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THE PROPOSED TEACHING EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK (TEF) FOR UK UNIVERSITIES

Abstract:

The role of universities within society has been the subject of constant discussion and conjecture amongst politicians, the public, as well as within the Higher Education (HE) sector itself. However, this issue has come ever more to the forefront of people's minds in recent times due to the comprehensive spending review (CSR), related concerns regarding student fees and public debt, and governmental demands for the increased accountability of Universities in terms of student satisfaction and perceived 'value for money'.

The Research Excellence Framework (REF), which replaced the Research Assessment Exercise (RAE), is accepted as a reasonably effective means by which universities, and their researchers, may be assessed periodically and subsequently allocated Quality Research (QR) funding in recognition, as well as to reinforce, research excellence in the HE sector. However, the results of any exercise will be interpreted in a number of ways and, inevitably, has led to claims that the 'teaching' function of universities has become the poor relation to the sector's research agenda.

There have been a number of initiatives which have sought to address this perceived imbalance, and to regulate, monitor or even promote the educational function of universities. Amongst these have been Teaching Quality Assessments, Centres of Excellence in Teaching and Learning (CETLs), and the most recent initiative in the form of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF). In many respects, it is hard to challenge the principle that universities should be assessed in the same way for their teaching function as they are for their research activities and outputs. Indeed, the incorporation of 'impact' into the REF offers a seductive promise of similar connections that may be made with teaching in the form of progression, achievement and employability statistics. After all, this is the era of analytics and Big Data, why shouldn't it be used as part of a new system if it is readily available across the HE sector? The authors don't, in principle, disagree with this direction of travel. However, as with any new initiative, time and thought should not only be given to the precise objective of this exercise, but also to the potential pitfalls that may result from making a less than perfect choice. In this respect, the consultation surrounding the current green paper '...' may be likened to the following passage from Lewis Carroll's 'Alice's Adventures in Wonderland': "Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

Keywords:

Teaching Excellence Framework, Thresholds of Quality, Learning and Teaching, Teaching Quality, Educational Gain

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