



Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF): Findings from the subject-level pilot 2018-19

**Annex D: Widening participation expert
report**

This is an independent report completed in autumn 2019 following the conclusion of the pilot.

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Introduction

Provider-level and subject-level assessment for the second Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) subject-level pilot was carried out by one main panel assessing providers and five combined subject panels assessing subjects. The main panel had two widening participation (WP) experts as panel members and each combined subject panel had two widening participation liaisons.

The main panel WP experts and report authors – Professor Liz Thomas, Professor of Higher Education, Edge Hull University, and Ross Renton, Pro Vice-Chancellor, University of Worcester – provided expert input on widening participation to the main panel and the WP liaisons on the subject panels. The WP experts had responsibilities for reviewing a sample of provider-level metrics and submissions to identify issues related to widening participation.

The WP liaisons on each subject panel were academics and student panel members, whom in addition to subject assessment responsibilities, advised the subject panel on WP issues and directed the panel’s attention to WP issues. The liaisons worked with the WP experts to support consistent approaches to WP issues across the subject panels.

WP liaison	Panel	Role
Professor Lesley-Jane Eales-Reynolds	Medical Sciences / Nursing and Allied Health	Academic
Dr Tracey Cockerton	Medical Sciences / Nursing and Allied Health	Academic
Matthew Kenyon	Natural Sciences	Student
Kate Williams	Engineering and Technology	Academic
Professor Christina Hughes	Social Sciences	Academic
Professor Joanna Bullard	Natural and Built Environment	Academic
Joanna MacDonnell	Arts	Academic
Harry Anderson	Humanities	Student
Juliette Wagner	Business and Law	Academic
Professor Debby Cotton	Education and Social Care	Academic

Full details of the assessment process are outlined in the TEF subject-level pilot guide¹ published in October 2018. Comprehensive evaluation of the second pilot is reported in ‘Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework: Findings from the subject-level pilot 2018-19’, to which this report is an annex. Details of the panel membership are published on the Office for Students (OfS) website².

¹ Available at: www.officeforstudents.org.uk/publications/teaching-excellence-and-student-outcomes-framework-subject-level-pilot-guide/.

² Available at: www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/teaching/future-of-the-tef/subject-level-pilots/.

Methodology

1. The widening participation (WP) experts were full members of the main panel, and advisers to both the main panel and the subject panels. The experts were not given a formal case allocation, so were asked to self-select a provider-level caseload using widening participation data tables supplied by the OfS team and their own sector knowledge. There was regular contact and feedback between the TEF officers/OfS team and the WP experts. Throughout the process, the experts took notes on widening participation issues.
2. For the second subject-level pilot, a widening participation liaison was appointed to each of the ten subject panels, following the recommendations of the WP experts. Each WP liaison was an ordinary member of their subject panel (two were students) and they had a full caseload. The role of the liaisons was to help ensure that diversity and equality issues were considered in all cases by reminding panel members of their responsibility; they also noted any cases with particular WP elements to highlight in discussion with the chair. Liaisons were not expected to have expert knowledge of WP, and they did not have a remit to specifically review submissions from providers with a particular WP focus or challenge. Where WP queries were raised within the subject panels, liaisons were expected to discuss these initially with the pilot subject panel chairs and refer any complexities to the experts.
3. The experts provided training, online and face to face, and specialist advice to both the main panel and the subject panels. Two group sessions were held with the WP liaisons, facilitated by the OfS, to gather feedback and observations. The experts produced a survey for all WP liaisons at the end of the pilot to gather further detailed information on the process.

Observations

The role of the WP liaison

4. Overall, it was believed that sufficient information and guidance was provided before undertaking the role of WP liaison. It was noted that it would have been helpful for the training materials developed by the WP experts with the OfS to have been provided earlier in the process.
5. It was observed that further training on the metrics would have been beneficial, in particular further details on the nuances within, and between, POLAR and IMD as measures of disadvantage. It may have been productive to hold some sessions between the liaisons and the experts; this could have been face to face or online (e.g. webinar).
6. The majority of liaisons reported that their role was well understood by the other members of the subject panels. It would have been helpful if the prompt questions devised by the WP liaison group in the subject panel training event were an embedded feature of the panel discussion.

Panel meetings

7. There could have been a more systematic approach to addressing WP and equality issues within the assessment process at the subject panels. In some assessments where the provider did not talk about WP explicitly in their submission, the panel did not spend much time discussing this element.
8. The majority of liaisons reported they had sufficient discussion of WP issues within their panel meetings. They also believed that panel members had an improved understanding of WP compared to the previous year, engaging with the new training materials and the WP aspects of the metrics.
9. It was highlighted that the WP experts could have had a role in advising further on borderline cases where WP factors were a significant element for consideration.
10. A key suggestion made on possible improvement to the coverage of WP and equality issues within the assessment process was to revise the assessment template to include a WP checklist.

Provider submissions

11. It was observed that providers would have benefited from further guidance on outlining their approach to WP. This could include guidance on providing further details against TEF criterion SO3 – Positive Outcomes for All. Concerns were raised about the quality of self-analysis on WP issues from some smaller providers.
12. There were a small number of discipline specific and subject-related factors that needed to be considered in relation to WP. This included gender imbalances evident in the Natural Sciences, Engineering and Technology subjects. Some subjects are male dominated (e.g. Maths, Physics, Engineering), others female (e.g. Forensics, Archaeology). It was also noted that there was a lack of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) representation in Arts and Humanities subjects. There could also be greater reference to disabled students within the submissions.

General observations

13. The split metrics were believed to be the most helpful data source in considering and discussing WP and equality issues within the panels. This became challenging at subject level when split metrics were of low population size or incomplete due to suppressed data. Concerns were raised regarding the Longitudinal Educational Outcomes (LEO) data, with the lack of regional benchmarking potentially disadvantaging providers with high local WP intakes or local deprivation.
14. There were some concerns about the complexity of the process and the volume of data. However, additional data on care leavers and commuter students was raised as potentially helpful within the assessment process. Further guidance on the definition of 'positive outcomes for all' would be helpful for panel members if it is to continue being used as a TEF criterion.

15. It is the view of the WP experts and the liaisons that the OfS should clarify how access and participation datasets and plans relate to TEF. In a number of cases panel members felt better cross-referencing could be helpful.
16. Given the current focus of the OfS on differential attainment for WP and equality groups, the lack of progress in reducing the differential, and the consensus that this should be addressed through academic interventions, it would be useful to see attainment differential data continue to be included in the TEF metrics, especially in relation to ethnicity, age, gender, POLAR/IMD and disability. The experts believe this is more relevant and useful data to assess quality than grade inflation data.

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