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The University Of Sheffield.

The Teaching Excellence Framework: What's The Purpose?

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The Sir Bernard Crick Centre
Promoting the Public Understanding of Politics

centre for engaged philosophy

Foreword

Professor Sir Keith Burnett FRS, Vice-Chancellor of The University of Sheffield

I am delighted to have been asked to write a Foreword to this important reflection on the proposed Teaching Excellence Framework by Dr Josh Forstenzer, a Vice-Chancellor's Fellow at The University of Sheffield considering the public value of higher education.

My conversations with Josh about the nature of universities and who they should rightly serve began in unexpectedly traumatic circumstances. Josh was elected President of Sheffield's award-winning Students' Union in the academic year 2010 to 2011. What neither he nor I knew when he took office, was that this would be the year in which the government followed the Browne Review with the increase of tuition fees for home undergraduates to £9,000 and, with it, a major shift of the cost of higher education from the public purse to students themselves.

Sheffield found itself at the heart of considerable media attention during this time, not least because our students often live in the Sheffield Hallam constituency held by Nick Clegg MP and many of them had voted Liberal Democrat based on a pledge of no fee increase.

The rest, as they say, is history. But that history is still being written, and the thoughtful and principled leadership which Josh showed as Union President has continued as we are now being asked to consult on a Green Paper on Higher Education which proposes further marketization of higher education and the introduction of a Teaching Excellence Framework.

Once again, here in Sheffield I am in close conversation with our students who are so much more than customers, and in whom our interest and care extends way beyond their period of study. We share the belief that it is vital that, as well as considering the introduction of new metrics, we ask more fundamental questions about the nature and purpose of universities, what they should do for students and what is needed by society – those who attend university and those who benefit from our work in so many other ways, both in the UK and overseas.

This paper is, I believe, a valuable contribution to this deeper thinking. As a student leader, philosopher and associate of the Crick Centre which focuses on UK political developments, Dr Josh Forstenzer offers an important critique of thinking lying behind proposed reforms, and asks us to consider what we ought to consider as we review the future of British higher education.

About the Author

Dr Josh Forstenzer is a Vice-Chancellor's Fellow at The University of Sheffield working on The Public Benefit of Higher Education. He studied Politics and Philosophy at Sheffield, where in 2007 he received the Political Theory Graduate Prize awarded jointly by the Departments of Philosophy and Politics. He gained a PhD in Philosophy in 2013, also from Sheffield.

Josh served as President of The University of Sheffield Students' Union from 2010 to 2011 and was a Member of The University Council, where he was an advocate of the wider civic role of universities. From 2008 to 2010, he led the award-winning Philosophy in the City programme dedicated to the dissemination of philosophy in Sheffield schools and to widening access to University for under-privileged pupils, and co-founded Rising Stars, a mentoring programme working with disadvantaged pupils in local schools.

Executive Summary

- Context: The mass expansion of higher education along with the progressive introduction of fees and an ever expanding research agenda have changed the institutional priorities of British universities over the past 25 years from teaching and scholarship to research and economic innovation.

- The general ambition of the proposed Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) recommended in the latest Green Paper on Higher Education (specifically, Part A) is to rebalance 'the relationship between teaching and research' in universities and to put 'teaching at the heart of the system', by introducing a teaching quality assessment mechanism using core metrics and qualitative evidence. In exchange, universities deemed to have 'excellent' teaching will be rewarded with the right to increase undergraduate fees in line with inflation.

- There will be a technical consultation about the exact metrics used in the TEF, but it will start with three readily available common metrics, namely: Employment/Destination; Retention/Continuation; Student Satisfaction indicators from the National Student Survey (teaching quality and learning environment).

- The Secretary of State in the Department of Business, Innovation and Skills would have authority to lift tuition fee caps in line with inflation without an Act of Parliament.

- While the government has sought to depoliticise the TEF, there is a more fundamental set of political and ethical questions about the purposes and social value of higher education that needs to be at the heart of this debate.

- In response, this report considers three immediate criticisms: the TEF is not really about teaching excellence, but about fees; the TEF does not serve students, but an imagined group of employers; the TEF ignores the wider public benefits of undergraduate education.

- The most fundamental concern with the proposed TEF is that it risks overly emphasising the development of the skills which will lead to certain kinds of employment and high-salary work options at the expense of the wider social purposes and benefits of undergraduate education.

Recommendations:

- The issue of fees should be entirely disentangled from the TEF, because the proposed connection would amount to lifting the cap on fees by stealth and would erode the confidence of students and academic staff in the wider goal of rebalancing teaching and research priorities.

- Assessment of graduate progression should include a wider definition of valuable and productive employment, beyond simply an assessment based on salary - a measurement notoriously uneven across sectors and which ignores the equally profound impact on future earnings of social class, networks, access to placements, and most crucially, financial support to undertake internships and offset the costs of working and living in London.

- The TEF ought to reflect higher education's full range of social purposes. To that end, the White Paper and the technical consultation on metrics should expand on the brief set out in the Green Paper to ensure that TEF metrics and panel guidance reflect all of these social purposes.

- Decision-makers should consider that the simplest method to achieve a rebalancing of teaching and research is not the introduction of a TEF, but rather the abandonment of the REF coupled with the improved student representation of student interests in the broadest sense, first but not exclusively by students themselves.

1. Introduction

Throughout the summer of 2015, the newly appointed British Minister of State for Science and Universities, Jo Johnson, affirmed his intent to introduce what he has called the 'Teaching Excellence Framework' (TEF). The general ambition of the TEF has been expressed as 'rebalancing the relationship between teaching and research' in universities and 'putting teaching at the heart of the system', by introducing a metrics-based teaching quality assessment mechanism. In exchange, universities deemed to have 'excellent' teaching will be rewarded with the right to increase undergraduate fees in line with inflation. On November 6th 2015, the Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills published a Green Paper on higher education, entitled, *Fulfilling our Potential: teaching excellence, social mobility, and student choice*,[1] outlining various reforms in higher education, one of which is the introduction of the TEF.

This report aims to offer an academically informed rapid-response analysis of the policy proposal, focusing on the TEF by engaging with the Green Paper as well as the Minister for Science and Universities' public statements regarding the general ambition, objectives, and implementation mechanisms for the TEF. Moreover, this report aims to cast a critical eye upon the proposals made in the consultation paper relating to teaching excellence, by focusing on the question of purpose. More specifically, it will argue that there is a fundamental set of political and ethical questions about the purposes and social value of higher education that needs to be at the heart of this debate.

To this end, the report will begin by offering a short historical overview of the recent trends in British higher education out of which the TEF has grown. It will then outline current proposals for the implementation of the TEF, before considering the following criticisms:

- The TEF is not really about teaching excellence, but about fees;
- The TEF does not serve students, but employers;
- The TEF ignores the public benefits of undergraduate education.

Finally, the report will discuss how the TEF relates to the question of the purpose of higher education, ultimately arguing that it constitutes a dangerous narrowing of our understanding of such purposes, since the policy envisions higher education as a primarily private good, as well as encouraging students and academics to be motivated by self-interest and self-advancement at the expense of public service and civic engagement.

1 BIS, *Fulfilling our Potential: teaching excellence, social mobility, and student choice*, November 2015 – hereafter *Fulfilling our Potential*.

2. *The Context: Higher Education in Britain*

> "For those who have lived through the last few decades in British education, particularly higher education, the changes have been both extensive and profound. In fact for some of those who have taught in universities in Britain between the 1960s and the 1980s, the present system in 2011 is barely recognisable in many of its practices."[2]

As Andrew Vincent evocatively suggests, British higher education has been nothing short of transformed since the 1960s. In addition to devolved powers on higher education policy in Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, this transformation is explained by three further concomitant trends: the mass expansion of higher education; the privatisation of the cost of undergraduate teaching; and the development of an aggressive research environment. Taken together, these have led to a managerialised and marketised higher education environment. This report contends that the TEF should be understood as the latest expression of this over-arching development. To explain why, we will consider in further detail the three trends leading to this over-arching development.

The first trend is the mass expansion of higher education. Gill Wyness notes that "[s]tudent volumes have more than quadrupled, rising from around 400,000 full time HE students at UK institutions in the 1960s to over 2 million by 2007."[3] Expansion began in 1963, when the Robbins Report first set out the objective of radically expanding university places. This same report also enshrined the principle named after the report's first author, the Robbins principle, according to which, university places "should be available to all who were qualified for them by ability and attainment."[4] To achieve this end the report recommended a major expansion in the number of universities, leading to the creation of the 'glass plate' universities. In 1992, the Further and Higher Education Act enacted further expansion of the sector by awarding the title of 'University' to all former polytechnics.[5] In 1997, the Dearing Report recommended an even greater expansion of university places, while purportedly allaying any fears of degree devaluation.[6] In 2001, while campaigning for re-election, then Prime Minister, Tony Blair announced that his government would set the goal of sending 50 per cent of a generation to university by 2010.[7] Although, between 1962 and 2002, the

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[2] A. Vincent, 'Ideology and the University', *The Political Quarterly*, Vol. 82, No. 3, July–September 2011, p. 332

[3] Total UK/EU HE part-time and full-time students (HESA, 2007) as cited in G. Wyness, 'Policy Changes in UK higher education funding, 1963-2009', DQSS Working Paper no. 10-15, Department of Quantitative Social Science, Institute of Education, University of London, London, p.1: http://repec.ioe.ac.uk/REPEc/pdf/qsswp1015.pdf (accessed 01/12/2015)

[4] The Robbins Report, *Higher Education - Report of the Committee appointed by the Prime Minister under the Chairmanship of Lord Robbins,* London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1963, p.8

[5] Further and Higher Education Act 1992: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1992/13/contents (accessed 20/11/2015)

[6] The Dearing Report, *Higher Education in the Learning Society – Main Report*, London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1997: http://www.educationengland.org.uk/documents/dearing1997/dearing1997.html (accessed 22/11/2015)

[7] Tony Blair, Speech on education, May 23 2001, the University of Southampton: http://www.theguardian.com/politics/2001/may/23/labour.tonyblair (accessed 20/11/2015)

participation rate rose from 6 per cent to around 43 per cent, participation peaked in 2011/12 at 49 per cent, before dropping down to 43 per cent in 2012/13, then rising to 47 per cent in 2013/14.[8] Most recently, starting in the academic year 2015/16, the cap on student numbers was abolished, leading to record numbers of university entrants.[9] However the official participation rate is not yet available for this year.

The second trend is the privatisation of cost, that is to say, the shifting cost of undergraduate education from the public purse to students/graduates. In 1989, the government published a White Paper on student loans, proposing to end full universal maintenance grants for students and replacing them with new maintenance loans. In 1990, the first student loan scheme came into existence, providing half of student maintenance, while half remained as grants. In 1997, the Dearing report recommended that students should contribute to their university education. In 1998, the first fees were introduced: £1,000 per year, to be paid upfront by all home and EU students at UK universities. Poorer students, however, were exempt from paying these fees. In the same year, universal maintenance grants were cut. They were then abolished the following year. In 2004, the Higher Education Act lifted the cap on fees in English and Northern Irish universities to £3,000, transforming it from an upfront fee to a graduate deferred payment scheme. Moreover, this same piece of legislation reintroduced maintenance grants for the poorest students. In 2010, the Browne report recommended that the cap on fees be lifted to £6,000 per year as standard in English universities, and to £9,000 per year in the 'exceptional cases' where universities meet rigorous Widening Participation requirements. In 2012, all English universities met the requirements to lift their fees to £9,000 per year, with virtually all such universities charging this maximum amount. In 2015, means tested maintenance grants in England were abolished.

The third trend is the development of an aggressive research environment. In 1986, the first Research Assessment Exercise (RAE) was introduced. It was repeated in 1989, 1992 (involving new universities for the first time), 1996, 2001, and 2008. The RAE was replaced by the Research Excellence Framework in 2014. Both the RAE and the REF are methods to evaluate the quality of publications produced by academics working in British universities. Such evaluations lend themselves to ranking, which allow for the allocation of research funds to be performed on the basis of such rankings. Although such mechanisms have led to increased research outputs and have given a chance to lesser renowned universities to demonstrate their capacity for research, they also have had the effect of creating a British version of the American 'publish or perish' culture, where academics "no longer [have] a free choice to see their main role either as a

[8] P. Bolton, *Participation in Higher Education*: [social indicators page], September 2015, UK Parliament House of Commons Library: www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/sn02630.pdf (accessed 1/12/2015). Also see, BIS, *Participation rates in higher education: academic years 2006 and 2007 to 2013 and 2014 (provisional),* 2015, https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/participation-rates-in-higher-education-2006-to-2014 (accessed 2/12/2015)

[9] UCAS, 'Over 409,000 students already placed in UK higher education – up 3% on 2014', Press Release: https://www.ucas.com/corporate/news-and-key-documents/news/over-409000-students-already-placed-uk-higher-education-%E2%80%93-3 (accessed 01/12/2015)

research or as a scholars and teachers."[10] This has been compounded by the introduction and subsequent growth in popularity of world university rankings (such as QS World University Ranking and the Academic Ranking of World Universities - also known as the 'Shanghai Ranking') largely focused on research outputs, because these are seen to drive international student applications.

Thus, the mass expansion of higher education along with the progressive introduction of fees and an ever expanding research agenda have changed the institutional priorities of British universities: from teaching and scholarship towards research and economic innovation. The underlying consequence of these developments has been a cultural shift towards greater managerialism in universities, an intensified focus on research outputs, and an expansion of extracurricular services to enhance the 'student experience' and prepare for employment in "the context of mounting pressures from the state to reduce the unit-costs of higher education products"[11]. A further consequence has thus been a reduction in the diversity of the ecosystem of higher education institutions, with the more teaching intensive 'new' universities modelling themselves on the older universities through the development of research capacities. The result of this trend, it is argued, has been a reduced focused on teaching across the board.[12] Indeed, Jo Johnson claims that this systemic trend away from teaching towards research has led to a Faustian bargain between university lecturers, giving little teaching hours, and their students, being awarded generous grades in exchange for their acquiescence to poor teaching standards.[13]

It is against the backdrop of these wider trends that Lord Browne and the Coalition government in 2010-11 claimed that introducing higher fees would 'put students at the heart of the system' once and for all.[14] Moreover, it is explicitly to accelerate

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[10] Elton, L. 'The UK Research Assessment Exercise: Unintended Consequences', *Higher Education Quarterly*, Vol. 54, No. 3, July 2000, p. 276 (pp.274-283): http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/1468-2273.00160/pdf

[11] Hugh Willmott, 'Commercialising Higher Education in the UK: The State, Industry and Peer Review', *Studies in Higher Education*, May 2003, p.2

[12] On the relationship between research and the quality of teaching, see G. Gibbs, *Dimensions of Quality*, 2010, Higher Education Academy, p.29: "institutions with a strong orientation towards research often reveal a weak emphasis on teaching and vice-versa – there is a strong negative relationship in relation to institutional priorities and this has measurable effects on educational gains"; and A. Astin, *What matters in college*, 1993, San Francisco: Jossey-bass, p.363: "... a college whose faculty is research-orientated increases student dissatisfaction and impacts negatively on most measures of cognitive and affective development."

[13] J. Johnson, 'Higher Education: fulfilling our potential', speech given at University of Surrey, 9 September 2015: https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/higher-education-fulfilling-our-potential (accessed 22/11/2015). Indeed, Johnson refers to what "David Palfreyman and Ted Tapper describe as a 'disengagement contract' with their students: 'This goes along the lines of 'I don't want to have to set and mark much by way of essays and assignments which would be a distraction from my research, and you don't want to do coursework that would distract you from partying: so we'll award you the degree as the hoped-for job ticket in return for compliance with minimal academic requirements and due receipt of fees'.'" See D. Palfreyman & T. Tapper, *Reshaping the University: the Rise of the Regulated Market in Higher Education*, 2014, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.140

[14] The Browne Report, *Securing a Sustainable Future for Higher Education: higher education funding and student finance*, 12 October 2010, Independent Review: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-browne-report-higher-education-funding-and-student-finance (accessed 25/11/2015), p. 4; BIS, *Students at the Heart of the System*, White Paper, June 2011.

this process of re-focusing universities that the current Conservative government has announced its intention to introduce a Teaching Excellence Framework, designed to "incentivise excellence and innovation" in higher education teaching. Jo Johnson thus writes: "For too long, teaching has been regarded as a poor cousin to academic research. The new Teaching Excellence Framework, which we promised in our manifesto, will hard-wire incentives for excellent teaching and give students much more information both about the type of teaching they can expect and their likely career paths after graduation."[15] The official goal of this policy is therefore to rebalance teaching and research as institutional priorities for British universities by introducing a teaching quality assessment mechanism focused on core metrics and supplemented by qualitative evidence.

Although there has been a clear direction of travel in these various changes in higher education over the last few decades, 'pauses' to reflect upon the social purposes of higher education beyond delivering the skills and training required by the labour market have been few and far between. As a result, we risk losing something special – possibly even an element of the public sector that was always designed to act as a counterweight to the immediate and often-shorted sighted demands of the market – without proper consideration.[16] While we are sympathetic with the goal of taking teaching in universities ever more seriously, it is a wider discussion of the social purposes and the public value of higher education that this report ultimately hopes to foster. Yet, in order to enable that conversation, we first must deal with the concrete proposals set out in the Green Paper relating to the TEF.

3. The Proposal: The Teaching Excellence Framework

Evaluating the quality of teaching and learning has been a growing concern for academics and policy-makers for nearly half a century. In primary and secondary education in various countries, but perhaps nowhere more radically than in Britain, this concern has been translated into monitoring measures to assess teaching and students' learning. In those countries, we find the broad introduction of standardized testing and the growth of a more stringent system for teacher oversight in state run schools. Although the net pedagogical effects of such programmes continue to be hotly disputed,[17] intentions to roll-out a teaching accountability mechanism in higher education have been growing in recent years.[18] In fact, many pilot and medium-scale programs to assess learning

[15] J. Johnson, 'Foreword from the Minister of State for Universities and Science', in *Fulfilling our Potential*, p.8

[16] Thanks to Matthew Flinders for this Crickean formulation of our present intellectual knot.

[17] Politically, this is reflected in the latest reform to K-12 education recently signed into US law by President Obama: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/11/us/politics/president-obama-signs-into-law-a-rewrite-of-no-child-left-behind.html (accessed 22/12/2015). For a more academic take on this debate, see for example: L. Rosenthal, 'Do school inspections improve school quality? Ofsted inspections and school examination results in the UK', *Economics of Education Review*, Vol. 23, No. 2, April 2004, pp. 143–151; I. Shaw, D. P. Newton, M. Aitkin & R. Darnell, 'Do OFSTED Inspections of Secondary Schools Make a Difference to GCSE Results?', *British Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 29, No.1, 2003, pp. 63-75; M.C.M. Ehrena, J.E. Gustafssonb , H. Altrichterc , G. Skedsmod , D. Kemethoferc and S.G. Huberd, 'Comparing effects and side effects of different school inspection systems across Europe', *Comparative Education*, 2015 Vol. 51, No. 3, 375–400.

[18] At least, the growth in interest in questions of quality and learning gains suggests so much. See G. Gibbs, *Dimensions of Quality*, Higher Education Academy, 2010; UUK, *Measuring and recording student*

outcomes in higher education have already come into existence.[19] Most of these have focused on learning gains. But even the largest existing program of this type – namely, the Collegiate Learning Assessment in the U.S.A. – is not a uniform, compulsory, nation-wide program.[20] Most recently, the most ambitious plan to evaluate learning gains in higher education, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)'s AHELO programme (an attempt to introduce an international system to measure higher education learning outcomes) failed to come fruition, partially because of concerns over the comparability of international data,[21] but also simply because England refused to participate (and thus fund its share) in the longer-term OECD project, choosing to go it alone instead.[22]

British higher education has long implemented quality control mechanisms for teaching. Indeed, from internal feedback mechanisms and the external examiners system, to the creation of the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) in 1997, the sector has demonstrated concern with ensuring that the quality of teaching meets a minimum standard of quality. However, in the Green Paper it is proposed that the TEF would go beyond merely ensuring that teaching meet a minimum standard (i.e. securing or raising the bottom bar), in order to actively encourage excellence in teaching across the board (i.e. presumably raising the bottom, middle, and, perhaps, top bar all at once). To be even more precise, it is the 'variability' in the quality of teaching provision that the TEF aims to address by introducing a standardised mechanism to encourage all institutions to pursue 'excellence' in teaching.[23] Although a certain level of standardisation in British higher education was already brought about through the Bologna process, it did not lead to the creation of a measure of quality that would allow for comparison, competition, and ultimately market-driven improvement. To produce a measure of teaching quality which will allow for just that, Johnson's preferred implementation mechanism involves a "set of outcome-focused criteria and metrics […] underpinned by an external assessment process undertaken by an independent quality body."[24] In other words, the accountability mechanism preferred by Johnson involves selecting criteria that can easily be expressed numerically and using these as proxies to evaluate the quality of teaching in universities, with some, as of yet unknown, degree of qualitative contextualisation. This raises the following three questions: (1) What is excellence in teaching? (2) Which metrics should stand as proxies for excellence? (3) Who should resolve upon these matters? It is worthwhile exploring each of these questions in a little more detail.

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achievement Report of the Scoping Group chaired by Professor Robert Burgess, 2004, especially p.25; and C. Hoareau Mcgrath, B. Guerin, E. Harte, M. Frearson, C. Manville, *Learning Gain in Higher Education*, RAND-Europe, 2015, commissioned by HEFCE .

[19] Most recently in the UK, we have seen the launch of the HEFCE learning gain pilots: http://www.hefce.ac.uk/news/newsarchive/2015/Name,105306,en.html (accessed 28/11/2015)

[20] For a good overview of the CLA and its effects, see S. Klein, R. Benjamin, R. Shavelson, R. Bolus, 'The Collegiate Learning Assessment: Facts and Fantasies', *Evaluations Review*, 2007 (Oct.), Vol. 31, No. 5, pp. 415-39.

[21] P. G. Altbach, 'AHELO and the Myth of Measurement and Comparability', *International Higher Education*, Fall 2015, No.82, pp.2-3

[22] J. Morgan, 'England will not take part in OECD's 'Pisa for Universities', *Times Higher Education*, 15 July 2015, https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/england-will-not-take-part-oecds-pisa-universities (accessed 22/11/2015)

[23] *Fulfilling our Potential*, p. 12

[24] *Fulfilling our Potential, p. 12*

3.1 Defining Excellence in Teaching

The Green Paper recognises that "[t]here is no one broadly accepted definition of 'teaching excellence.' In practice it has many interpretations and there are likely to be different ways of measuring it."[25] However, it goes on to state four principles that inform its understanding of excellence:

- "excellence must incorporate and reflect the diversity of the sector, disciplines and missions – not all students will achieve their best within the same model of teaching;
- excellence is the sum of many factors – focussing on metrics gives an overview, but not the whole picture;
- perceptions of excellence vary between students, institutions and employers;
- excellence is not something achieved easily or without focus, time, challenge and change."[26]

One will note that this account says more about what excellence in teaching is not than about what actually *constitutes* excellence: teaching excellence is not uniform; teaching excellence is not one easily identifiable thing; teaching excellence is not the object of an existing consensus; excellence is not the product of mere happenstance. Although defining something by what it is not is a traditional method for providing definitions, the lack of an affirmative statement makes this definition arguably hopelessly vague. Why? Left at this one might think that the metrics that are to stand in as proxies for this entity hardly seem to refer to anything concrete beyond themselves.

While this may be true, the Green Paper argues that it need not propose a perfect set of metrics that would do full justice to the actual quality of teaching in universities, rather it merely needs to propose metrics that are better proxies for teaching excellence than research metrics, for as it stands research outputs (REF-scores, citations, research income, etc.) are the principal metrics used to rank universities and departments.[27] Accordingly, one might argue that a vague definition of teaching excellence is better than no definition at all.

However, a conceptual issue remains. Indeed, the concept of 'excellence' denotes the upper limit on a scale of quality, pointing to the outstanding nature of a cohort member in relation to the rest of the cohort in a particular regard. It is a relative, not an absolute concept. Thus, universally distributed excellence in a given cohort ceases to be excellence; it becomes merely normal. In light of this, it appears unclear what the TEF aims for. Does TEF merely aim to raise the bottom bar (i.e. the lowest acceptable level of quality, which is currently set by QAA) or does it aim to raise the median, or the top bar to new heights? Since, Johnson admonishes the sector for its 'variability', we might infer that the TEF in fact aims primarily to raise the median bar via a process of managerial rationalisation. In order to avoid that 'excellence' become the name for merely satisfactory performance, it is proposed

[25] *Fulfilling our Potential, p. 22*
[26] *Fulfilling our Potential, p. 22*
[27] *Fulfilling our Potential, p. 12*

that universities would be able to attain various levels of awards (possibly, 'gold' for the very best, 'silver' for the very good, 'bronze' for those merely good, and no award at all for those not good enough) reflecting their relative position in terms of quality of teaching.[28]

Moreover, one might also argue that the Green Paper implicitly proposes a functionalist definition of excellence in teaching. Largely in line with the widespread account '3p model' of presage-process-product understanding of teaching quality,[29] the Green Paper identifies three aspects of excellence in teaching - teaching quality (process), learning environment (presage), and student outcomes and learning gain (product) - specifying what excellence might look like in each of these:

- **Teaching Quality**: "TEF should reward and encourage teaching practices that provide an appropriate level of contact and stimulation, encourage student effort, and are effective in developing their knowledge, skills and career readiness." While intent on consulting on the matter, the Green Paper proposes the following goals: "Students are intellectually stimulated, actively engaged in their learning, and satisfied with the quality of teaching and learning. There is a strategic and effective approach to understanding the ways in which students are intellectually challenged and engaged in the curriculum and their learning. The courses, curriculum design, teaching and assessment are effective in developing all students' knowledge and skills."[30]
- **Learning Environment**: "This is the wider context of teaching and associated resources to support learning within an institution, and ensuring the student develops the ability to study and research independently." Potential criteria include: "Leadership and the teaching and learning strategy support and promote excellent teaching and learning. The provider recognises and rewards excellent teaching through parity of status between teaching and research careers, and explicit career path and other rewards. The relationship and mutual benefits between teaching, scholarship and research."[31]
- **Student Outcomes and Learning Gain**: "Excellent teaching has the ability to transform the lives of students. A key focus of TEF should be the educational and employment outcomes of higher education, and the gains made by students from different backgrounds." Potential goals include: "Students' knowledge, skills and career readiness are enhanced by their education. All students receive effective support in order to achieve their educational and professional goals and potential. Students get added value from their studies."[32]

As a result, we might surmise from this that the Green Paper envisions teaching excellence as the kind of teaching that takes place in an institution where research and teaching are well integrated, where teaching is given appropriate institutional priority in terms of staff time and resource, where students are actively engaged in

[28] *Fulfilling our Potential, p. 23*
[29] J.B. Biggs, 'From theory to practice: a cognitive systems approach', *Higher Education Research and Development*, 1993, Vol. 12, No. 1, pp73–85.
[30] *Fulfilling our Potential, p. 32*
[31] *Fulfilling our Potential, p.32*
[32] *Fulfilling our Potential, p. 33*

and intellectually stimulated by their studies, and where students obtain the kind of employment they seek upon graduation. While superficially attractive, this conception of teaching excellence is laden with assumptions about the purpose of universities, student/graduate motivations, and the general availability of graduate jobs for all deserving graduates. Instead of addressing these wider issues, the Green Paper recommends the use of metrics to ensure that universities deliver 'excellent' teaching.

3.2 Selecting Metrics

Firstly, while the Green Paper announces that there will be a technical consultation about the exact metrics used in the TEF starting in February 2016, it also identifies, as an initial proposal, three readily available common metrics:

1. "Employment/destination - from the Destination of Leavers from Higher Education Surveys (outcomes), and, from early 2017, make use of the results of the HMRC data match"[33].
2. "Retention/continuation – from the UK Performance Indicators which are published by Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) (outcomes)"[34].
3. "Student satisfaction indicators from the National Student Survey (teaching quality and learning environment)"[35].

Secondly, it further specifies that "as TEF develops we will incorporate new common metrics on engagement with study (including teaching intensity) and learning gain, once they are sufficiently robust and available on a comparable basis. We are also conscious that there are other possible proxies of teaching excellence. Metrics proposed by the sector and others so far include:

- Student commitment to learning–including appropriate pedagogical approaches
- Training and employment of staff–measures might include proportion of staff on permanent contracts
- Teaching intensity – measures might include time spent studying, as measured in the UK Engagement Surveys, proportion of total staff time spent on teaching"

Thirdly, acknowledging that these metrics are mere proxies, the Green Paper states that institutions should have the right to supplement these metrics with further qualitative evidence. While not wishing to be prescriptive about "the additional evidence providers might want to offer [...], these might include:

- Further information about the institution's mission, size, context, institutional setting, priorities and provision
- The extent to which students are recruited from a diverse range of backgrounds, including use of access agreements where relevant.
- The ways in which an institution's provision reflects the diversity of their students' needs.
- The levels of teaching intensity and contact time, and how the institution uses these to ensure excellent teaching.

[33] *Fulfilling our Potential, p. 33*
[34] *Fulfilling our Potential, p. 33*
[35] *Fulfilling our Potential, p.34*

- The ways in which the institution builds capacity and capability, motivates and engages teaching staff, and supports continued improvement through training, reward and recognition mechanisms, and career progression.
- How institutions ensure that employers get graduates with the skills they need, for example by involving employers, learned societies, and Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies (PSRBs) in course and curriculum design, delivery and accreditation.
- The institution might also wish to demonstrate how its excellence in teaching is spread throughout the institution.
- Evidence of students helping to shape their programmes of study where appropriate."[36]

But who will determine which metrics will be used and who will judge the relative weighting of institutional submissions against the core metrics?

3.3 Who decides what?

The mechanics of the TEF require that various decisions be taken along the way. The Green Paper envisions the TEF as an iterative process, providing details about years 1 and 2, as follows:

"In year one, we will award the first level of TEF. A provider will gain a level 1 TEF award if it has a current, successful Quality Assessment (QA) review and the level 1 award would last for up to three years. We will set a maximum fee cap for those institutions successful in TEF and providers will be entitled to raise their fees in line with inflation up to this amount for new students from 2017/18. [...] In year two, we will award higher levels of TEF. In order to achieve a higher level of award (for example levels 2 to 4), a provider would need to apply to be assessed, with outcomes of the assessment process to be announced in spring 2017. These awards would last for up to three years and feed into any further fee cap, fee loan cap uplifts, or incentives through the alternative provider performance pool from academic year 2018/19."[37]

This means that (a) metrics are likely to change, (b) there will be a group of assessors to determine excellence in teaching; and (c) someone will have to determine by what amount institutions are entitled to increase fees. Let us consider these in turn. So we may ask: who do these decisions rest with?

a. Who determines the metrics? Since the Green Paper is proposing to consult on the first set of core metrics, this decision will presumably rest with the BIS secretary in charge of universities. This enables political goals (such as increasing social mobility via widening participation, increasing graduate employment and income such as to increase repayment rates, etc.) to be set through the selection of these metrics.

b. Who assesses the quality of teaching in universities? It is envisioned that institutions would apply for the higher levels of fees to panels

[36] *Fulfilling our Potential, p.34-5*
[37] *Fulfilling our Potential, p. 23-4*

that would then assess them. "The proposed panels will be made up of a balance of academic experts in learning and teaching, student representatives, and employer/professional representatives. In time, it is envisaged that panels will be convened for each discipline (subject) and include experts in that discipline to make relevant and robust judgements."[38]

c. The Green Paper proposes to grant the BIS secretary of state "the power to set tuition fee caps" for universities on the basis of the panel's assessments.[39] It appears that the Green Paper envisions that the BIS secretary of state could only lift tuition fee caps in line with inflation.

Although the Green Paper states the intention of respecting academic freedom and institutional autonomy, it remains unclear who will select the members of the panels, while it specifies that the BIS secretary of state would likely set metrics and determine, within limits, the additional amount universities would be able to charge in light of their performances. This suggests that much power will rest with BIS, and that a wider discussion of the purposes of higher education and its place in society is completely lacking.

4. Three Core Criticisms of TEF

The TEF is a complex policy forming part of a wider rework of the higher education sector's governance and regulation structure. This wider plan seeks to introduce greater competition between newly formed private providers (giving them greater access to university status and degree bearing capacity) and public universities (ridding them of the responsibility to respond to Freedom of Information requests). Much has been written about the overall trend towards marketisation in the Green Paper and the TEF certainly forms a part of that wider trend. That is why it is worth considering three specific criticisms levelled at the TEF.

4.1 The TEF is not really about teaching excellence, but about fees

Like the Browne report in 2010, the Green Paper claims that it aims to put students at 'the heart of the system'.[40] However, the National Union of Students' response focuses on a wider similarity between this Green Paper and the Browne report, namely: both provide justification for increasing fees. Indeed, the second point of the NUS response reads: "The primary object of the TEF is to permit an increase in tuition fees, rather than the stated aim of improving teaching quality."[41] In other words, the TEF seems to be justifying lifting the cap on fees without properly acknowledging that such is the effect of the policy. This strategy of lifting

[38] *Fulfilling our Potential, p. 28*
[39] *Fulfilling our Potential, p. 62*
[40] *Fulfilling our Potential, p. 14: "The creation of the OfS builds on the central tenet of the 2011 reforms, putting students at the heart of the system."*
[41] NUS, Quality Doesn't Grow on Fees: NUS Response to the Green Paper, 11 November 2015, p.3: http://www.nusconnect.org.uk/resources/quality-doesn-t-grow-on-fees-green-paper-response (accessed 14/11/15)

the cap on fees in 'exchange' for improved teaching standards is a mistake, for both democratic and economic reasons.

Focusing on the democratic dimension, conflating these issues does not allow for proper debate on the principle of introducing a rising cap on fees independently from the question of teaching quality. Labour MP Gordon Marsden called the proposals a "Trojan horse for raising fees."[42] This is because year 1 of the TEF promises to lift the cap on fees for all institutions that meet the QAA standards for quality assurance,[43] which is likely to be all universities, since such standards are indicative of but minimal standards of quality. Furthermore, the Green Paper proposes to shift the locus of political decision-making on the issue of lifting the cap on fees. As it stands the cap on fees in English universities is currently a parliamentary decision, if the proposals in the Green Paper pass into law, then the BIS secretary will have the authority to lift the cap on fees - though presumably by no more than inflation - without an Act of Parliament. This means that, at least symbolically (and symbols matter in politics, because they are rallying points for political debate and action), the cap on fees will no longer be the object of parliamentary debate and decision. Although it appears that resetting the baseline cap (currently set at £9,000) at a higher level would require parliamentary approval, increases in line with inflation would no longer do so.[44] This constitutes a stealthy abandonment of the convention whereby tuition fees are to be settled in the deliberative chambers by an Act of Parliament.

Furthermore, over time, university leaders seeking the right to increase tuition fees in line with inflation may suffer the brunt of backlash from disgruntled students. It is worth bearing in mind that it was relatively small local increases in tuition fees (certainly in comparison with the almost trebling of fees in English universities from 2011-12 to 2012-13) that formed the basis of student revolts in California in 2009[45] and in Quebec in 2012.[46] Thus, the government's plan to preserve control of fee-setting while pushing the political responsibility for asking for the right to charge increased fees onto universities seems to put universities in line to suffer the brunt of public and student resentment.

Focusing on the economic dimension, an OECD report found that average fee levels in English public universities in 2013-14 were the highest of all OECD countries for

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[42] S. Coughlan, 'University fees linked to teaching quality', BBC News, 6 November 2015, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/education-34733096 (accessed 25/11/2015)

[43] *Fulfilling our Potential, p.23*

[44] It is worth stating, however, that this rather in the realm of speculation, because the Green Paper makes no firm proposals on this aspect of the policy.

[45] K. O'Leary, 'Tuition Hikes: Protests in California and Elsewhere', *Time Magazine*, 21 November 2009, http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1942041,00.html (accessed 22/11/2015):
"University of California regents voted this week to increase tuition a whopping 32% to more than $10,000 annually."

[46] C. Sorochan, 'The Quebec Student Strike – A Chronology', *Theory & Event*, 2012 Supplement, Vol. 15, No. 3: http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v015/15.3S.sorochan.html (accessed 27/11/2015):
"In early 2010, the Parti Liberal du Québec (PLQ) led by premier Jean Charest announces its intention to raise tuition fees by 75 per cent over five years beginning in 2012. This would result in a total increase of $1625 that would bring Quebec's tuition to a similar level as that found in other Canadian provinces."

public or state-dependent private institutions in the developed world.[47] On average, English undergraduates paid just under £6,000 in annual tuition fees, while the following highest was the US, with fees of about £5,300. Since English public undergraduate education is already the most expensive in the developed world, we may wonder whether this change in fee structure is even financially necessary at this point in time. Making a case for the necessity of change is arguably the first step towards effective change management; however, the Green Paper hardly makes a financial case for why the status quo is in need of remedy. Instead, the Green Paper was merely presented as a means of addressing "unfinished business."[48] Still, introducing variability in the cap on fees is a major change with no clear financial purpose other than to seek to incentivise universities into focusing on teaching.

We therefore recommend that the issues of fees and the TEF be entirely disentangled, because the proposed connection would amount to lifting the cap on fees by stealth and would erode the confidence of students and academic staff in the wider goal of rebalancing teaching and research priorities.

4.2 The TEF does not serve students, but an ill-defined set of employers

> "The document's logic has 'students' at the heart of the system. If and only if those students can afford to pay higher fees, study full-time, and what they want is what employers want."[49]

Sorana Vieru, the current NUS Vice-President for Higher Education, argues aggressively and rather convincingly that the Green Paper's stated intention to serve students is a ruse. In her view, "there is an alarming emphasis on employers throughout. 57 mentions of what employers want, telling us that students aren't ready for the job market; that employers are annoyed that students aren't coming out of university immediately ready to generate them more profit; that employers want more of a say in generating the content of curricula."[50]

Although we could only count 49 mentions of the word 'employer' in the Green Paper, so much is true: when speaking of the interests of students, the Green Paper does seem to defer to the demands of employers with disturbing regularity. The consultation therefore assumes that students have certain pre-given interests (in acquiring certain skills, obtaining employment, and ultimately earning enough to repay loans) instead of actually bolstering the democratic voice of students in shaping the TEF or mandating that universities give a greater role to student representatives in shaping their teaching agendas, as well as appointments and

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[47] OECD, 2015, *Education at a Glance 2015: OECD Indicators*, OECD Publications, p. 275. This was trend had also been anticipated by Paul Bolton, 'Tuition Fees Statistics', Briefing Paper 917, 5 October 2015, House of Commons Library, p. 18: www.parliament.uk/briefing-papers/SN00917.pdf (accessed 2/12/2015)

[48] J. Johnson, 'Higher education: fulfilling our potential', speech given at the University of Surrey, 9 September 2015, https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/higher-education-fulfilling-our-potential (accessed 28/11/2015)

[49] S. Vieru, 'We've got the power! No, you've got the power. Hang on, who's got the power?', 8 November 2015, WonkHE: http://wonkhe.com/blogs/weve-got-the-power-no-youve-got-the-power-hang-on-whos-got-the-power/ (accessed 28/11/2015)

[50] Ibid.

promotions practices. This pivot away from envisioning students as co-creators of their learning experience and towards thinking of them as mere recipients of a product is further compounded by the Green Paper's passing admission that the government will seek soon to further regulate student unions.[51] Already, the 1994 Education Act severely limits the scope of political campaigning by student unions.[52] It is troubling, to say the least, that the government would wish to further meddle in the democratic affairs of the bodies that represent students, while claiming to wish to put students at the heart of the higher education system.

At best, this suggests a fundamentally contradictory approach to student empowerment. At worst, this betrays an ideological, pre-given conception of student interests couched in an economic understanding of students (perhaps of people), as consumer-producers locked in a life of competition settled via the medium of self-interested accumulation. This conception of the student as an economic agent engaged in the market of higher education is hardly new, but the TEF seems to take it to new heights.

This approach is all the more problematic since the Green Paper keeps the notion of the needs of employers rather vague, without disentangling the likely different labour needs of different employers over time. The risk is clear: students' education could be biased in favour of the local employment market of today, and in particular its most persistent voices with access to government, at the expense of the changing globalised challenges of society over a generation. As such, short-termism and clumsy moneterisation could be inadvertently built into a system of higher education respected around the world for its breadth and depth. As a result, we recommend that assessment of graduate progression include a wider definition of valuable and productive employment, beyond simply an assessment based on salary - a measurement notoriously uneven across sectors and which ignores the equally profound impact on future earnings of social class, networks, access to placements, and most crucially, financial support to undertake internships and offset the costs of working and living in London.

4.3 The TEF ignores the public benefits of undergraduate education

If we are to believe student voices that claim that it is not students but employers who have found their way to the heart of the system, we may ask ourselves: who is being dislodged from such prime real-estate? The short answer is: the public.

Until the late 1990s, politicians of all stripes believed that public investment in higher education was justified on the grounds that it provided public benefits to society as whole. Since then, however, successive governments have taken the view that the private benefits of higher education were significant enough to justify introducing and then increasing tuition fees. Illustrating the spirit of this change in the American context, the educator and former Carnegie Foundation Vice-President for Education, Ernest Boyer remarked: "Increasingly, the campus is being viewed as a place where students get credentialed and faculty get tenured, while the overall work of the academy does not seem particularly relevant to the

[51] *Fulfilling our Potential, p. 61*

[52] See http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1994/30/part/II (accessed 7/12/2015)

nation's most pressing civic, social, economic, and moral problems. Indeed, it follows that if students are the beneficiaries and get credentialed, then let students pay the bill."[53]

In the latest Green Paper, the only meaningful mention of the public benefits of higher learning are formulated in terms of debt repayment and tax revenue: since graduates make more money than non-graduates, we can hope that their income might allow them to (a) pay back their student loans, and (b) contribute to the exchequer by paying higher rates of taxation.[54] In other words, from the standpoint of the common good, students have become but a mere financial product, while the public interest is reduced to the public purse. Yet, it was only in June of 2015 that David Willetts, the former Minister of State for Universities who introduced the £9,000 tuition fees, encouraged his readers to follow Stefan Collini in accepting "that there is a public not merely a private benefit from higher education that can be characterised in various, not merely economic, terms."[55] Willetts goes on to characterize individual and collective benefits in economic and non-economic terms as follows:

- Individual economic benefits include higher earnings, less exposure to unemployment, increased employability & skills development;

- Individual non-economic benefits include longer life expectancy, lesser likelihood of smoking, of drinking excessively, or of obesity, greater likelihood of engaging in preventative care, better mental health, greater life satisfaction, better general health;

- Public economic benefits include more tax receipts, increased exporting, improved productivity;

- Public non-economic benefits include reduced crime rates, greater propensity to vote, to volunteer, to trust and tolerate others, more dynamic cities.[56]

Thus, we may ask ourselves: why does the Green Paper give so little mention of the public non-economic benefits of higher education? One potential answer is that such benefits are harder to quantify. Yet, their quantification is not impossible: translating social values into economic values is one way to achieve this. But translating social values into economic values constitutes a fundamental

[53] E. L. Boyer, 'The Scholarship of Engagement', *Journal of Public Service and Outreach*, 1996, Vol. 1, No. 1, p. 14

[54] Despite a passing mention of wider social and public benefits in *Fulfilling our Potential* - p. 18: "the taxpayer needs to see a broad range of economic and social benefits generated by the public investment in our higher education system" - there are many more references to the tax considerations of proposed changes in the Green Paper. They are as follows: p.14: "ensure value for money for the public purse"; p. 42: "in order to maintain quality, protect students and ensure value for money for the public purse"; p.55: "The outcomes Government will want to see are that students and the reputation of the sector are protected as well as minimising any impact on public finances"; p. 62: "safeguarding public funding".

[55] S. Collini, Collini, S., What are Universities For? London: Penguin, 2012, p.99, as cited in D. Willetts, *Higher Education: Who Benefits? Who Pays?*, London, The Policy Institute at King's College London, June 2015, p.7

[56] D. Willetts, *Higher Education: Who Benefits? Who Pays?*, op. cit. , June 2015, p.8-9

concession to the language of the market, because it foregoes democratic debate for the sake of speaking of values in market terms. The market speaks in prices, returns on investments, and optimisation strategies, thereby eclipsing questions relating to the common good, to shared values, and even non-economic personal development. Referring to the more general topic of quantification, the research statement of a project entitled 'The Limits of the Numerical' at the University of California, Santa Barbara, focusing on higher education, claims that in "a democratic, pluralist society, there is bound to be widespread disagreement over which values we should seek to promote, how they should be balanced and so on. When we choose to use a particular quantitative metric to assess and guide policy, we risk of downplaying, trivialising or simply ignoring value considerations which the particular metric does not measure, and which, perhaps, could never be quantified at all."[57] In other words, selecting metrics is a political choice expressive of certain values.

In the case of the TEF, the NSS is a measure of customer satisfaction, retention rates can be understood as customer loyalty, and DHLE can be understood in terms of return on investment for students. Therefore, we would argue that the metrics suggested in the Green Paper to evaluate teaching excellence are not neutral proxies referring to an agreed upon notion of excellence, but purposeful choices designed to drive universities to treat their students to think and behave as customer-investors hoping to make a return on investment while having an enjoyable customer experience.[58] In occluding or down-playing the public benefits of learning in higher education when speaking of teaching quality, we run the risk of disregarding values which the metrics selected to do the job simply do not measure, and which, perhaps, are not quantifiable at all. Such values might include: democracy, mutual respect, dialogue, creativity, thoughtfulness, compassion, meaningfulness, and even authenticity. These non-numerical values surely deserve a primary role in the teaching that takes place in universities, because they will serve our students and our societies in the long run.

Although the introduction of a higher fee regime places such a significant burden on students as to make these economic considerations understandable and important, the TEF, at least in its first iteration, seems to leave little space for other, perhaps equally important, considerations. This suggests a particular understanding of the purpose of higher education that is in need of explicit discussion.

5. ***The Question of Purpose***

The question of purpose in education is an ancient one. Socrates warned against those who would receive their learning from sophists, for though their students

[57] C. Newfield & B. Ghosh, Project Brief: 'The Limits of the Numerical', Cambridge University, University of Chicago, University of California, Santa Barbara, Strand 3: Higher Education, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2015, p. 3: http://ihum.innovate.ucsb.edu/sites/secure.lsit.ucsb.edu.engl.d7_ih/files/sitefiles/ProposalLimits%20of%20the%20NumericalNEWFIELD%20GHOSH%20UCSB.pdf (accessed 22/11/2015)

[58] Furthermore, as we saw earlier, the panel guidance for additional qualitative evidence only points to social mobility (through widening participation) as a wider social good worthy of consideration. It thus leaves out other forms of social and public benefits derived from undergraduate education.

would learn how to be convincing, they would not learn how to be wise.[59] Plato thought that the social purpose of education was to train wise and just rulers as well as to maintain social harmony by training subordinates to obey their masters.[60] For Aristotle, the purpose of education is the development of the virtues, such as to educate the youth into responsible citizenship.[61] Since then, the purposes of education have been and continue to be the object of intense dispute: Should education simply impart truth? Should education prepare for the demands of the labour market by imparting needed skills? Should education instil in the general population the values and practices of democratic society? Should education aim for general critical thinking skills and wise judgment?

In the British context of higher education, the Robbins Report offered a strikingly compelling answer. It thus set out the following objectives for undergraduate education:

- the "instruction in skills", because "[w]e deceive ourselves if we claim that more than a small fraction of students in institutions of higher education would be where they are if there were no significance for their future careers in what they hear and read; and it is a mistake to suppose that there is anything discreditable in this"[62];
- "the promotion of the general powers of the mind so as to produce not mere specialists but rather cultivated men and women" [63];
- the advancement of learning, since "the search for truth is an essential function of institutions of higher education and the process of education is itself most vital when it partakes of the nature of discovery"[64];
- the transmission of a common culture and common standards of citizenship, "[b]y this we do not mean the forcing of all individuality into a common mould: that would be the negation of higher education as we conceive it. But we believe that it is a proper function of higher education, as of education in schools, to provide in partnership with the family that background of culture and social habit upon which a healthy society depends."[65]

Although we may wish to add to this list that undergraduate education also aims to help develop (however humbly) self-understanding and personal growth in our students, the framework offered by the Robbins Report helps in characterising what is worrisome about the TEF. The most fundamental concern with the proposed TEF is that it risks overly emphasizing the development of the skills which will lead to employment and pecuniary gain, at the expense of all other purposes. Since the TEF seeks to reward universities by using what are predominantly market criteria, the risk inherent in this approach can thus be understood as the potential eclipse of the wider social and personal purposes of undergraduate education.

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[59] Plato, *The Republic*, trans. D. Lee, London: Penguin Classics, 2007, 505a-518e; also see T.C. Brickhouse, & N. D. Smith. The Philosophy of Socrates. Boulder (Colo.): Westview Press, 2000, p. 30

[60] Plato, *The Republic*, op. cit., 2007, 369a-520d.

[61] Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. T.A. Sinclair, London: Penguin Classics, 1981; also see R.R. Curren, *Aristotle on the Necessity of Public Education*, Lanham (MD): Rowman and Littlefield, 2000.*and Littlefield, 2000.*

[62] The Robbins Report, op.cit., 1963, p.6

[63] Ibid. p.6

[64] Ibid. p.7

[65] Ibid. p.7

It would, however, be a mistake to ascribe sole responsibility to the TEF for this eclipse. The stage for it has been set both inside and outside of higher education for quite some time by the rise of neo-liberal ideology, which enshrined across large swathes of the policy domain in the United Kingdom faith in the unregulated classical liberal free market order as the most efficient allocator of resources, with wealth creation, privatisation, deregulation, and individualism as the engines of economic growth. As we have seen, in higher education, this is most obviously expressed by the fact that market indicators are foisted on institutions as supposedly meaningful measures of academic excellence. Although bureaucratic and regulatory in structure, the TEF as proposed seems likely to further this ideological bent by ensuring that these 'market incentives' permeate throughout all of academic life. Thus, although Jo Johnson's speeches and the Green Paper use the language of common sense and technocratic expertise to present the TEF as beyond political and ethical dispute, nothing could be further from the truth. At the core of the government's plan, we find a distinctively narrow understanding of the purposes of higher education.

This is problematic for three reasons.

a. *It envisions higher education as a primarily private good, as opposed to a public good that serves society as a whole:*

   If we take the various public benefits of higher education (as discussed in section 4.3) and consider them holistically, then we must acknowledge that undergraduate education contributes to fostering the conditions of healthy democratic deliberation. By introducing the practices of reasoned debate, dialogue, and discussion, responsible problem solving, and critical thinking, undergraduate education instils democratic habits of thought and action. Such habits are central to what Amartya Sen calls 'public reason'[66], or what John Dewey called 'social inquiry'[67]. In other words, undergraduate education (among other things) helps promote the development of the practices underpinning civic engagement that are ultimately necessary to sustain public trust and engagement in democratic institutions.

b. *It encourages students to adopt a life of self-interest and self-advancement, rendering the idea of public service peripheral to the mission of education:*

   Encouraging students to think and act like ideally rational economic agents (or self-interested utility maximisers) is a nonsense in the context of education. Education stops being education when it merely focuses on the acquisition of skills to be used in the labour force and it becomes mere training. If higher education is to be reduced to professional training, then

[66] See A. Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, London: Penguin Books, 2010, chapters 5 & 6

[67] See J. Dewey, "John Dewey: The Later Works, 1925-1953", in *The Collected Works of John Dewey: The Early Works, The Middle Works, The Later Works*. 17 volumes, edited by JoAnn Boydston. Carbondale (Illinois): Southern Illinois University Press. 1969-1990, *LW* 2: 350. This concept is also sometimes referred to as 'applied social intelligence', see J. Forstenzer, 'Education, Active Citizenship and Applied Social Intelligence: some Democratic Tools to Meet the Threat of Climate Change', in *Rethinking Climate Change Research*, edited by Pernille Almlund, Per Homann Jespersen and Søren Riis, Farnham: Ashgate, 2012, pp.177-191.

private companies, not students, should arguably shoulder the brunt of the financial burden, since they would be the net beneficiaries. Furthermore, while students need their lecturers to do their utmost to enable them to obtain meaningful employment, they also need their lecturers to introduce them to a breadth and depth of experience that enables them to find purpose and self-direction in the complex world we live in. In April 2015, David Brooks, the author and New York Times columnist, drew a distinction between résumé virtues and eulogy virtues: "The résumé virtues are the skills you bring to the marketplace. The eulogy virtues are the ones that are talked about at your funeral — whether you were kind, brave, honest or faithful. Were you capable of deep love?"[68] Although it is understandable and even desirable in these precarious times that university teachers do their utmost to help students develop their résumé virtues in order to gain access to meaningful employment, it is also important that we stimulate our students' minds about the wider public good and eulogy virtues, to help them think about what makes not just their work, but ultimately their lives, meaningful to them and others.[69]

c. *It encourages academics to be further driven from above by private gain, as opposed to being self-governed and fulfilled by "teaching, the freedom to follow ideas and [...] collegiality"[70]:*

Seeking to incentivise good teaching in universities sounds innocuous until we distinguish 'incentivising' from 'supporting'. 'Incentivising' implies motivating behaviour solely on the basis of self-interested calculations, while 'supporting' implies providing the necessary resources and conditions to enable those already so inclined to perform a given task.[71] Though offering significantly more support to lecturers who want to teach seems compelling, we remain sceptical of the idea that we can incentivise those who are uninterested in teaching into becoming meaningfully interested teachers. Rather, to be more precise, we are doubtful that teaching performed purely for the sake of monetary gain can ever actually result in excellent teaching, because the best teaching requires engaging in relations of trust and personal development that are not reducible to market exchanges. To nurture, support, challenge, and celebrate are experiences that exceed the bonds of financial exchange, they are thoroughly human experiences that require both student and teacher to respect and care for one another more deeply than mere business relationships demand. It is in no small part out of this reality that the ideal of a university as a community was first imagined. It is also in this

[68] D. Brooks, 'The Moral Bucket List', April 11 2015, *New York Times*: http://www.nytimes.com/2015/04/12/opinion/sunday/david-brooks-the-moral-bucket-list.html?_r=0 (accessed 01/12/2015). Also see his book, *The Road to Character*, New York: Allen Lane, 2015.

[69] This point largely echoes the following piece: http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2015/dec/07/universities-as-markets-we-shouldnt-be-valued-just-in-economic-terms (accessed 20/12/2015)

[70] A. Vincent, op. cit., 2011, p. 339

[71] Thanks are owed here to Sir Keith Burnett for pointing out this distinction and providing a copy of John Ruskin's essay 'Ad Valorem', in Ruskin's, *Unto this Last and Other Writings*, ed. Clive Wilmer, London: Penguin Classics, 1997, pp. 204-228, where this distinction is further elucidated by the distinction between the 'price' and 'value' of labour.

> irreducibly human experience of inter-personal growth that undergraduate education, as well as the vocation of teaching, finds its full human significance. To offer a purely mechanistic model of teaching excellence threatens to reduce the undergraduate learning experience to an accumulation of mere instrumental relationships.

In light of these concerns, our recommendation is that the TEF ought to reflect higher education's full range of social purposes. To that end, the White Paper and the technical consultation on metrics should expand on the brief set out in the Green Paper to enable the TEF metrics and panel guidance to reflect all of these social purposes. Furthermore, if the goal is to truly rebalance teaching and research, then it is worth considering that the simplest method to achieve this goal is not the introduction of a TEF at all but the abandonment of the REF coupled with strengthened student representation in universities. This would avoid the risks associated with further bureaucratisation and the introduction of perverse incentives in higher education, while strengthening student representation would allow universities to reallocate resources towards teaching in line with the local demands of their student cohorts.

6. Conclusion

In sum, despite the appeasing language used in the Green Paper and Jo Johnson's public interventions, the TEF is a radical proposal. We have seen that the Green Paper envisions it as a metrics-heavy model of teaching evaluation, supplemented by as yet undetermined qualitative evidence, and incentivised by increasing fees in line with inflation for 'excellent' universities. In response, it has been argued that the TEF focuses too much on the goal of creating a market in higher education and not enough on actually improving teaching. In particular, we have considered arguments to the effect that TEF is a way to increase fees by stealth, that the TEF serves employers but not students, and that the TEF fails to reflect the wider public benefits of undergraduate education. Finally, we returned to the articulation of the purposes of higher education found in the Robbins Report in order to show that the TEF fails to do full justice to the civic and social purposes of undergraduate education.

While we support the general ambition of the TEF to rebalance teaching and research in universities, we fear that the means proposed in the Green Paper threaten to further enshrine the values of the market in university education, without necessarily improving the standing of teaching. That is why we have made the following recommendations:

- The issues of fees and the TEF should be entirely disentangled, because the proposed connection would amount to lifting the cap on fees by stealth and would erode the confidence of students and academic staff in the wider goal of rebalancing teaching and research priorities.

- Assessment of graduate progression should include a wider definition of valuable and productive employment, beyond simply an assessment based on salary - a measurement notoriously uneven across sectors and which ignores the equally profound impact on future earnings of social class, networks, access to placements, and

most crucially, financial support to undertake internships and offset the costs of working and living in London and other expensive localities.

- The TEF ought to reflect higher education's full range of social purposes. To that end, the White Paper and the technical consultation on metrics should expand on the brief set out in the Green Paper to enable TEF metrics and panel guidance to reflect all of these social purposes.

- Decision-makers should consider that the simplest method to rebalance teaching and research is not the introduction of the TEF but the abandonment of the REF, coupled with strengthened student representation.

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