

Bristol UCU - TEF at UoB

Introduction

- The decision to enter year 2 of the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) at the last Board of Trustees meeting was not unexpected. From a Bristol UCU perspective it was a disappointing decision. Both Bristol UCU and Bristol Students' Union (SU) reflect their respective unions' national opposition to the TEF.
- Rather than go over the pros and cons of the TEF – this is covered in the joint [Bristol UCU and SU 'TEF Off' Open Letter](#) – we would like to hone in on the potential institutional impact of the TEF at the University on academic and academic-related staff.
- One key short-term objective for Bristol UCU would be our involvement in the University's planning around TEF. A meeting with the PVC (Education), who appears to be the internal UoB TEF lead, is apposite. This meeting should include the SU Sabbatical Officers.
- As is, Bristol SU is being consulted on the TEF. The staffing implication of the TEF are such Bristol UCU would also like input.
- 2 key areas for discussion are 1) clarity and consultation and 2) UoB management of TEF

1) Clarity and Consultation

- For Bristol UCU branch officers and executive members, the institutional discussion around entering the TEF (and in general on the TEF) has been unduly limited. Uncertainty over Bristol's position on the TEF and the lack of clear signposting of the 'local' decision-making process over the course of 2016 has meant that staff have not been fully briefed or included in any meaningful consultation up to now.

- Given the significance of the decision, very much the second HE market 'big bang' after the introduction of tuition fees, this lack of consultation likely means staff are unprepared for any TEF changes, in particular any staffing or workload changes in response to Bristol's predicted Bronze ranking in the second stage of the TEF exercise.
- The news that Bristol is on course to be ranked Bronze was in the form of the circular/statement to Heads of Schools and above from the PVC (Education), dated 31st October, and then a reference to the circular/statement in the Staff Bulletin on 2nd November. The decision to formally enter TEF was taken at the Board of Trustees on Friday, 11th November, which we gather was not on the agenda. On being questioned by student reps before the Board of Trustees, the Chair of the Board of Trustees confirmed that there would not be a vote. Of note, there is an addendum *'[t]his decision will be taken by the Board of Trustees'* to the circular/statement between the initial comms from the PVC (Education) and the statement as it is now on the UoB website.
- While it may be noted that details of how the second trial year of the TEF was to operate were only published at the end of September, we believe that staff could have been kept far more in the picture. When Bristol UCU raised the TEF – asking for clarification over the *Times Higher* story, 01/09/16 that noted Bristol had 'confirmed that they would participate in the second stage of the TEF' – the reply was that no decision had been taken, but clearly TEF-related deliberations were ongoing at that stage.
- One question would be: have concerns about Bristol's potential ranking been discussed over the course of year, previous to September this year, and could they have been shared more widely with staff?
- It is clear from talking to branch reps that some Heads of School did not shared the circular/statement mentioned above, and we are concerned how staff in those Schools are now not in the loop. The raising of the issue in Faculty assemblies seems to be patchy: we believe it was mentioned at Science's but not in Arts's.

2) UoB management of TEF

- As from now, we would hope that the institutional response to the TEF is open and transparent. If there is to be a plan in regard to any 'drive to Silver', then it should be shared at the earliest opportunity with all staff.
- We think it is crucial that University academic leaders are open and explicit about how the TEF is determining policy and change management if at all. For example, the recent *Times* story and the quote '[n]ow the university will guarantee a minimum of ten hours a week contact time...' may be less the complete, and reflects current mooted proposal rather than firm decisions. This acknowledged, matters for discussion are often less open than that; actually they are objectives that unless there is a good reason not to become policy.
- If the next few academic years are to be characterised at the University by a 'drive to Silver', then it would be advantageous if staff were aware of the extra demands in response to said 'drive'.
- In other words, although the benchmarks associated with the TEF – student satisfaction; the NSS; graduate employment; staff student ratios – are already drivers of academic behaviour and the allocation of resources, the strategic response to the TEF should be explicit in relation to any firming up of or changes to these benchmarks.
- Bristol UCU would want to participate in these deliberations. Although the institutional TEF response may be part of the 'Educational' policy purview, the TEF response is likely to have staffing implications that are very much of UCU's concern.
- If there is to be a 'drive to Silver' we would expect the University to not simply ask more of overworked staff – deploying the stick more than the carrot. We would hope that any new expectations, demands or requirements placed on academic or academic-related staff are fully funded: they are not asked to do more with the same resourcing to be blunt.
- The TEF puts potentially more pressure on early career researchers/academics because school's striving for teaching excellence may make it more difficult for ECRs to gain teaching experience. At the same time, the latter is an integral part of the employment prospects of a doctoral degree. The University should mitigate the negative effects on

young academics by offering better teaching trainings for PGRs and pay preparation, teaching, and marking fairly. This would also help to relieve other staff from teaching obligations.

- Bristol UCU would welcome a shift in thinking towards pathway 3 positions in response to teaching provision. That shift should see pathway three positions established on a far more secure, open-ended, progressable basis.
- One important aspect of the TEF at Bristol is the true costing of the financial impact. Putting to one side the 'keeping up with the Jones's' aspect of the Framework, is this University going to see marked extra funding as a result of the TEF, once administrative and other costs are factored in?