was felt to be an accurate representation focused on the narrative nature of the exercise as providing an open forum for focusing on and highlighting strengths.

“Providing the context and the narrative around the data was key. It allowed us to reach out to partners and provide an understanding for the ways in which we work, when data often presents a limited account”.

Academic contributor, University

“The metrics hide a lot of good practice that is going on in the institution, so the narrative is a way of illustrating this – time consuming though it is.”

Academic contributor, University

8.25 In some cases, respondents commented that it can be difficult to accurately convey all the required information within the word limit. This tended to be the case for some of the interdisciplinary courses or departments with a greater number of submissions.

“We wrote three subject-level TEF submissions based on three individual programmes and then we wrote one subject-level TEF submission based on nearly twenty programmes. It was just... to write five pages around twenty programmes is really hard.... If you've got areas that have got a lot of submissions, maybe they could be allowed a few more words.”

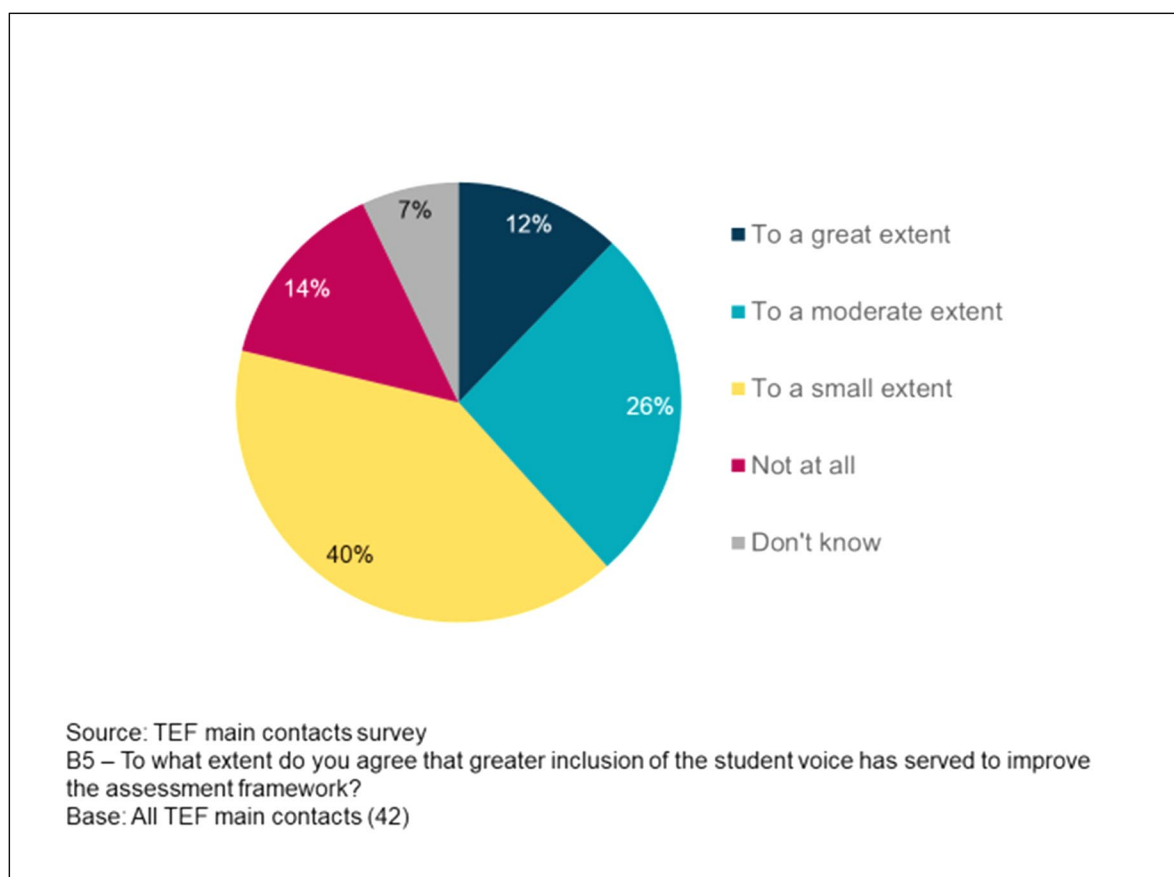
TEF main contact, University

8.26 Only 18% of student contributors said that they got to see the final submission(s), but of those all agreed that they represented an accurate portrayal.

Inclusion of student voice

8.27 TEF main contacts were asked about the extent to which incorporating student voice in this year's pilot had improved the assessment framework. They were in broad agreement that the inclusion of the student voice improves the assessment; almost four in ten (38%) said it had improved the assessment to either a 'moderate extent' or 'great extent'.

Figure 8.5 Extent to which inclusion of student voice has improved the assessment process



8.28 TEF main contacts gave a number of reasons for this, including that it provided greater context than simply relying on ‘in-house evaluations’ and provided more focus by operating at a ‘local-subject level’.

8.29 Those TEF main contacts who were not positive about the effect of student voice on the assessment cited the challenging timescales and, consequently, difficulty of students being able to make time to participate. Other reasons given included the challenge for institutions without sabbatical positions (often the student representative was appointed from the Students’ Union) and making the metrics simpler for students to engage with.

8.30 Student contributors were asked whether they saw any TEF metrics for their subject, college or university. Around two in five (44%) said they saw metrics for one or more subject(s) and one in five (22%) saw provider-level metrics. A quarter (24%) said they did not see any TEF metrics, while a similar proportion (22%) were unsure.

8.31 When it came to the final subject-level TEF submissions, one in three (34%) student contributors said that they saw the provider-level submission and around one in seven (14%) saw one or more subject submission(s). Two in five (42%) did not get to see any final submission and, again, one in five (22%) were unsure.

- 8.32 Student contributors who had seen one or more submission(s) were asked the extent to which those submissions were an accurate reflection of quality of teaching. Broadly speaking, they were positive about the submission. Seven student contributors answered for their department's quality of teaching; of these, five 'strongly agreed' and two 'agreed' that the subject submission was an accurate reflection of their department's quality of teaching³.
- 8.33 Seventeen student contributors answered for their provider's quality of teaching; of those seventeen, ten 'strongly agreed' and five 'agreed' that the provider level submission was an accurate reflection of their provider's quality of teaching; one 'disagreed' and one opted for 'neither agree nor disagree'.

Improvements to the process

- 8.34 Academic contributors were asked how, if at all, the subject-level TEF process could be improved or streamlined. There were four broad themes that emerged: the timeframe, the grouping of subject areas, better structured forms and clearer guidance.
- 8.35 The timescale for the pilot was clearly challenging. There is evidence of this from the range of data sources, including the quantitative surveys, the post-submission workshops and the in-depth interviews.

"I felt that the process itself was streamlined, but the timescales and time period were challenging. It was very difficult to get students involved at a time of year that was close to Christmas and up against January examination period. A longer gap between the release of the metrics workbooks and the narrative due date would have been beneficial."

Academic contributor, University

- 8.36 On the grouping of subjects, there was a call to review the way in which subjects are grouped to ensure they are 'appropriately collated'. Another comment suggested that institutions should be able to choose which courses fall into which category.

"We should be able to choose which courses fall in what category, when courses fall into more than one category, otherwise you could end up with different awards for the same courses and that just doesn't make sense".

Academic contributor, University

- 8.37 As for the forms, there was a suggestion about having online forms, with a review of word counts. There was, also, a point about clarity for what counts as evidence.
- 8.38 Chapter 6 of this report focused on guidance, but to reiterate the key issue with the guidance is that, for many people involved with subject-level TEF, the sheer range of

³ Due to the small numbers involved, the findings must be treated with caution and are being reported as numbers of respondents rather than percentages.

guidance materials felt quite overwhelming. There is a desire for more materials that are more focused, concise, simple and accessible.

“I found the guidance documents to be rather over-long and repetitive.”

Academic contributor, University

“Guidance on structure would have been helpful, i.e. headings for sections.”

Academic contributor, University

“I think it’s over-complex in terms of having flags and having asterisks and exclamation marks and blue asterisks and grey asterisks.”

TEF main contact, University

“I appreciate it was a pilot so a lot of the stuff would be new, but it was very text heavy. I think having some sort of audio guide, or podcasts or even videos about what the expectations would be might make it easier, just as a reference when you’re going back to things rather than have to delve into the handbooks.”

TEF main contact, Further Education College

9 Revisions made for second TEF subject-level pilot

- 9.1 Between the first and second subject-level TEF, the OfS instigated a number of changes based on feedback and experience of the first year. This chapter briefly explores TEF main contact's reflections on these changes.

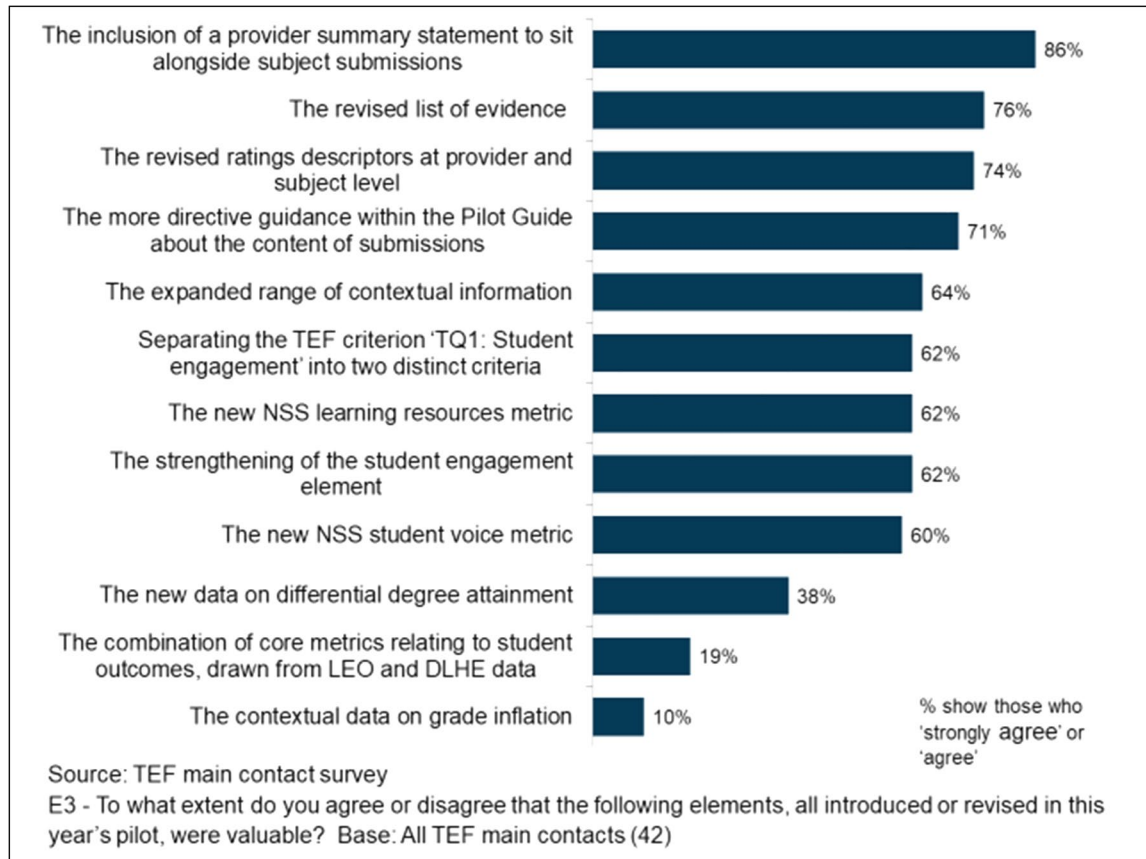
Key findings

- TEF main contacts were asked to reflect on the changes the OfS instigated between the first and second TEF subject-level pilots. Of most value was the inclusion of a provider summary statement to sit alongside subject submissions. Of least value was the contextual information on grade inflation and the combination of core metrics relating to student outcomes, drawn from LEO and DLHE data.

Views on revisions made to the second subject-level TEF

- 9.2 TEF main contacts were supplied a list of 12 features that either changed or were introduced for the second TEF subject-level pilot. These are displayed in Figure 9.1 below.
- 9.3 As this chart shows, the vast majority (86%) of TEF main contacts agreed that the inclusion of a provider summary statement to sit alongside subject submissions was of value to the process. Around three-quarters of TEF main contacts also agreed that the revised list of evidence (76%), the revised ratings descriptors (74%) and the more directive guidance within the Pilot Guide (71%) were valuable.
- 9.4 Only a minority of TEF main contacts welcomed the new data on differential degree attainment (38%), the combination of the core metrics relating to student outcomes from LEO and DLHE data (19%) and the contextual data on grade inflation (10%).

Figure 9.1 Value of revised features and additions to second TEF subject-level pilot



10 Provider views on the statements of findings

10.1 This chapter reports on the key findings from the Statement of Findings survey, directed at TEF main contacts and academic contributors.

Key findings

- TEF main contacts were generally more positive about the statement of findings than academic contributors.
- The statements were thought to be more effective in providing best-fit judgements rather than providing accompanying narratives. Type 3 received the most positive feedback, while Type 2 was the most criticised.
- The main improvement staff would like to see is for more detailed feedback (which is reflected in Type 1 being preferred to Type 2), in order to help staff make the changes they need to within departments.
- Where there is sufficient detail in the statement of findings, providers intend to use it to improve future TEF submissions and improve general practice around quality of teaching.
- There is a general sense that these statements of findings will not be particularly useful for students, neither current nor prospective.

10.2 A total of three different types of statements were released, as the OfS sought to test which type was most suitable. Two were subject-level only, and one provider-level:

- Type 1 (subject-level only): includes narrative feedback and an overall best-fit holistic judgment. There are not separate judgements for each aspect.
- Type 2 (subject-level only): draws on set text supplied by the OfS. There are separate judgements for each aspect. They also include an overall best-fit holistic judgment.
- Type 3 (provider-level only): a blended approach of the above methods. These include a separate judgement for each aspect of quality in conjunction with narrative feedback. They also include an overall best-fit holistic judgment.

10.3 Staff were asked to respond about each Statement of Findings they received.

Type and volume of statement of findings received

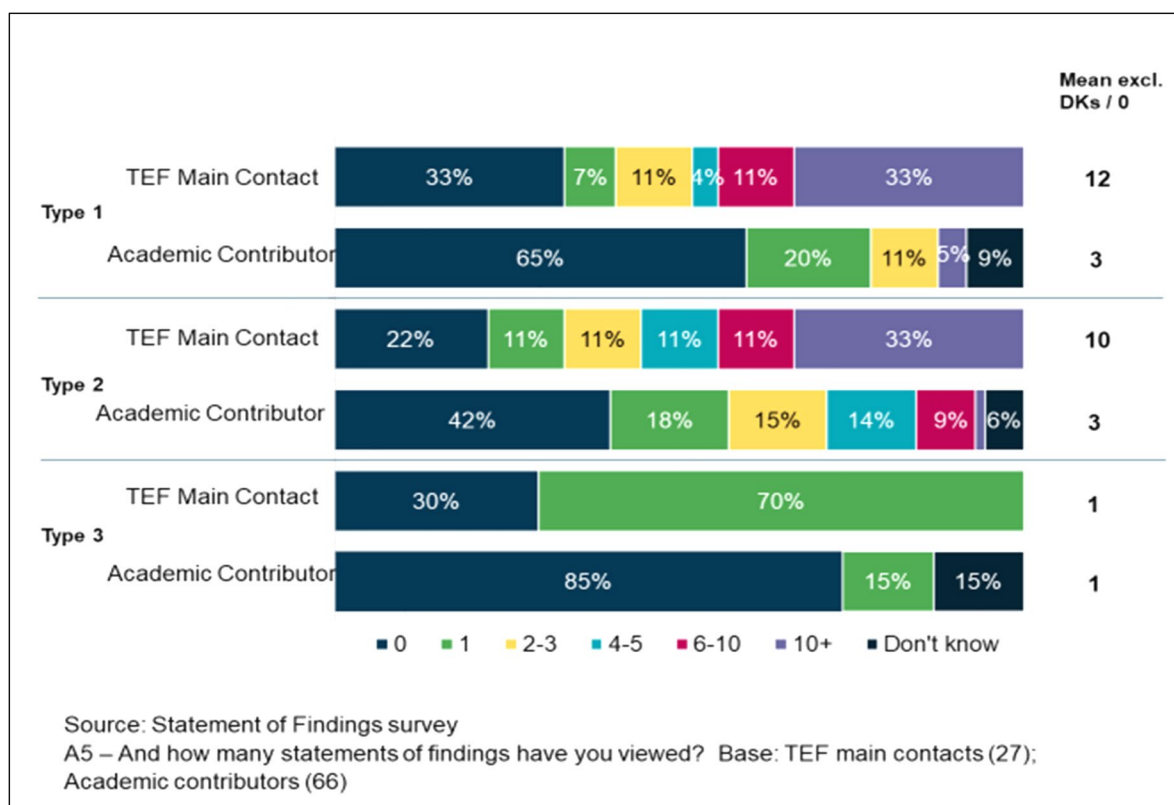
10.4 A majority of TEF main contacts saw each of the three statement of finding types, while academic contributors typically only saw one type, as shown in Table 10.1.

Table 10.1 Type of Statement of Findings received

	TEF main contact	Academic contributor
Type 1 Subject-level only	67%	44%
Type 2 Subject-level only	78%	64%
Type 3 Provider-level only	70%	N/A

10.5 On average, TEF main contacts saw between 10 and 12 Type 1 and Type 2 statement of findings, while academic contacts typically saw much fewer than this, as shown in Figure 10.1. Summing across all types of statements of findings, TEF main contacts saw an average of 17, while academic contributors saw an average of two.

Figure 10.1 Number of statement of findings seen, by type

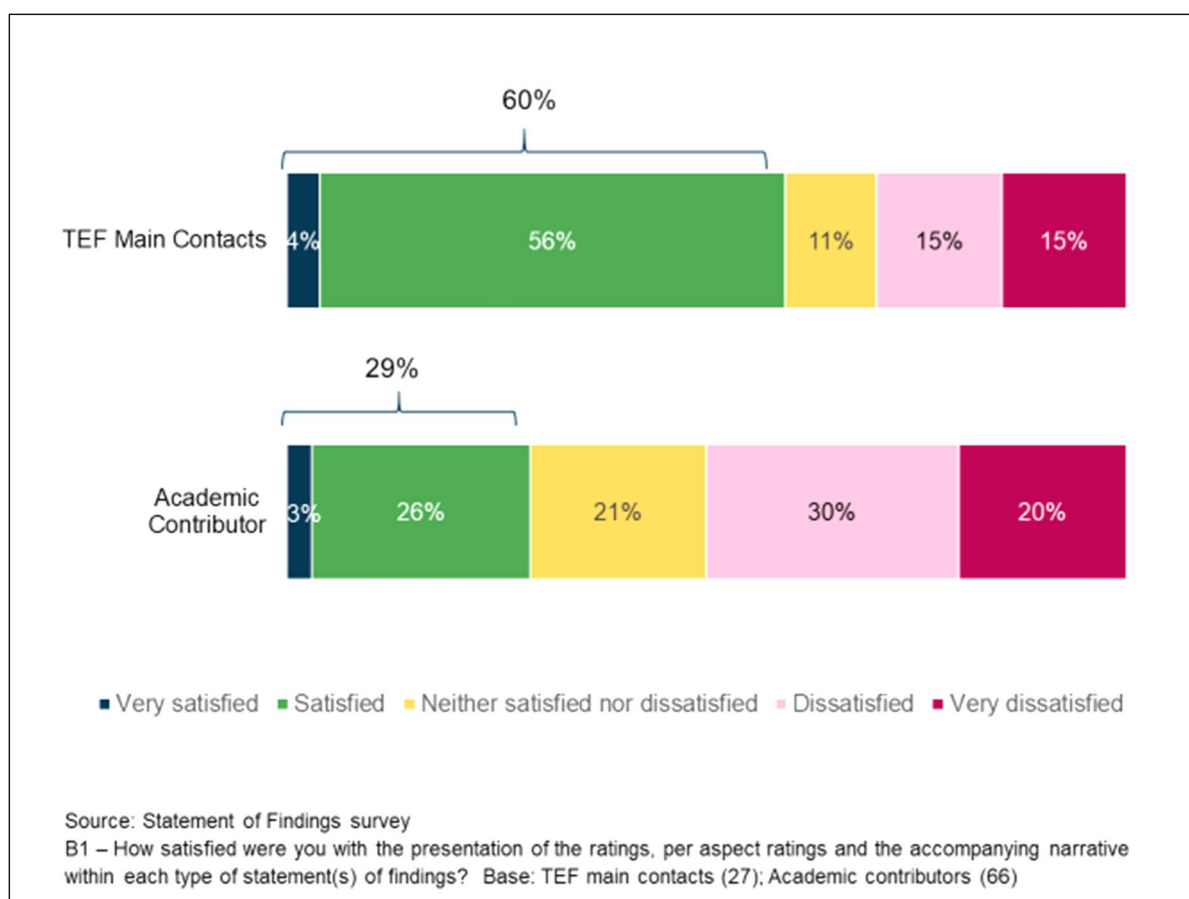


Overall satisfaction

10.6 As shown in Figure 10.2, satisfaction levels with the presentation of ratings were generally higher for TEF main contacts than for academic contributors. Six in ten (60%) of the former expressed an overall feeling of being at least somewhat satisfied ('satisfied' 56% or 'very satisfied' 4%) while this proportion was half (29%) for academic contributors who were either at least somewhat satisfied (satisfied 26%, very satisfied 3%). Half of academic contributors were either 'dissatisfied' (30%) or 'very dissatisfied' (20%) with the presentation. Only 11% of TEF main contacts expressed that they were 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' suggesting that the way the ratings were presented was quite a polarising issue.

10.7 Dissatisfaction levels were particularly high among universities where 22% of TEF main contacts and academic contributors expressed that they were 'very dissatisfied'.

Figure 10.2 Satisfaction with the presentation of findings



10.8 TEF main contacts were also asked the extent to which they were satisfied with how the subject ratings collectively represented provision at their institution. Just over half (51%) expressed at least some satisfaction, compared with just over a fifth (21%) reporting that they were at least partly dissatisfied with the representation.

10.9 Views by provider type were mixed. While it was a very small base, it should be noted that only one further education college (out of four) and one alternative provider (out of three) reported satisfaction with the way the subject ratings collectively represented provision at their institution.

10.10 Satisfaction generally occurred where the feedback and outcome met staff's expectation.

“Although initially at subject level the feedback in each of the sections seemed very formulaic, there were (in a subtle way) clear messages between the different submissions which (for the vast majority) matched as to how we had assessed the strengths and weaknesses of those sections and submissions.”

TEF main contact, University

“In general, the statements of findings accurately identified the university's position with regard to the metrics. In most cases panels clearly accepted points raised through the narrative submissions to either mitigate metrics below benchmark or to provide supporting evidence for positively flagged data.”

TEF main contact, University

10.11 Dissatisfaction derived from a variety of factors, including concern that there was insufficient detail in the Statements of Findings, discrepancies between the provider-level rating and subject-level ratings, an absence of consistency in panel decisions, and that the context of a provider was not appropriately taken into account. A handful also took the opportunity to raise concerns about the theory and process behind subject-level TEF.

“The judgement seems to have remained with the initial hypothesis so it is felt that context was not taken into account. Context includes student entry profiles being lower than sector and regional pay rates not being considered, both which impact on expected student outcomes.”

TEF main contact, Further Education College

“The absence of any consistency in outcomes between the subject panels undermines any confidence in the robustness of the process whatsoever. For example, for subjects where the metrics led to an initial hypothesis of Bronze or Silver/Bronze, some panels recognised the ongoing work and trajectory of improvement and awarded a higher outcome whereas as other panels stated that they recognised good enhancement work but the metrics say bronze therefore you are Bronze.”

TEF main contact, University

“We were awarded a rating of Bronze at provider level, despite being awarded a Silver or Gold in the majority of the 22 subjects that we were rated in.”

TEF main contact, University

“I am increasingly convinced that the proxies used by the TEF bear little or no relationship to the quality of teaching.”

TEF main contact, Alternative Provider

Perceived merits of statement of findings

10.12 Staff were asked to provide feedback on each type of statement of findings across a range of measures, as detailed below:

- Whether it provided a helpful level of detail.
- Whether the separate judgements/per-aspect ratings were useful (asked just of those in receipt of Type 2 and Type 3 Statements of Findings).
- Whether the best-fit holistic judgement/final rating is consistent with information elsewhere in the statement of findings
- Whether the content of the statement(s) of findings was clear
- Whether the statement of findings presented information in an easily digestible format.
- Whether the content was written in a way that would be accessible and useful to students.

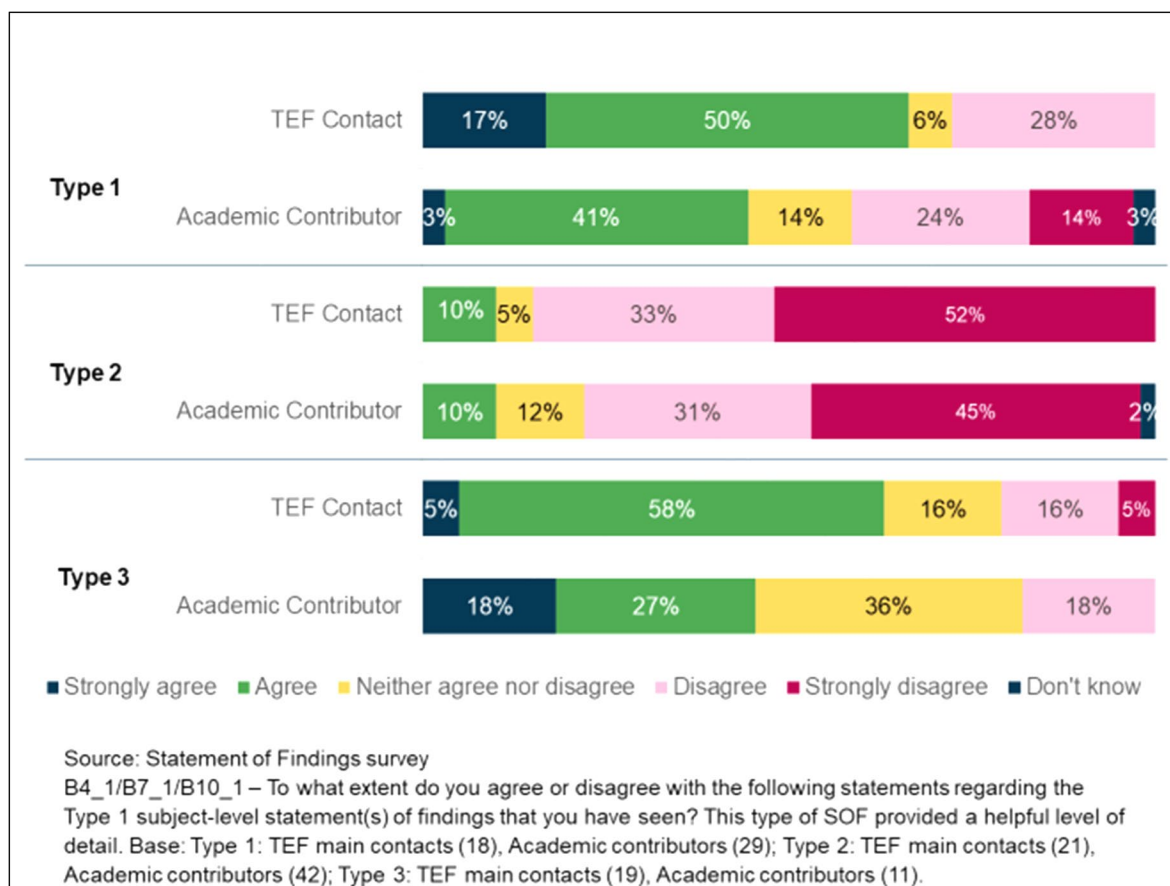
10.13 We take each measure in turn below.

Whether the statement of findings provided a helpful level of detail

10.14 There was a stark contrast between perceptions of the level of detail given in Type 1 and Type 2. The vast majority (85%) of TEF main contacts disagreed that the level of detail in Type 2 statements was helpful and over half (52%) ‘strongly disagreed’. The proportion of academic contributors that felt this way was lower but still sizeable (45% ‘strongly disagreed’). Most of the comments, particularly the negative ones, made reference to there not being enough detail, particularly in Type 2.

10.15 Type 1 statements were found to have a more helpful level of detail. Two-thirds (67%) of TEF main contacts at least somewhat agreed with this statement (17% ‘strongly agreed’), as did 44% of academic contributors (3% ‘strongly agreed’). There were, however, still detractors as over a third (38%) of academic contributors at least somewhat disagreed that the level of detail was helpful (14 % ‘strongly disagreed’). In terms of the provider-level statement (Type 3), around two-thirds (63%) of TEF main contacts agreed that this statement provided a helpful level of detail.

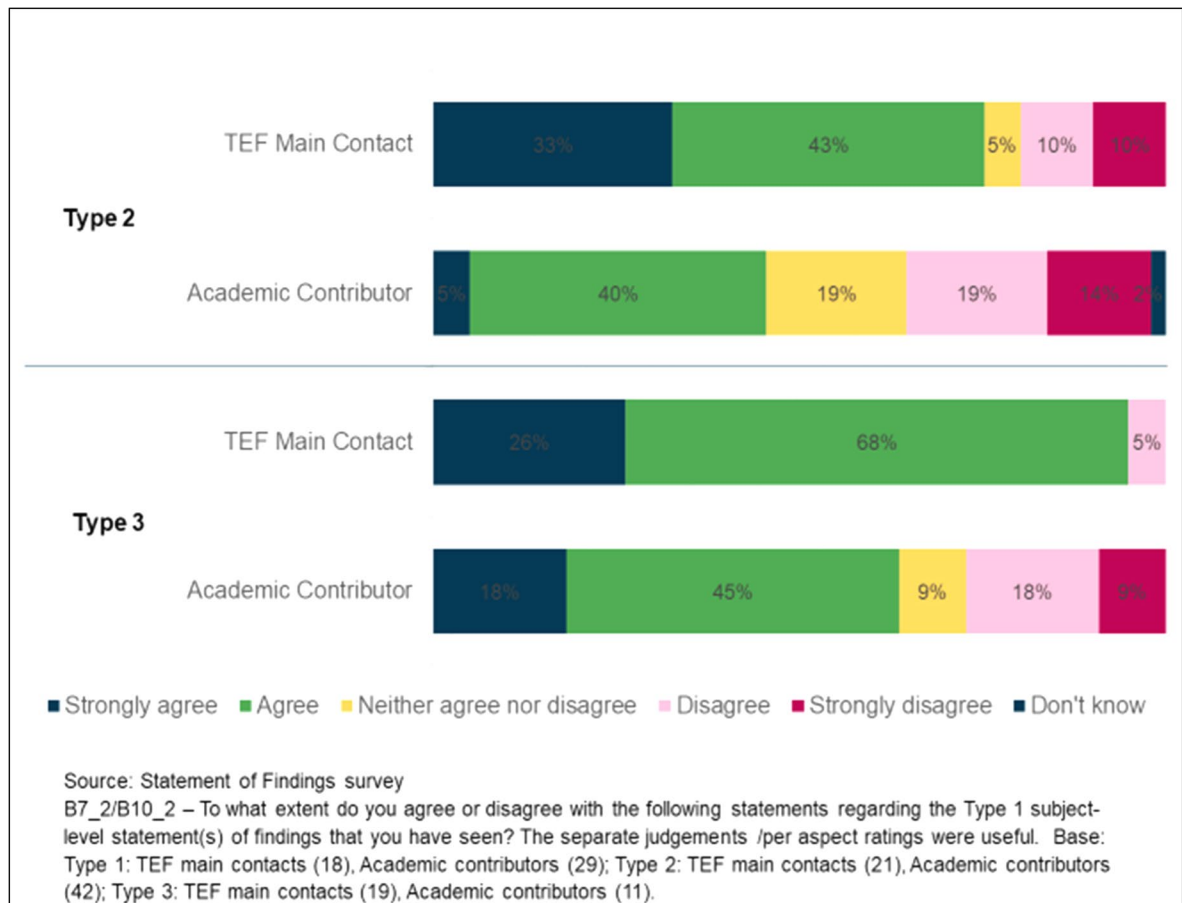
Figure 10.3 Staff views on whether the statement of findings provided a helpful level of detail



Whether the separate judgements/per-aspect ratings were useful

- 10.16 Staff were typically relatively positive that the separate judgements/per-aspect ratings were useful. In particular, an overwhelming majority of TEF main contacts (95%) agreed that the Type 3 Statement of Findings gave useful separate judgements or per-aspect ratings.
- 10.17 There was less support for Type 2 compared with Type 3 as illustrated in Figure 10.4.
- 10.18 Further education colleges were most likely to agree that the separate judgements for both Type 2 and Type 3 were useful. Universities were a little less likely to strongly agree but were still broadly positive. Specialist universities were indifferent. It must be noted that these observations are taken from small bases and should be regarded as indicative.

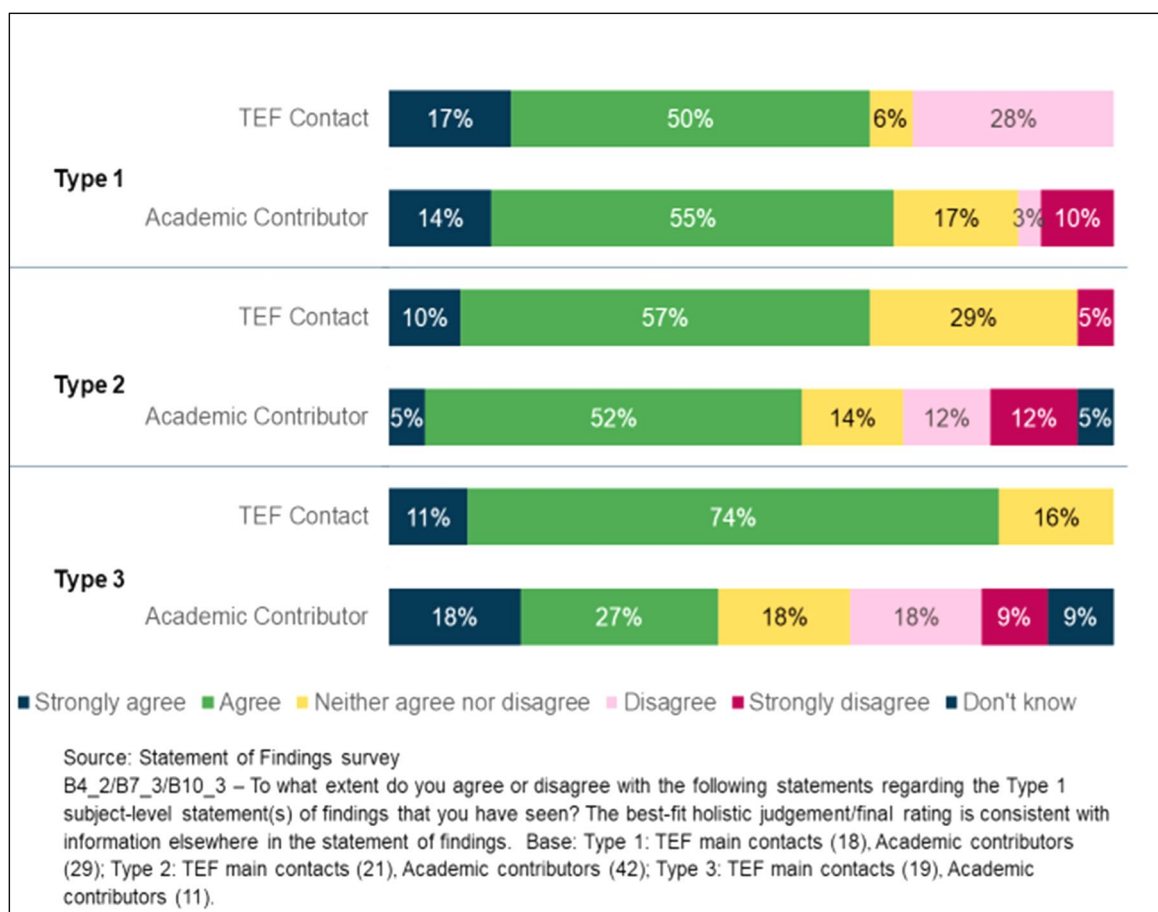
Figure 10.4 Staff views on whether the separate judgements/per-aspect ratings were useful



Whether the best-fit holistic judgement/final rating is consistent with information elsewhere in the statement of findings

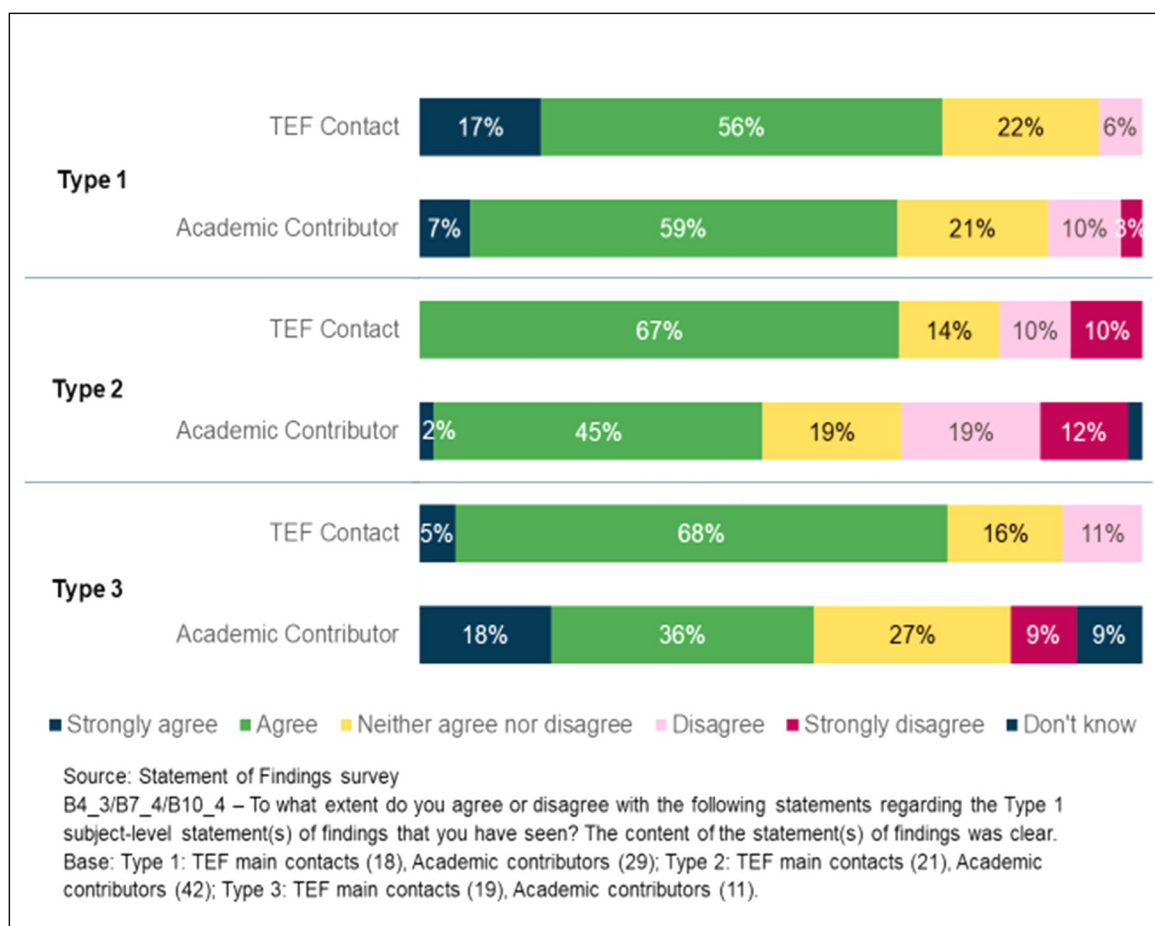
10.19 There was a fair degree of consistency across Type 1 and Type 2, and TEF main contacts and academic contributors, in terms of the proportion (approximately two-thirds).

10.20 Nearly three-quarters (74%) of TEF main contacts agreed that the Type 3 final rating was consistent with information elsewhere in the statement of findings and a further 11% ‘strongly agreed’.

Figure 10.5 Staff views on best-fit holistic judgments**Whether the content of the statement(s) of findings was clear**

- 10.21 When asked whether they agreed that the statement of findings had clear content, respondents were more inclined to broadly agree than broadly disagree. Typically, around two-thirds of TEF main contacts agreed with this statement across all three types of statements of findings, as shown in Figure 10.6.
- 10.22 Academic contributors on the other hand felt that Type 2 had less clarity than Type 1 (fewer than half agreed with this statement).
- 10.23 For Type 1, universities tended to agree that the best-fit holistic judgements were useful and of the two specialist universities that experienced it, one neither agreed nor disagreed and the other strongly disagreed but this is obviously a very small base. In terms of Types 2, all provider types were inclined to agree that these holistic judgments were useful but, again, these findings should be treated as indicative.

Figure 10.6 Staff views on whether the content of the statement(s) of findings was clear

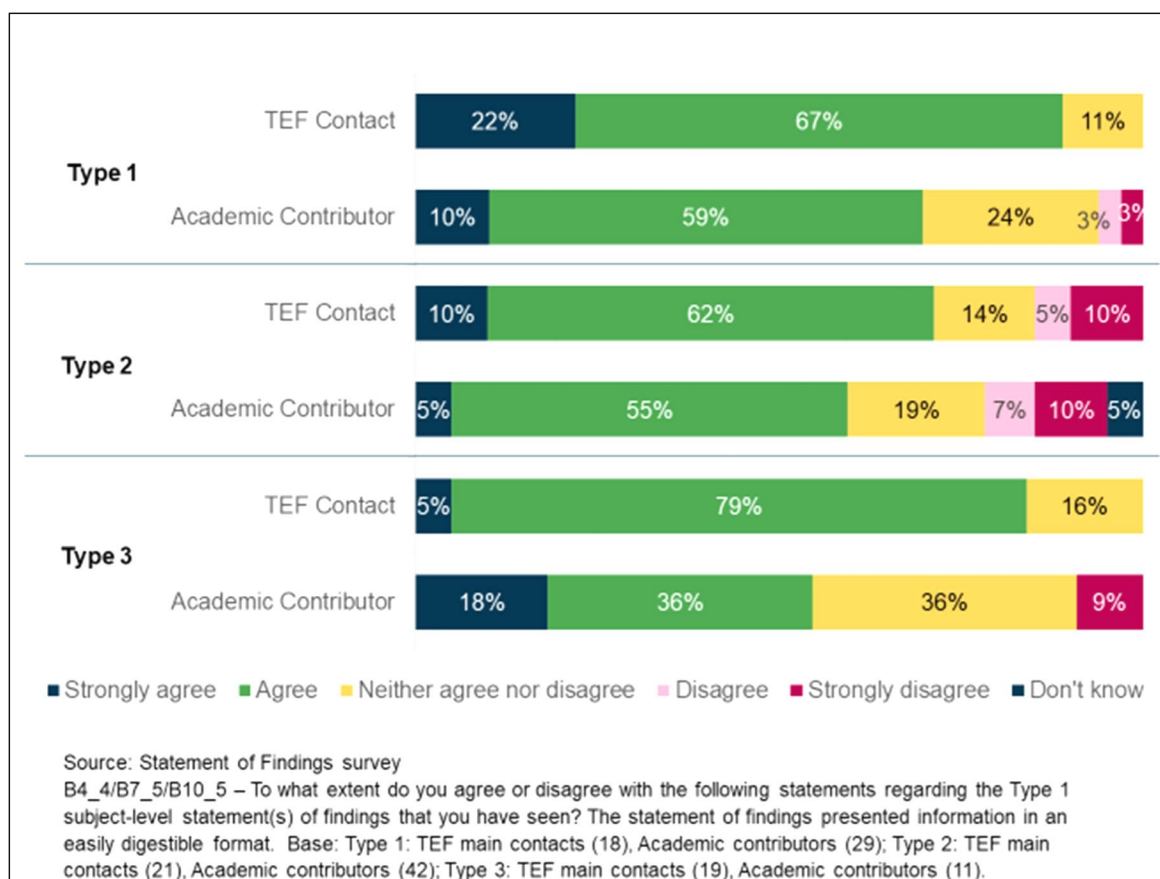


Whether the statement of findings presented information in an easily digestible format

10.24 Staff were generally inclined to agree that all three statement types had an easily digestible format. As across other measures, TEF main contacts were typically more positive than academic contributors, while Type 2 also suffered from the lowest levels of agreement (although still a comfortable majority agreed that the Type 2 statement of findings presented information in an easily digestible format). There were no notable differences by provider type.

10.25 Figure 10.7 presents the detailed percentage figures.

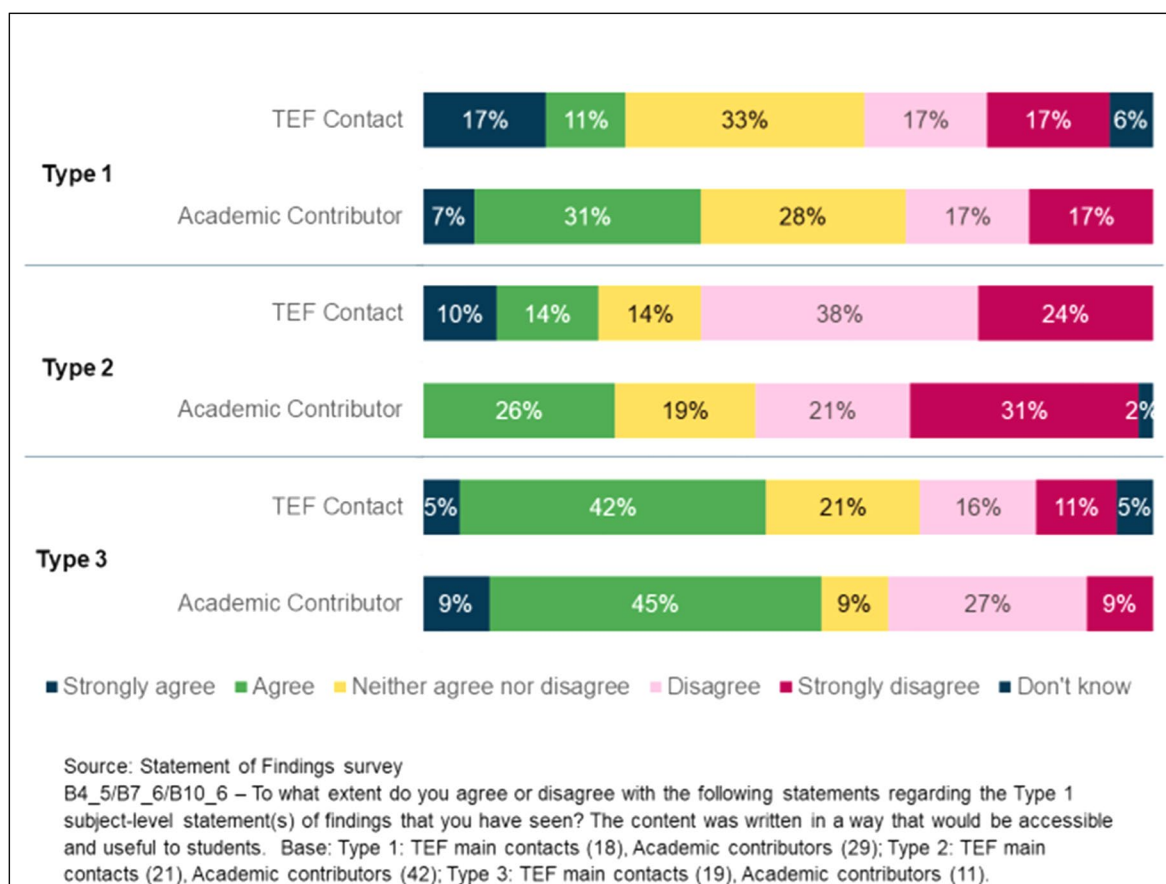
Figure 10.7 Staff views on whether the statement of findings presented information in an easily digestible format



Whether the content was written in a way that would be accessible and useful to students

10.26 Staff were typically more negative on this measure than the other measures. Only between a quarter and a third of TEF main contacts and academic contributors felt that the Type 1 and Type 2 statements of findings would be accessible and useful to students. As Figure 10.8 shows, however, they were more positive regarding Type 3, with around half agreeing that this type was accessible and useful to students. There were no notable differences by provider type.

Figure 10.8 Staff views on whether the content was written in a way that would be accessible and useful to students

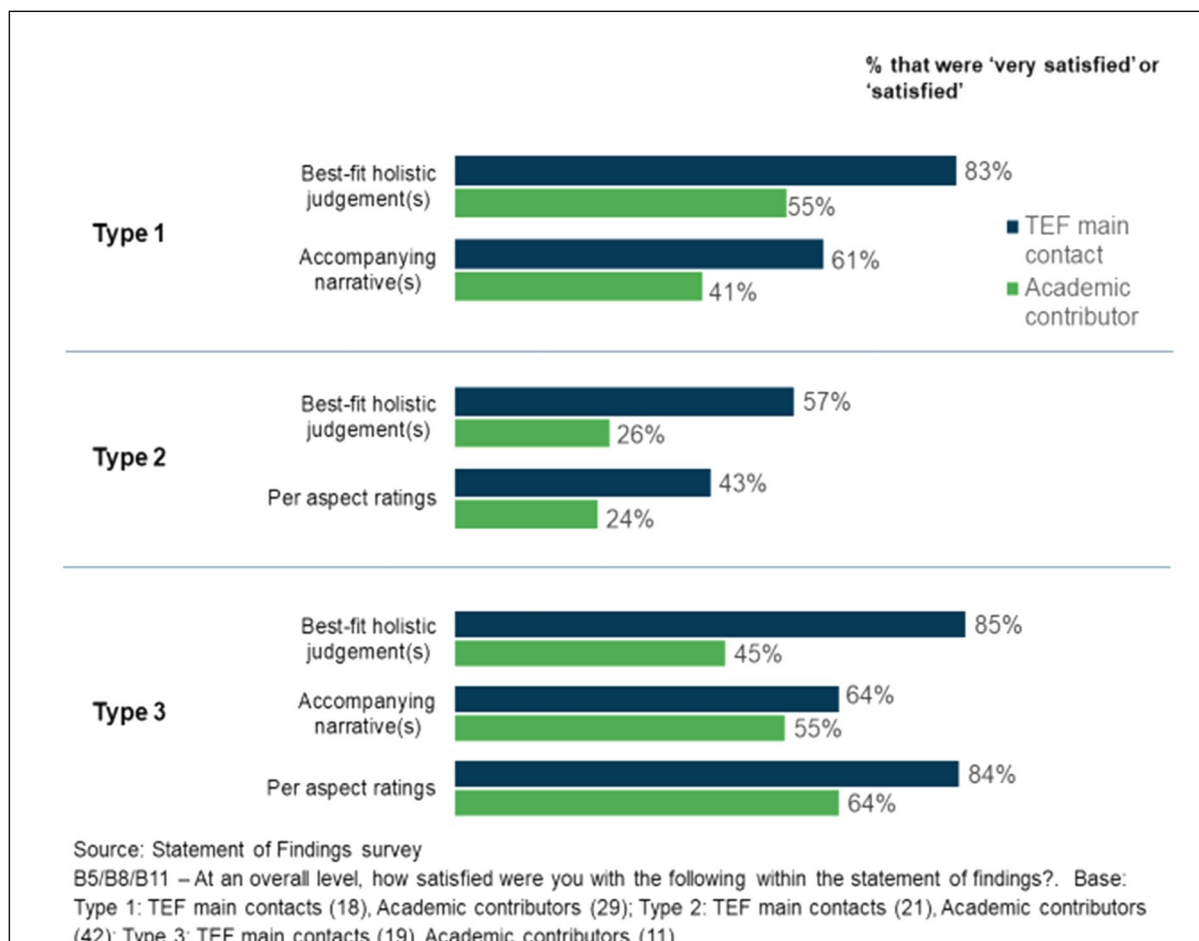


Satisfaction with various elements within statements of findings

- 10.27 Staff were asked how satisfied they were with the various elements that make up each statement of findings, including the best-fit holistic judgement, the accompanying narrative, and the per-aspect ratings. (Different statement types contained different elements.)
- 10.28 As Figure 10.9 illustrates the majority of TEF main contacts reported positive satisfaction levels across all these elements and types with the exception of the Type 2 per-aspect ratings, where only 43% were at least somewhat satisfied. Typically, they expressed greater satisfaction levels for the best-fit holistic judgements than the accompanying narrative as well.
- 10.29 Academic contributors were less satisfied than TEF main contacts, across all elements, and most notably in relation to Type 2, where only 26% were at least somewhat satisfied with the best-fit holistic judgements, and 24% with the per-aspect ratings.
- 10.30 Both specialist universities strongly disagreed that Type 1 provided findings in a way that would be accessible to students. Universities had a more polarised opinion of Type 1 with opinions across the whole spectrum. Further education colleges were

positive about both Types 2 and 3 in terms of their accessibility for students, while universities were again divided. Due to small base sizes, these findings should be treated as indicative.

Figure 10.9 Satisfaction with various features of the statement of findings



10.31 When asked to elaborate on their satisfaction with Type 1, TEF main contacts raised three main points. The first, most positive, was that they found the statement of findings to be fair, reflective and useful.

“The narratives provided a sufficient amount of detail to add justification to the holistic judgement. That is not to say that we necessarily agreed with these narratives, but they were felt to be internally consistent.”

TEF main contact, University

10.32 For others, the feedback was more negative, and some felt that there were inconsistencies across the Type 1 statements.

“Each could be said to stand OK on their own, but the inconsistency between different subject panels is unacceptable.”

TEF main contact, University

10.33 Another criticism of the Type 1 statement was a lack of usable feedback within the narrative.

“The amount of feedback we received as part of the subject TEF pilot was not value for money given our effort in preparing the statements. It would be of limited value to our prospects and employers as public information to judge our provision.”

TEF main contact, University

10.34 Among academic contributors, the same themes emerged. A few mentioned that they found the narrative balanced and perceptive, while there were other descriptions of this being helpful. However, negative comments tended to outweigh the positive comments, with issues raised over inconsistencies and a lack of detail. Alongside a lack of detail, the narrative was also considered to be too generic in places. These issues were all the more important for academic contributors, who were considering how they would practically carry forward the outcomes from the TEF exercise. There were therefore calls for more specific guidance in order to help institutions improve. Some also found it difficult to distinguish between different courses within the narrative, partly a result of the TEF subject classification not mapping on to their departmental structure.

“The narrative felt cut and pasted from a set of marking criteria, repeating things in the submission. Just as our students would say of our feedback to them (and this is one of the criteria that the TEF is judged on), the feedback needs to show how/where to improve. I find it ironic that the feedback given repeats what students criticise of their feedback.”

Academic contributor, University

10.35 Type 2 received lower scores than the other statement types across the approval metrics and this was reflected in the supporting comments. The overarching feeling was that there needed to be more detail. For some the lack of information meant they “couldn’t see why a rating was given” and others found it to be a stumbling block in terms of what they can do going forwards, with one respondent saying there was “too little information to act on”. The paucity of information also raised fears that the final judgement had not appropriately accounted for the narrative provided by institutions that contextualised the metrics, rather undermining the TEF submission process. Academic contributors in particular expressed quite negative views of Type 2.

“The statements were ‘cut and paste’ and all the same vanilla remarks – i.e. ‘good initiative but requires evidence of impact’. No indication of what kind of evidence was being thought of as adequate or indeed what initiative was being referred to.”

Academic contributor, University

“We do not recognise some interpretations and the conditions to which they refer. The metrics judgement seems to have prevailed and the narrative does not seem to have been read in detail or taken into account in the final judgement which is inconsistent with other subject areas.”

Academic contributor, University

“The best-fit holistic judgement is a bit more detailed. However, where a case was borderline Bronze/Silver or Silver/Gold from the metrics, it does not give us a clear idea why/how the final rating was reached. For example, one case says: ‘the submission does not provide sufficient evidence that provision in this subject is consistently excellent’ – what would consistent evidence look like?”

Academic contributor, University

10.36 There were nevertheless some positive comments, with some staff praising its clarity and accessibility (it should be noted that very few academic contributors received both Type 1 and Type 2 statements of findings and so they were unable to compare between the two).

“The findings were clearly expressed and fair, though I felt that a little more ‘narrative’ detail would have been helpful in clarifying one judgement in particular, not that it was necessarily unfair in its judgement.”

Academic contributor, FEC

10.37 Comments pertaining to Type 3 were generally a lot more positive with praise frequently given for the quality and detail.

“It is probably the best way of responding to the submissions. It is concise yet gives a steer for improvement. A holistic approach has to be a better method.”

TEF main contact, University

“Combining narrative and award for each aspect is of greatest benefit to the institution in understanding the holistic award given. I would still contend the narrative will not be much help to students.”

TEF main contact, University

10.38 For some, there was still room for improvement and scope for extra information. One suggestion was for a greater exploration of the evidence presented in the submission and more of an evaluation at institutional level rather than being so focused on the metrics.

10.39 The more positive comments towards Type 3 were reflected in TEF main contacts’ responses when they were asked which type they preferred. A large majority (70%) reported that they preferred Type 3, with only 4% preferring Type 2 and 11% Type 1 (4% were not sure).

10.40 There were no significant differences in these responses by provider type.

Predicted future use of statement of findings

10.41 The survey asked staff who they envisaged would make use of the statement of findings. Both TEF main contacts and academic contributors felt that senior leaders and heads of learning and departments were the most likely to make use of them. In line with their more positive outlook overall, TEF main contacts were more likely to think optimistically about the likelihood of use of statements of findings, and in line with previous findings, Type 2 was considered to be least useful for nearly all users (with the exception of prospective students). Detailed figures are shown in Table 10.1.

10.42 While the statement of findings were predicted to be widely used by staff, they were considered to be of much less use for students, both current and prospective. Highlighting the difficulty of incorporating the student voice into subject-level TEF, only between 10% and 33% considered that current students would make use of the statements of findings.

Table 10.2 Likelihood to make use of statement of findings

	Type 1		Type 2		Type 3	
	TEF main contact (%)	Academic contributor (%)	TEF main contact (%)	Academic contributor (%)	TEF main contact (%)	Academic contributor (%)
Base	18	29	21	42	19	[not asked]
Senior leaders	94	79	52	67	89	n/a
Heads of learning	89	76	62	74	84	n/a
Heads of department	89	76	71	64	63	n/a
Elected student reps (SABBs)	78	48	52	43	68	n/a
Current students	33	28	10	26	16	n/a
Prospective students	39	31	29	40	37	n/a
Marketing and recruitment	78	52	48	40	63	n/a

10.43 In terms of how the statement of findings would be used, staff felt that the findings were most likely to drive enhancement of teaching at a subject level or to improve future TEF submissions at subject level. TEF main contacts felt that Type 1 was the most likely to be used in this way, followed by Type 3 with Type 2 some way behind.

10.44 Staff were also asked how they themselves might use the statements of findings. TEF main contacts considered how they would use the results as a basis for future improvements, strategies and action plans, using the statements of findings as evidence or justification for making change happen.

“We will review aspects which were commented on to improve teaching, learning and assessment. We’ll also produce reports for senior leaders and academic staff.”

TEF main contact, Further Education College

“As this provides a broad overview of the university's performance in the subject-level TEF, the statement of findings will be considered and will inform our strategic and operational plans related to learning and teaching. However, we are conscious that these outcomes represent only a proportion of the university's provision.”

TEF main contact, University

10.45 Academic contributors also focused on potential areas of improvement they could make, while one felt it would be a useful opportunity to further engage student groups.

“I will use the overall best-fit judgement with subject area leaders/teams: 1. to identify issues for improvement; 2. to unpack National Student Survey (NSS) scores and prioritise areas for improvement.”

Academic contributor, University

“I will share findings with student groups through student rep systems and consult students further around future plans to improve teaching practice according to student voice and (increasing) diversity of student groups.”

Academic contributor, University

“We will focus on those [subjects] that are Bronze/Silver borderline – and try to build on those that are Silver/Gold borderline.”

Academic contributor, University

10.46 Some however were concerned the reported rating/judgement simply did not contain enough detail to be able to act. This was particularly common for academic contributors in receipt of Type 2.

“We won’t take action, as there is insufficient detail to know what actions, within our control, would enhance any future audit exercise.”

Academic contributor, Specialist University

“This is difficult as the statement of findings did not include much actionable feedback. If it had, we would act on it. The statement of findings largely just reiterated that we need to improve our NSS scores, which was already known and being acted upon. Two actionable points are that that we (1) need to improve how we monitor the impact of our initiatives and

(2) need to think more strategically about how we incorporate the student voice into future TEF submissions.”

TEF main contact, University

10.47 Indeed, for some of these individuals, while they saw little material value in the Statements of Findings themselves, they still recognised that the overall subject-level TEF process had already contributed to improvements and might continue to do so in future.

“Because the statements are too generic it is hard to envisage taking specific actions based on these. Rather we will continue to use the TEF metric data and institutional data about subject performance along with student feedback in order to make necessary enhancements.”

Academic contributor, University

“Possibly no changes specifically. Our quality assurance measures are now aligned to TEF metrics and therefore the TEF exercise outcome is now a by-product of, rather than a driver for, change.”

TEF main contact, University

“There is insufficient feedback to drive an action planning exercise. However the process of undertaking the assessment ourselves highlighted areas that action plans have been put in place for, which is being updated as a result of recent NSS results. However NSS provides a much clearer data set for us to work on at this time.”

Academic contributor, University

Learnings for future subject-level TEF submissions

10.48 Staff were asked whether and how they might approach future subject-level TEF submissions differently. Nearly all (95%) TEF main contacts and most (86%) academic contributors said they had learned something about how they would approach future exercises.

10.49 Three broad themes materialised. Firstly, staff reported that they would need to plan better for the submission process: introducing tighter project management controls, starting the process earlier and providing more support and resource to academic staff throughout.

“We learnt that it needs to be led by a small senior team. It is important to allow time for the guidelines and metrics to be understood. We also realised an in-house data and policy expert was central for the academic contributors to digest the elaborate TEF guideline and complex metric dataset.”

TEF main contact, University

“To start the whole process earlier. To simplify the guidance provided to subject submission authors. To include student reps earlier and at every stage.”

TEF main contact, Further Education College

“It has flagged the importance of getting all subject leads actively engaged in the process at an early stage, with time allocated to work on this (e.g. reflecting on the performance of their subject area; identifying areas where their metrics performance requires justification/improvement; and instigating initiatives to improve teaching quality and student outcomes). Some subject leads who were unable to devote sufficient time to preparing their submissions did not attain a rating that their provision perhaps deserved.”

TEF main contact, University

“The exercise is demanding and requires time and effort from a range of staff and students. This would need to be planned in.”

Academic contributor, Further Education College

10.50 The second consideration related to data practices. Many reflected that they needed to better monitor the impact of their initiatives so that they were able to feed in quantitative, rather than anecdotal, context to their submission. This was a particular need for smaller courses. Linked to this, some reflected that they needed to improve the way that they collated and shared evidence with other staff, as many found this process time-consuming, or the data (and metrics) confusing. There was also a move by many to start aligning existing quality processes to the TEF structure, to allow a more streamlined approach in future. More constant monitoring of data was also a common theme, especially at subject level.

“We need to: understand and focus on metrics through the academic year and focus our annual monitoring and enhancement processes around subject TEF. We need to focus on split metrics and provide strong alternative evidence for and directly address below benchmark metrics.”

TEF main contact, Specialist university

“We have aligned our quality processes to fit our own, but will struggle to fit all elements to what a small provider is. We have to look at the resources we can allocate to future exercises.”

Academic contributor, Further Education College

“We need to be better at collecting and formally recording some aspects of feedback, performance and quality at a course level. The exercise is helping us to plan ahead and helping us to be better prepared for future submissions.”

Academic contributor, Further Education College

10.51 A final focus was learnings from the process by which panel members appeared to reach their final rating. Some felt that the statement of findings suggested that the ratings were derived predominantly from the metrics rather than any contextual information they provided alongside these. Others perceived that the NSS was given greater weight than any other evidence, and therefore would adjust future submissions accordingly.

“It has made clearer the mechanics of the process although it is unclear how this will play out in future TEF exercises until the implementation and methodology of future subject-level TEF has been confirmed.”

Academic contributor, University

“That we need to speak more specifically to the data, even when this data doesn't feel very meaningful. We have one year of data using a very small cohort and yet small aspects of the pattern of this data seem to have been very important in determining our outcome.”

Academic contributor, university

“That TEF places the greatest emphasis on NSS metrics with other evidence being given much less value.”

Academic contributor, University

“Don't bother much with the narrative: the decision will be based on metrics plus some unfathomable and inconsistent 'judgement' regardless and so it is better to invest time on teaching and learning than this.”

Academic contributor, university

11 Conclusions

11.1 This final section pulls together key themes addressed through the research and reflects on how various aspects of the process may be enhanced to help streamline and/or improve the process for all stakeholders concerned. The first section focuses on the procedural elements, such as the role of students, evidence and assessment processes and the burden on the institution. The second section focuses on outputs, such as driving enhancements and influencing student choice.

Process

11.2 **Meaningfulness for students:** The way in which the student voice was captured, through the roles of student representatives and student contributors, had mixed success. In some providers the inclusion of students was effective, while others found it more challenging. Analysis of verbatim responses found a lack of clarity around the student declaration, with several students commenting that it needs to be less of a tick-box exercise.

11.3 **Student representatives:** The importance of the role of students in the process, and how their contributions can be encouraged and made meaningful, was highlighted. For example, submissions benefited from the inclusion of the student voice, whilst the opportunities students had to contribute directly to the submission also adds weight to the student voice, whilst making their contribution more meaningful. **Other means of encouraging students' contributions are suggested, such as taking direct evidence from students in other ways, for example by speaking to students directly about their experience with their provider.**

11.4 **Student contributors:** Student contributors were asked to give feedback on their experience of their teaching and learning experience. Although the timing proved challenging for engaging students, some providers were more successful than others. This success stems from proactive attempts by academic staff to communicate with and encourage their students to participate. **Greater consideration about the time of year and timetable for the overall process may prove helpful in encouraging student engagement.**

11.5 **Robust evidence and assessment processes:** The metric data the OfS supplied to providers to support their submissions proved challenging for some to use. Many academic staff were unfamiliar with working with this type of data. There were also concerns that metrics are not regionally benchmarked, implying that London-based providers are at an advantage given the regional economic disparities that exist. A minority of participants said they found the data insightful. The research shows that providers need more resources and support in understanding and interpreting this data. There was broad support across all the assessment criteria against which submissions are measured against.

11.6 Institutional burden: Participation in the second subject-level TEF pilot placed additional burdens on those staff involved, with some reporting that they had to work evenings, weekends and/or over the Christmas holidays. This additional burden reflects both capacity and issues of expertise. Lack of expertise arose in two main areas: understanding of the metrics data and the ability to write a submission in a style appropriate for the exercise. Over time, as participants become accustomed to the requirements, issues around style and the data would ease. This would bring down the amount of time spent and ease the overall issues around capacity. **Participants could be better supported by the sharing of examples of best practice. More concise and focused guidance materials would, also, be very welcome, given feedback around the volume of materials received, and help to further reduce the institutional burden.**

Outputs

11.7 Driving enhancements: The results for current impact and future potential impact of subject-level TEF were mixed. The muted result is to be expected given that the overall benefits of a scheme such as TEF will take time to filter through, as HE providers respond to the outcomes and, likely, implement changes incrementally. For enhancements to be realised, it is important that there is clarity in the reasoning behind the decisions taken. This is where the statement of findings has a critical role to play. There was mixed feedback from the pilot on the extent to which staff were clear as to why they received the decision they did. **Although producing statements with clear, actionable findings would likely have an impact on resource, efforts to make the findings less generic would be welcomed.** Ultimately, if providers do not feel that the exercise is worthwhile and helping to support the enhancements it was designed to achieve it may breed resentment towards the exercise in the future. Another area of concern expressed regarding the statement of findings was the perception of inconsistencies in panel decisions. Also, grouping of subjects made it difficult to identify the changes individual departments may need to make. **The latter may be difficult to resolve, but it is worth looking at the question of consistency across judgements and whether panel members need more training and/or guidance.**

11.8 Influencing prospective student choice: Students were, on the whole, positive that subject-level TEF may influence prospective student choice, with most citing the importance of subject over location as the primary concern for prospective students' application choices. Staff, however, were less certain, with a number contending that – for a variety of reasons – the TEF rating is not an accurate representation of teaching quality. Another added complication is how prospective students might weigh contradictory university/subject ratings either between provider- and subject-level TEF or between TEF ratings and other provider ratings available.

11.9 Supporting diversity of provision: There are mixed views on which institutions will most benefit from subject-level TEF and, in some cases, there is a concern that the exercise would reinforce existing perceptions of excellence in the sector. In contrast, some representatives from alternative providers and further education colleges believe

that subject-level TEF could help them to compete with top ranking higher education providers at a subject-level even if they cannot compete with them at an institutional level. The submission process itself, however, seemed more of a challenge for alternative providers and further education colleges due to the comparative resource challenges they faced. **The Office for Students might think about whether there are provisions that could be made for further education colleges and alternative providers that would help compensate for the additional challenges they face. It may be that further support for everybody around, for example, the metrics, would help to alleviate some of the difficulties these providers face.**

11.10 **Supporting widening participation and social mobility:** Evidence from the study suggests that both staff and students are broadly split as to whether subject-level TEF will contribute to supporting widening participation and social mobility. They would, however, benefit from further support and guidance materials provided by the Office for Students on interpreting this data.

11.11 **Effects on provider behaviour:** Learnings from the pilot focused on positive efforts to align the subject-level TEF process with existing internal QA processes. This was particularly true for universities; whereas further education colleges and alternative providers were more likely to cite establishing internal processes. As for any unintended consequences of the subject-level TEF process, at this early stage there was little evidence of any unintended consequences or vulnerability to gaming in how providers approach the process. This is not to say a full-scale roll-out of the scheme would not identify either unintended consequences or gamification behaviour. This is something that would need to be monitored over time.

Concluding remarks

11.12 This study sought to evaluate the second TEF subject-level pilot. The research demonstrates that within the limited parameters of a pilot exercise there were some positive developments for those providers who chose to take part. The exercise was challenging, but, nevertheless, many providers felt that the process was beneficial, providing insight and understanding of performance across subjects as well as across providers. We have highlighted some key areas of reflection that could help to improve the process in the future as it continues to develop.

12 Appendix A: Glossary

Term	Definition
Academic contributor	Academic contributors are typically heads of department or faculties who led on the writing of departmental subject-level TEF submissions on behalf of their department.
Alternative provider (AP)	Prior to August 2019, alternative providers were any providers of higher education courses who were not in direct receipt of recurrent funding from the Office for Students (OfS) and previously the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) or from equivalent funding bodies in the Devolved Administrations; or did not receive direct recurrent public funding (for example, from a local authority, or the Secretary of State for Education); and were not further education colleges.
Benchmarking	A unique benchmark is calculated for each TEF metric, for each provider. The benchmark is a weighted sector average where weightings are based on the characteristics of the students covered by that metric. The benchmarking methodology used in TEF means that a provider is not being compared with a pre-set group of providers, such as a specific subset of other universities or other further education colleges. Instead, the outcomes for its students are compared with similar students across the entirety of the higher education sector. The outcomes for students in an individual subject are compared only with similar students across the sector studying the same subject. The benchmarking information items selected comprise only those characteristics that are not within the provider's control. They include: subject, entry qualifications, age, ethnicity, sex, disability, educational disadvantage (POLAR), level of study, and year.
DLHE	The DLHE (Destinations for Leavers from Higher Education) survey collects information on what leavers from higher education programmes are doing six months after qualifying from their course. TEF uses DLHE data to create a metric measuring employment outcomes of graduates.
Further education (FE) college	Further education colleges provide technical and professional education and training, including courses leading to a higher education degree. Some FE colleges also offer undergraduate higher education courses and are therefore eligible to participate in TEF.
HESA	HESA (Higher Education Statistics Agency) is the official agency for the collection, analysis and dissemination of quantitative information about higher education in the United Kingdom.
ILR	The ILR (Individualised Learner Record) is a primary data collection source capturing details on students at FE colleges. The TEF uses ILR data as the basis for some of its metrics.
LEO	LEO (Longitudinal Education Outcomes) data contains statistics employment and earnings of higher education graduates using

Term	Definition
	matched data from different government departments. The TEF uses LEO data as the basis for some of its metrics.
NSS	The NSS (National Student Survey) is a UK survey for final year, undergraduate students to give feedback on their higher education experience. The TEF uses NSS data as the basis for some of its metrics.
OfS	The OfS (Office for Students) 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 university	A specialist university is typically small, grant-funded provider awarding degrees at undergraduate and postgraduate for a small selection of niche or specialised subjects.
Student contributor	These individuals were engaged in the subject-level TEF process and will have contributed to discussions about the quality of teaching for one or more subjects, and potentially the learning environment.
Student representative	Each institution participating in the pilot was expected to demonstrate meaningful student engagement with both provider- and subject-level TEF and to that end were asked to nominate a student representative, such as a student union officer or relevant sabbatical officer who would be involved and contribute to the process. Part of their responsibility would be to sign a declaration to say that students had been given the opportunity to feed into the TEF process.
TEF	The TEF (Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework) is a national framework, introduced by the government in England to recognise and encourage excellent teaching and student outcomes in universities, colleges and other providers of higher education. It is intended to help students choose where to study, by providing clear information about teaching provision and student outcomes. The first provider-level awards were released in 2017.
TEF main contact	Nominated OfS contact for an institution who oversaw the subject-level TEF submission process.
TEF metrics	The TEF metrics are a set of measures that are produced consistently for all providers, specifically for the TEF. They are used to help assess performance in relation to each of the aspects of teaching excellence. They cover: Teaching Quality (TQ), Learning Environment (LE), and Student Outcomes and Learning Gain (SO), and use data from the NSS, HESA and ILR, DLHE and LEO.
University	Universities are grant-funded providers that award degrees at undergraduate and postgraduate level; most usually they have a university title.

13 Appendix B: Statement of Findings examples

Type 1 Statement of Findings

Name of the provider: Joe Bloggs University
CAH2 subject: Subject 2
<p>Teaching Quality</p> <p>There are good levels of student satisfaction with teaching and assessment, in line with the subject's benchmarks. Student voice is above benchmark and there is evidence that student feedback is acted on.</p> <p>Students are given opportunities to engage with activities beyond core teaching that could enhance their learning, although there is limited evidence that these are accessible to all students.</p> <p>A significant proportion of staff are research active, however there is limited evidence of how this informs teaching and learning.</p>
<p>Learning Environment</p> <p>Continuation rates for most groups of students are in line with the subject's benchmark. Continuation for mature students is below benchmark and this is not addressed in the submission.</p> <p>Student satisfaction with academic support and learning resources are in line with the subject's benchmarks. There is evidence that students are supported in their learning, progression and attainment, through a robust tutorial system.</p> <p>Teaching and learning in the subject is enriched by opportunities for involvement in professional practice through partnerships with employers. An increasing number of students take up opportunities for live projects and placements and work experience.</p>
<p>Student Outcomes and Learning Gain</p> <p>Most students achieve good outcomes. Progression to highly skilled employment, and to employment with above median earnings, is below benchmark.</p> <p>The submission provides some mitigation through increasing placement activities and developing institution wide career services. However, there is limited evidence of how accessible these are to all students, or their impact on student outcomes.</p>
<p>Best-fit holistic judgement</p> <p>The initial hypothesis based on analysis of the metrics was Bronze. The panel judged that there was additional evidence in the submission that partially addresses areas of below benchmark performance, and provides evidence of some aspects of performance above the baseline for this subject. However, the additional evidence overall did not fully address significant areas of underperformance in student outcomes or provide sufficient evidence that provision in this subject across three aspects of teaching quality consistently exceeds the baseline quality threshold expected for this subject.</p> <p>The panel therefore judged the totality of evidence best fits the descriptor of the Bronze rating.</p>

Type 2 Statement of Findings

Name of the provider: Joe Bloggs University
CAH2 subject: Materials and Technology
Teaching quality From the evidence provided from the submission and the metrics the panel judged that this subject best fits the gold section of the rating descriptor for teaching quality.
Learning environment From the evidence provided from the submission and the metrics the panel judged that this subject best fits the Gold section of the rating descriptor for learning environment.
Student outcomes and learning gain From the evidence provided from the submission and the metrics the panel judged that this subject sits on the borderline of the Gold/Silver rating descriptors for student outcomes and learning gain.
Best-fit holistic judgement The initial hypothesis based on analysis of the subject-level metrics is Gold. The panel judge that there is substantial additional evidence in the submission that provision is outstanding and of the highest quality found across the UK in this subject. The panel therefore judge the totality of evidence best fits the descriptor of the Gold rating.

Type 3 statement of findings

Name of the provider: Joe Bloggs University
<p>Teaching Quality</p> <p>From the evidence provided from the submission and the metrics the panel judged that this provider best fits the gold section of the rating descriptor for teaching quality.</p> <p>Student satisfaction with teaching, academic support and student voice is in line with the provider's benchmark.</p> <p>Student satisfaction with assessment and feedback is below benchmark, and this is partially mitigated in the submission. The provider reflects that across the institution assessment and feedback is an area of development. At course level the provider has put in place a range of measures to support students including responding to student concerns around 'deadline bunching' which also support students in the contexts they are sometime in when on placement in remote areas. Students have been actively involved in these developments and are positive about them.</p> <p>Students are highly engaged with their studies and work in partnership at course and provider level to develop provision.</p>
<p>Learning Environment</p> <p>From the evidence provided from the submission and the metrics the panel judged that this provider best fits the gold section of the rating descriptor for learning environment.</p> <p>The provider is significantly above benchmark on continuation for students from all backgrounds. A large proportion of students are either mature or non-school leavers, and tailored support has been designed effectively to meet the needs of this demographic.</p> <p>Students have access to an outstanding range of physical and digital resources. The provider has invested in simulation resources that are closely aligned to practice. Students access designated Health and Wellbeing learning spaces and make use of clinical skills development facilities.</p>
<p>Student Outcomes and Learning Gain</p> <p>From the evidence provided from the submission and the metrics the panel judged that this provider best fits the gold section of the rating descriptor for student outcomes and learning gain.</p> <p>Students from all backgrounds achieve positive outcomes. All employment metrics are above benchmark, and there is an exceptionally high level of progression to highly skilled employment.</p> <p>The provider is effectively supporting students to gain knowledge and skills which are in demand by employers. Professional and personal skills development is embedded throughout the curriculum, and pathways to professional employment or further study. Students are effectively supported to follow their chosen pathways to professional practice or postgraduate studies.</p>
<p>Best-fit holistic judgement</p> <p>The initial hypothesis based on analysis of the metrics was Gold. The panel judge that there was substantial additional evidence in the submission that the provider supports consistently outstanding teaching, learning and student outcomes for its students. It is of the highest quality found in the UK higher education sector. The panel therefore judge the totality of evidence best fits the descriptor of the Gold rating.</p>

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