

Research to support the Independent TEF Review: Survey of HE careers advisors

July 2019



Department
for Education



Social Science in Government

The logo for UCAS, featuring the letters 'UCAS' in a bold, black, sans-serif font. The letter 'A' is stylized with a red triangle pointing upwards, forming the top of the letter.

Overview of Research

Research purpose

Questionnaire for HE careers advisors to establish:

- What are Careers Advisors' current levels of awareness of TEF and use of the TEF in their career advisory role?
- How useful do Careers Advisors think TEF is for pupils making HE choices?
- How may Careers Advisors use provider-level and subject-level TEF in the future?

Methods

The questionnaire was designed by the DfE HE Social Research Team to meet the needs of the TEF Independent review.

- UCAS administered the survey via their monthly newsletter to careers advisors registered on their careers advisors database.
- Analysis was undertaken by DfE.
- The research was undertaken in March 2019.

Response

The questionnaire received 226 responses

- 210 centres had dedicated careers advisors; 31 centres had a part-time advisor, 121 either 1 or 2 dedicated advisors and 58 had 3 or more advisors.
- 72 advisors had been advising for 0-5 years, 46 for 6-10 years and 96 for over ten years.

Respondent centres

State schools	38
Academies and free schools	37
Independent schools	37
Colleges	33
Specialist schools, academies and colleges	8
Education/Careers organisation	5
Other UK	5
International schools and colleges – EU based	20
Education/Careers organisations – EU based	12
International schools and colleges – Outside EU	24
Education/Careers organisation – Outside EU	7
Total	226

- 163 centres in the UK, 32 from an EU country and 31 from outside the EU.
- 111 centres with less than 250 Year 12 and 13 pupils, 54 with 250-500 pupils and 36 with over 250 pupils.

Please Note: We cannot confirm whether this sample is fully representative of all careers advisors. However many of the key careers advice services centres are represented in the research.

Overall, 73% of careers advisors had heard of the TEF, with 55% of those who had heard of TEF considering they knew a fair bit or a lot about the TEF

Careers advisors knowledge of TEF was compared by location of advisor and compared to an applicant based companion survey

All Careers Advisors Knowledge of TEF before taking the survey		UK Advisors	EU Advisors	Outside EU Advisors	All Applicants*
I had heard of the name, the 'TEF'	50%	53%	41%	42%	41%
I had heard of gold silver and bronze awards	59%	61%	56%	55%	28%
I had heard of provisional awards	17%	20%	9%	10%	6%
No, I had not heard of any of the above ^a	27%	24%	34%	33%	47%

For those who knew about TEF, how knowledgeable did they think they were?

I had heard of the TEF, but didn't know anything about it	10%	8%	10%	19%	30%
I knew a little bit about the TEF	35%	31%	43%	53%	44%
I knew a fair bit about the TEF	38%	42%	24%	29%	22%
I knew a lot about the TEF	17%	19%	24%	0%	4%

- UK careers advisors are relatively more knowledgeable about TEF than EU and international advisors.
- Over the whole sample of careers advisors 40%^b are relatively knowledgeable about TEF compared to 14%^c of all applicants. This suggests careers advisors knowledge of TEF is not reaching applicants as well as it could.

^a Meaning 73% of all advisors had heard of TEF (76% UK advisors, 66% EU advisors, 67% advisors outside EU and 53% of applicants had heard of TEF)

^b 40%:- 55% of the 73% who had heard of TEF knew a fair bit or a lot about the TEF

^c 14%:- 26% of the 63% who had heard of TEF knew a fair bit or a lot about the TEF

*Source - UCAS Applicant Omnibus survey 2019 with DfE questions

For the UK, 76% of careers advisors had heard of the TEF, with 61% of those who had heard of TEF considering they knew a fair bit or a lot about the TEF

All UK Careers Advisors Knowledge of TEF before taking the survey		State schools	Academies or free schools	Independent schools	Colleges	UK Applicants*
I had heard of the name, the 'TEF'	53%	45%	38%	60%	58%	43%
I had heard of gold silver and bronze awards	61%	53%	43%	73%	73%	31%
I had heard of provisional awards	20%	16%	16%	27%	18%	7%
No, I had not heard of any of the above	24%	32%	46%	16%	9%	45%

For those who knew about TEF, how knowledgeable did they think they were?

I had heard of the TEF, but didn't know anything about it	8%	8%	10%	6%	7%	31%
I knew a little bit about the TEF	31%	38%	15%	29%	33%	44%
I knew a fair bit about the TEF	42%	31%	55%	55%	37%	21%
I knew a lot about the TEF	19%	23%	20%	10%	23%	4%

- Advisors at colleges (91%) and independent schools (84%) appear more likely to have heard of TEF and the awards than state schools (68%) and academies or free schools (54%).
- Of those who had heard of TEF, advisors at academies or free schools (75%) were most likely to consider they know a fair bit or a lot about TEF compared to Independent schools (65%), Colleges (60%) and State Schools (54%).

Note that analysis by UK FE type uses small sample sizes for the sub-sample of those who knew about the TEF (n<30 for each FE Type), and we know the careers advisor sample may not be representative of all careers advisors and FE types. Further research is required to confirm the accuracy and robustness of these findings.

42% of careers advisors who had heard of TEF had informed students about the TEF to at least a moderate degree

I have informed students about the TEF

15%

27%

31%

26%

I have informed parents about the TEF

10%

20%

26%

42%

I have informed teachers about the TEF

7%

14%

25%

53%

I have used the TEF to help individual students make decisions about where to study

12%

21%

28%

39%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ Yes, a lot ■ Yes, a moderate amount ■ Yes, a little ■ No, not at all ■ Unsure

Asked a student to look at it when they couldn't decide between institutions that were very similar.

We display the awards in our sixth form area for students to see

Used in Careers lesson on How to research HE and the use of league tables

The TEF is not necessarily a reliable measure of overall university quality. Top universities do not always achieve gold awards

A number of careers advisors indicated they were aware of TEF, but had not fully used it with their students. Reasons given included:

- Advisors lack of knowledge and lack of time to gain knowledge.
- Advisors are yet to be convinced about TEF's accuracy, credibility, reliability or objectivity.
- Other choice factors are more significant to students.
- TEF lacks departmental or course level awards.

The results looked very mixed. If a university is good at ensuring its students respond to surveys/questions, they may score better than other institutions.

42% of UK careers advisors who had heard of TEF had informed students about the TEF to at least a moderate degree

I have informed students about the TEF

15%

27%

33%

25%

I have informed parents about the TEF

8%

19%

27%

45%

I have informed teachers about the TEF

7%

16%

24%

53%

I have used the TEF to help individual students make decisions about where to study

9%

21%

31%

39%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50% 60% 70% 80% 90% 100%

■ Yes, a lot

■ Yes, a moderate amount

■ Yes, a little

■ No, not at all/Unsure

- UK careers advisors had a very similar pattern of use of TEF to the average number of careers advisors.
- Comparison with the small number of advisors based outside the EU suggests use by advisors outside the EU may be higher than UK or EU based advisors, but sample sizes are too small draw robust conclusions.

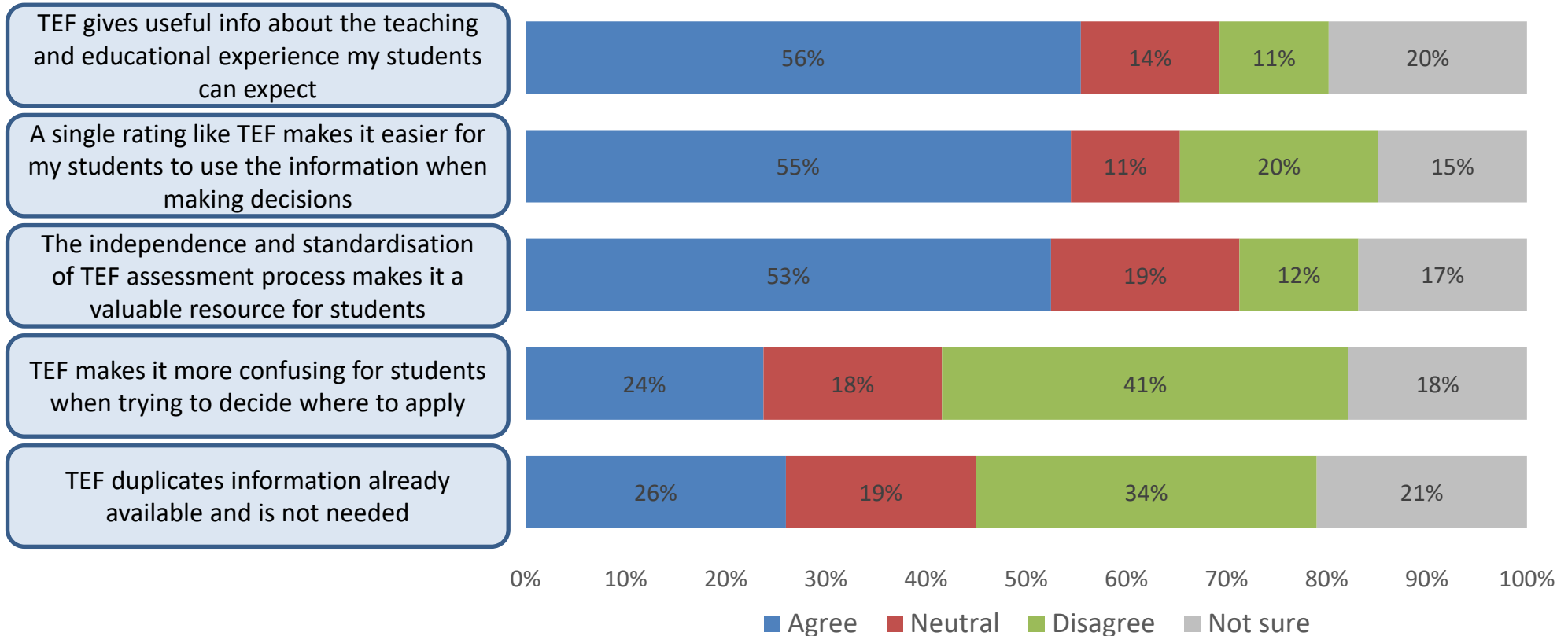
Informed to at least a moderate degree	Informed Students	Informed parents	Informed teachers	Helped individual students
State school*	39%	33%	29%	16%
Academy or Free school*	45%	20%	5%	35%
Independent school	38%	27%	21%	42%
College	43%	28%	17%	20%

In terms of how different careers advisors at different types of sixth form institution used the TEF:

- Academies or free schools, and colleges appear most likely to inform students about the TEF.
- Independent schools appear most likely to use the TEF to help individual students to make decisions.
- State schools appear most likely to share information about the TEF to both teachers and parents.

*Note there are small sample sizes for some sixth form types who had heard of TEF (n<30)

Careers advisors' views about the value of TEF are broadly positive



Whilst careers advisors views of the value of TEF to students are broadly positive, applicants themselves rate the value of TEF higher than careers advisors:

- Useful information from TEF: 70% applicants, 56% advisors.
- Ease of use of a single rating: 67% applicants, 55% advisors.
- Value of TEF independence and standardisation: 64% applicants, 53% advisors.
- TEF adds confusion: 17% applicants, 24% advisors.
- TEF duplicates information and is not needed: 18% applicants, 26% advisors.

UK, EU and International career advisor views of TEF

% agreeing with statements	TEF gives useful information	Single TEF rating is easier to use	Independence and standardisation is valuable	TEF makes deciding where to apply more confusing	TEF duplicates information already available
All	56%	55%	53%	24%	26%
UK	54%	54%	52%	26%	28%
EU	66%	59%	61%	21%	29%
International	60%	57%	50%	17%	13%

- EU careers advisors appear to value TEF more than UK and International advisors in terms of it providing useful information, being easier to use, and valuing the independence and standardisation.
- International advisors are less likely than UK and EU advisors to agree that TEF adds confusion or duplicates information.

State schools	51%	57%	65%	41%	32%
Academies or free schools	38%	50%	44%	21%	33%
Independent schools	59%	57%	54%	19%	19%
Colleges	65%	55%	45%	19%	32%

Across different FE institutions the picture is more mixed.

- Colleges and independent schools are most likely to agree that TEF provides useful information about teaching and educational experience, and least likely to agree TEF makes decision making more confusing.
- Independent schools are also least likely to agree TEF duplicate information already available.
- State schools are most likely to agree the independence and standardisation of TEF is valuable, and also that the TEF makes applying to HE more confusing.
- Academies or free schools are most likely to agree that a single rating is easier to use (though this is a lower rate of agreement than all other FE types).

But when considered alongside other decision-making factors, 'TEF rating of HE provider' is **least important of 15 factors**

Decision-making factor	% saying important or extremely important
Academic entry requirements	95%
Graduate prospects	94%
Quality of teaching facilities	90%
Quality of staff/teaching	88%
Good student reviews	82%
The range of modules	81%
Work experience as part of course	76%
Earning potential of graduates	70%
Challenging course content	67%
Institution pre-application communication	63%
Cost of tuition fees	62%
Position in league tables	61%
Incentives on offer	61%
TEF rating of subject at institution	48%
TEF rating of institution	37%

Factors are rated in a different order and have a different importance rating for careers advisors and applicants e.g. applicants:

- Highest importance: Quality of staff/teaching: 95%.
- Lowest importance: Provider TEF rating: 40%.
- Subject TEF importance: 51%.

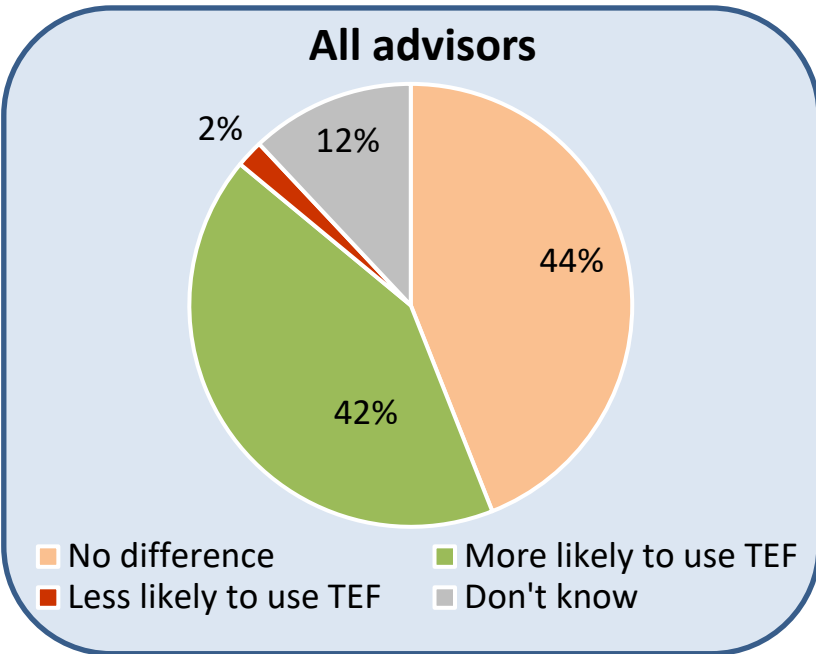
There were some differences between careers advisor by location and FE institution type.

- 97% of EU and 100% of International advisors rated graduate prospects most important.
- 64% of International advisors rated subject TEF important; 12th of 15 factors, the only sub-group of advisors not rating it as 14th of 15.
- 59% of EU advisors rated subject TEF important, as did 42% of UK advisors.
- Academies or free schools rated the importance of subject and provider TEF the highest at 45% and 38% respectively; colleges the lowest at 38% and 28%.

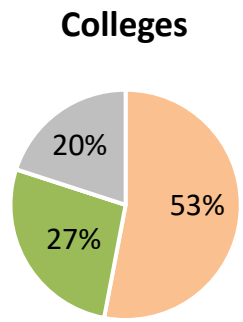
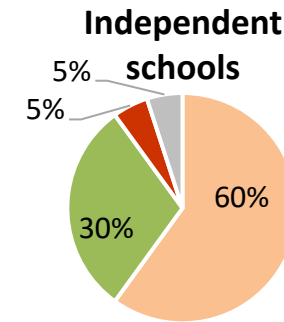
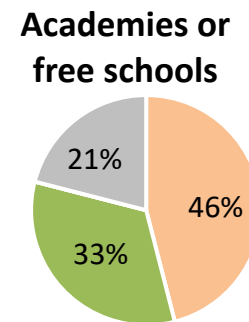
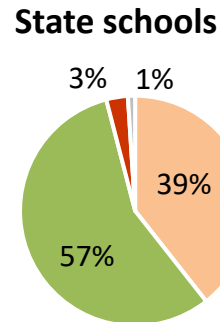
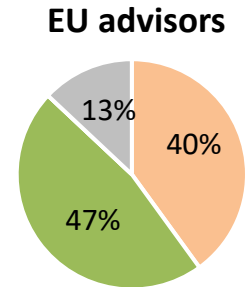
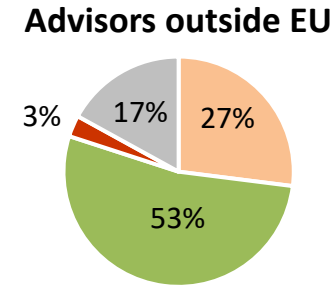
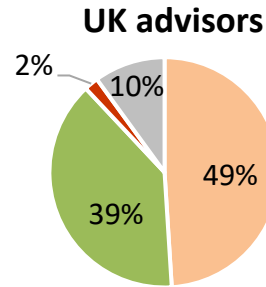
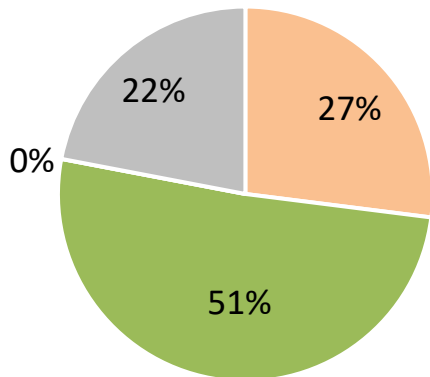
Note: Whilst TEF was ranked lower compared to other factors, many of the factors that are rated highly are composite elements within the TEF rating.

Having additional information about the TEF has encouraged advisors to consider using the TEF more widely with students

Careers advisors were presented with further information about the TEF throughout the survey. They were asked whether this additional information would make them more or less likely to use the TEF in their role as an advisor in the future



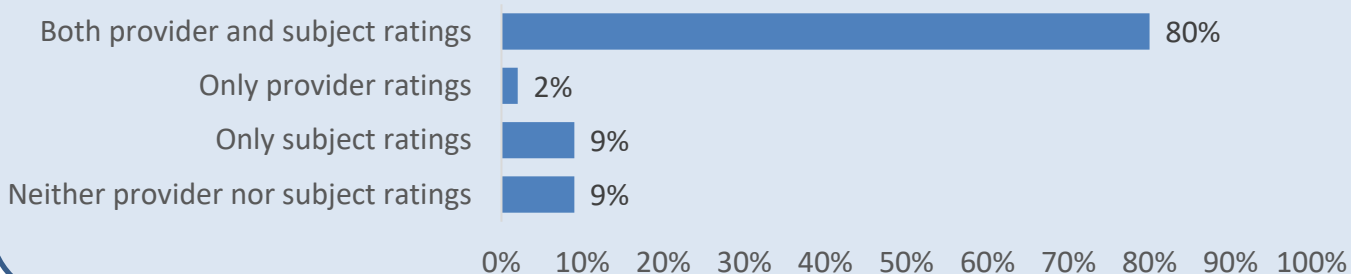
All advisors not aware of TEF prior to the survey



- Provision of additional information about the TEF has encouraged advisors to consider using TEF or using TEF more widely with their students.
- Advisors from centres outside the UK were more likely than UK advisors to think they would use the TEF now they had additional information about it.
- This reflects findings that advisors outside the UK generally knew less about TEF than advisors in the UK and around a third were not aware of TEF prior to the survey compared to around a quarter in the UK (Slide 3).

The majority of careers advisors favoured using both subject-level and provider level TEF ratings

If both provider-level and subject-level ratings were available, which do you think you would use?



Most advisors say they would use **both** provider-level and subject-level TEF. But subject-level slightly more popular:

- 9% say they would use only subject-level.
- 2% would only use provider-level.

Careers advisor use of subject-level TEF

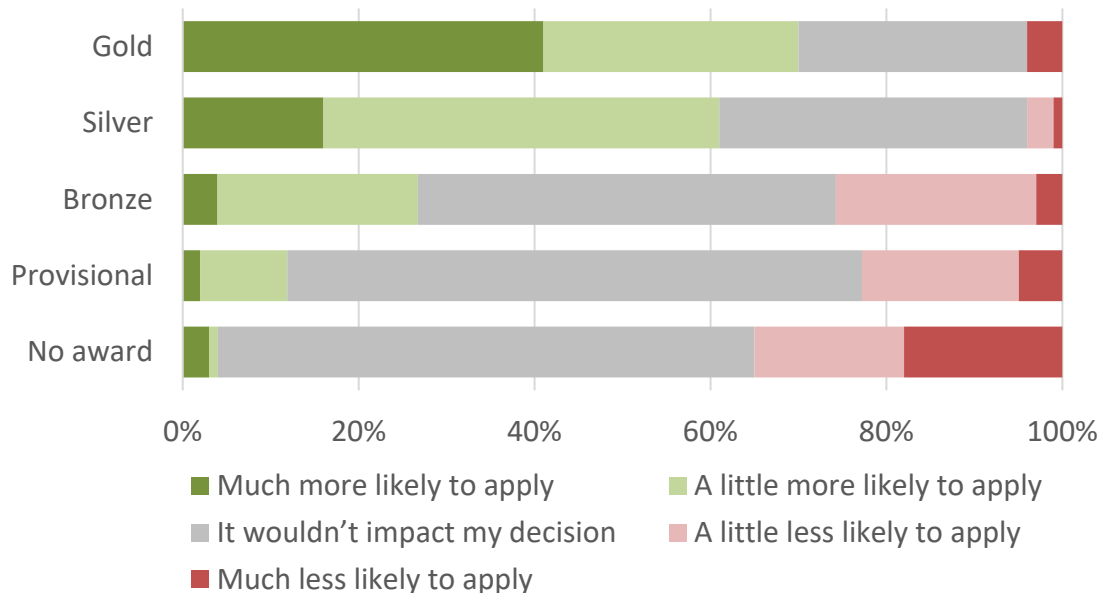
After hearing about subject-level TEF

71% of advisors say they are likely or very likely to use subject-level TEF with their students

International advisors are more likely to think they will use subject-level TEF (82%) than EU advisors (73%) and UK advisors (69%)

Advisors from state schools (73%) and independent schools (72%) are more likely to think they will use subject-level TEF than advisors from academies or free schools (67%) and from colleges (62%)

What impact would subject-level TEF ratings have on likelihood of encouraging students to apply?



Views about TEF - evidence from career advisor comments

Careers advisors considered the TEF was useful to assist decision making, but other factors could be more important

- *It will be a reference for my students if they can't decide which university to go*
- *At the end of the day there are other factors that come in to play - notably the reputation / Russell Group status, the location, parents wishes and the customer service available, whether the unis are supportive - the personal touch*
- *The TEF provides only part of the information that students need when choosing a university. It makes a difference to choice at the margins, but other factors influence students more significantly.*

Careers advisors are yet to be fully convinced about TEF's accuracy, credibility, reliability or objectivity – though in some cases this appeared to be due to lack of knowledge

- *I am not convinced by the method used to establish whether and which TEF a university deserves, therefore I would not want to rely on this*
- *I'm not sure it is an accurate reflection and true benchmark of the teaching and learning environment at the university. I don't know what it really measures...*

EU and Intl advisors in particular felt they needed more TEF information which would enable them to use it with applicants

- *I hadn't heard of the TEF prior to this survey, but will look into it and be likely to use it in my role*
- *I wasn't aware of the focus on outcomes and employability (I thought it was a quality award for teaching) and this emphasis on employability and student experience would be highly relevant for our students who are often eligible for WP schemes.*

Advisors thought that subject-level TEF would be more useful than provider level. Caveats about the credibility of TEF processes and usefulness of other choice factors remained in the comments.

- *This is what I felt was missing from the TEF, so if this is being included, this will be useful.*
- *More specificity would certainly make TEF a more useful resource.*
- *Far more useful than a rating for the whole university due to variation between faculties*
- *We always try to make students aware of the information available so that they can research and use it themselves - but we have and will continue to make them aware of how TEF decisions are made so that they can choose how much store to put by them.*



Department
for Education

© Crown Copyright 2019

Reference: DFE-RR 928

ISBN: 978-1-83870-058-4

For any enquiries regarding this publication, contact us at: www.education.gov.uk/contactus

This document is available for download at www.gov.uk/government/publications