



Department for Business, Innovation & Skills

## **Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice - Consultation**

You can reply to this consultation online at:

<https://bisgovuk.citizenspace.com/he/fulfilling-our-potential>

A copy of this response form is available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/higher-education-teaching-excellence-social-mobility-and-student-choice>

The Department may, in accordance with the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information, make available, on public request, individual responses.

The closing date for this consultation is 15/01/2016

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The British Philosophical Association

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Please tick the box that best describes you as a respondent to this consultation.

	Alternative higher education provider (with designated courses)
	Alternative higher education provider (no designated courses)
	Awarding organisation
	Business/Employer
	Central government
	Charity or social enterprise
	Further Education College
	Higher Education Institution
	Individual (Please describe any particular relevant interest; parent, student, teaching staff etc.)
	Legal representative
	Local Government
	Professional Body
<b>x</b>	Representative Body
	Research Council
	Trade union or staff association
	Other (please describe)

## Public sector equality duty

Question 1:

- a) What are your views on the potential equality impacts of the proposals and other plans in this consultation?

The British Philosophical Association is extremely concerned about the equality impact of giving a leading role to NSS scores and Employability statistics. We think this is enormously problematic.

- b) Are there any equality impacts that we have not considered?

Yes       No       Not sure

Please provide any further relevant evidence.

The BPA, and the Society for Women in Philosophy, think that the use of NSS scores as a measure of teaching quality is likely to perpetuate gender inequality. Recent studies<sup>1</sup> have shown that male instructors consistently receive higher student evaluation scores than female instructors, even though there is no evidence that they are more effective teachers. (Teaching effectiveness is generally measured by subsequent student performance). This holds true even when what is measured is something objective e.g. promptness of feedback.

Another study<sup>2</sup> shows that women were especially likely to be negatively evaluated if they did not give high marks. If the TEF takes the form currently anticipated—one that gives a leading role to NSS scores—then it will incorporate into the governmental research framework this extremely problematic form of gender bias. This may have very damaging effects: i) it may hinder the progression of women who are excellent teachers and researchers in their academic careers; ii) since Universities are keen to secure good NSS scores, perverse incentives may prevail whereby we are under increasing expectation to hire lecturers who will get high NSS scores - men, according to the current research. (It's plausible that the same effect will occur for other groups such as black and minority ethnic lecturers, although there needs to be more research carried out for those groups.) This has the potential to have extremely negative effects for women in academia. These effects would thwart the efforts that have been made by Universities and Governments to increase the representation and success of excellent women in academia<sup>3</sup>.

Since the Government has recently identified 'removing barriers to women's success' as a 'key priority'<sup>4</sup>, we expect this concern to be one that you will

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2016/01/11/new-analysis-offers-more-evidence-against-student-evaluations-teaching>

<sup>2</sup> <http://psp.sagepub.com/content/26/11/1329.abstract>

<sup>3</sup> see e.g. <https://www.shef.ac.uk/hr/equality/femaleprogression>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/women-of-the-future-summit>

share. Incorporating bias-inflected NSS scores into assessments in the way proposed would be a step in the wrong direction. We urge consideration of other metrics of teaching evaluation that more accurately tracks real quality.

Similarly, using Employment/Destination/Salary data as a measure of teaching quality is to rely on a metric which has many historic inequalities built into it. The UK does not have wage equality between men and women, and other groups (BME people, disabled people) experience unequal levels of remuneration and higher levels of unemployment. Access to labour markets is high unequal, and can depend upon social class, networks, and access to placements. Crudely put, until these inequalities are erased, any TEF which uses employment statistics will reward those HEIs or degree pathways which have a greater proportion of students from these privileged demographics. Reliance on these metrics is in tension with the Green Paper's laudable aims to 'widen participation' among students from disadvantaged and BME backgrounds (Part A chapter 4).

### Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) (Part A: Chapters 1-3)

Question 2: How can information from the TEF be used to better inform student and employer decision making? Please quantify these benefits as far as you can.

The BPA welcomes attempts to recognise and value the centrally important role that teaching has within philosophy departments. Philosophical research and teaching philosophy are intimately related, and while philosophical research has received a lot of attention under the REF, philosophers' outstanding commitments to teaching have received relatively little acknowledgment. We welcome the opportunity for prospective students to become better informed about what an education in philosophy involves, and we welcome attempts to recognise the high quality of philosophical teaching, and, where possible, to raise that quality. We do not, however, share the view that lecturers in philosophy have permitted teaching standards to be poor in order to focus on their research,<sup>5</sup> since a proper commitment to research-lead teaching which is so intrinsic to philosophy is an important block on this happening.

Question 11: Do you agree with the proposed approach to the evidence used to make TEF assessments - common metrics derived from the national databases supported by evidence from the provider?

Yes       No       Not sure

Please give reasons for your answer.

Please see the response to question 1 above.

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<sup>5</sup> 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>

We are concerned by the TEF's appeal to student satisfaction and employability statistics as measures of teaching effectiveness. The official six-month window on employment used in these metrics is particularly problematic for philosophy; although philosophy graduates achieve successful levels of employment, the wider variety of career opportunities means that a six-month measure does not accurately track eventual graduate placement.

But more importantly, we suspect that in the long-term, focus on satisfaction and life-term earnings will pressure philosophy departments to change their degree programmes in ways which are likely to be harmful both to the education of philosophy students *and* to future employers.

Given the nature of philosophy, its successful teaching requires students to be active, collaborative and participatory; successful students are co-creators of their philosophical education. The TEF's emphasis on student satisfaction encourages a different attitude to education, in which students are encouraged to think of themselves as individual recipients of a product which teachers deliver. Reliance on NSS scores will incentivise HEIs to ensure that degree programmes appeal to and perpetuate this conception of students-as-consumers. We are concerned that this way of thinking about their education is harmful to students, since they stand to lose out on a distinctive and important part of a philosophical education – the process of being challenged, supported, confused, nurtured and having the opportunity to achieve personal insights, shared discoveries, and rich intellectual relationships.

Although we resist a strictly instrumentalist appreciation of the benefits our discipline bestows upon its students, we also note that these further moves towards thinking of students as consumers is likely to be harmful to future employers. At present, a proper philosophical education can give students important abilities and qualities of mind which are highly valued by many employers. Since the study of philosophy involves self-motivation, a willingness to tackle complicated material carefully and honestly, and the evaluative ability to make difficult judgements independently, philosophy graduates are recognised as having valuable entrepreneurial skills and are highly sought after in a wide range of occupations. We are concerned that attempts to court greater consumer satisfaction will result in students who no longer see themselves as responsible for co-creating their own educational experiences; the consequences for employers will be cohorts of students entering the labour market who are more satisfied by their university degrees but who are less prepared for engaging with a messy, un-prepackaged world. The risk is clear: philosophy students' education could be biased in favour of the local employment market of today, such that a philosophy degree will no longer equip students with the kind of versatile minds which are of greater long-term social, economic and political value.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> On this point, see Joshua Forstenzer's report on the public value of universities <http://www.crickcentre.org/new-report-on-teaching-excellence-framework/>.