

The English «Teaching Excellence Framework» and Professionalising Teaching and Learning in Research-Intensive Universities: An Exploration of Opportunities, Challenges, Rewards and Values from a Recent Empirical Study

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Abstract: Currently English universities are responding to a recent government Green Paper which promises to deliver a raft of radical policy changes which could have a major impact on how excellence in teaching and learning is to be publicly acknowledged and rewarded. A significant, yet controversial proposal is the introduction of a «Teaching Excellence Framework» for universities. This paper examines and contextualises the current important policy debates and then presents some preliminary findings from a recent empirical case study which explored how research-intensive universities have valued, rewarded and supported excellence in teaching through institutional structures and also from the perspectives of academic staff responsible for teaching students. We argue that the reality on the ground for many academics is a sense of confusion and contraction around how their universities value and support high quality teaching and that there may be some way to go before some of the ideas and principles currently being discussed in the context of a national English Teaching Excellence Framework are fully embedded in practice.

Keywords: England; higher education policy; research-intensive universities; teaching and learning in higher education, academic identity; academic work; Teaching Excellence Framework.

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1. Introduction

In May 2016 the English government published a radical White Paper on reform in higher education and research, *Higher Education: Success as a Knowledge Economy*, following a period of public consultation with universities on its Green Paper published in November 2015. Echoing much of what was scoped in the Green Paper, the White Paper builds on its key proposals which signal, amongst other major changes to the sector, a major impact on how excellence in teaching and learning is to be publicly acknowledged and rewarded. The idea of a ‘Teaching Excellence Framework’ (TEF) which will enable comparable judgements to be made across universities about the quality of teaching and the student experience, using a range of common metrics and determining the allocation of funding and resource, rather like the now well-established «Research Excellence Framework» (REF), has been mooted for some time but is now firmly endorsed and actively promoted by the Conservative government. Though there is much debate and controversy about the logistics and impact of a TEF on English universities, there is undoubtedly a renewed focus on what teaching excellence in higher education means, how this should be prioritised, particularly in those institutions whose reputations are built as much on the generation of the highest quality research as well as education, and how best academics can be supported and prepared for its effective delivery.

This paper examines and contextualises the current important policy debates and directions and then presents some preliminary findings from a recent empirical case study which explored how a sample of English research-intensive universities have valued, rewarded and supported excellence in teaching through institutional structures and also from the perspectives of academic staff responsible for teaching students. The paper is in four main parts. First, there is a critical overview of the current English higher education policy debate. Secondly, the framework for the empirical study; its research questions, methodological and theoretical approaches; are sketched. Thirdly, selected data from a series of in-depth qualitative interviews with academics responsible for teaching in a sample of four English research-intensive universities are presented and discussed. Finally, the emerging research findings are problematized in the context of current and future English higher education policy directions, with some suggestions for further research in the field identified.

2. Critical Overview of Current English HE Debate

UK Higher Education (HE) is highly prized as a valuable export with a long-standing international reputation for excellence. It is characterised by a distinctive blend of autonomy for the development and dissemination of

research, teaching and innovation within a public policy framework which is underpinned by clear lines of accountability. A recent report, published by Universities UK (UUK), argued that in the context of their global recognition and acclaim, «Universities play an intrinsic role in the UK economy. They increase skills, support innovation and attract investment and talent» (UUK, 2015, p. 4). In spite of this external recognition for excellence, the national UK HE policy context has become increasingly volatile and contested. With the controversial new funding arrangements in 2012/13, which introduced undergraduate student teaching fees of up to £9,000 per year, the quality of the student learning experience has become increasingly important across the sector. The 2011 Conservative/Liberal Democratic coalition government HE White Paper, *Students at the Heart of the System*, explicitly heralded this renewed emphasis on universities being held accountable to students for the quality and value of their learning experience. This is reflected in the growing importance of national and international league tables which measure a range of metrics associated with research performance, teaching quality and innovation. In the national context, the outcomes of the annual National Student Survey (NSS), greater transparency of public information about the quality and nature of the student experience, as well as increased competition for students has led to what some critics would regard as a highly marketised and consumer-led model of higher education (Collini, 2012; Tomlinson, 2015).

More recently, the idea of a TEF has been high on the HE policy agenda, powered by a Conservative Party election manifesto commitment to driving up teaching standards in universities and, critically, linking teaching excellence with the ability of successful universities to raise tuition fees, which have remained static since 2012. It should be noted that a REF, which cyclically evaluates the quality and volume of university research outputs and awards differentiated research funding accordingly, has been in existence in UK universities in some form or other for the last thirty years. The rationale for a TEF is underpinned by the belief that students as well as employers deserve better value for money from higher education and that teaching in universities should be on a par with research in terms of prioritisation, resource allocation and prominence. The implication behind much of the discussion about the TEF is that universities have not always accorded teaching and learning with as much respect as they should have done. In November 2015, the recently elected new Conservative government, published its long-awaited higher education Green Paper, *Fulfilling Our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice*. This outlined the government's plans for higher education in four key areas: the introduction of a TEF; greater regulation of market entry, exit and student protection; plans to further social mobility through access to higher education; and the development of research. An

open consultation on the proposals closed in January 2016 and the government then considered these responses pending the publication of its own response in the most recent White Paper, as well as a further planned technical consultation in the Spring/Summer of 2016. The TEF is presented as a mechanism to identify, reward and encourage high quality teaching in universities, with a focus on how universities prepare students for graduate employability and how they promote increased diversity and social mobility in its students. A fundamental part of the proposals around the TEF and the whole thrust of the policy direction is to stress much greater transparency and accountability on the part of universities in their engagement with students. It is the particular implications of the TEF for research-intensive universities that provide such a useful context for this paper.

Following the period of consultation the White Paper proposes a slower phasing in of the TEF than previously envisaged in the Green Paper. This suggests that the fierce debates about how teaching excellence can best be assessed, what criteria will be used to define teaching excellence and the evidence base on which judgements will be made, have not been fully resolved. The TEF will have three tiers of classification for individual universities: outstanding; excellent; and meets expectations. It is proposed that in its first iteration in 2016/17, existing quality assurance metrics will be used to enable universities to progress to Level 1 of the TEF and then to be able to charge higher fees in 2017/18 in line with inflation, within a maximum cap set by government. In Year Two, institutions can then apply to be assessed for higher levels of the TEF. Those who are successful will be able to charge higher fees from 2018/19, with the level of fees dependent on the TEF level awarded. In 2019/20 there will be a move to subject-level, rather than just institutional level analysis and the inclusion of postgraduate taught programmes in the exercise. The timeframe for implementation still appears very tight, given so many unresolved questions, and there are real fears across the sector that a model will be introduced that is not properly worked out, with far-reaching consequences for the sector and for the students. In addition, with bitter experience of the administrative burden of the management of the successive REF exercises over previous years, there are also fears that a TEF will be equally costly and bureaucratic for the sector. There is a danger that in seeking to promote, highlight and reward «teaching excellence», however this might be defined, the exercise could be reduced to one of clever institutional gamesmanship and manipulation, thus missing the whole point.

Much of the debate about the TEF has been concerned with the measurement of teaching quality and what metrics might be used to assess teaching excellence. The White Paper proposes the adoption of existing measures, which include student satisfaction, measured by institutional NSS performance; student employability outcomes, measured by the annual Destination of Leavers in Higher Education

(DLHE) survey and data on earning figures; and retention and performance, measured by progression data and degree awards. The introduction of further metrics is expected, for example around the idea of ‘learning gain’, but it remains unclear yet how this will be assessed – particularly when there is such a diversity of institutions and students. The value of a qualitative element, in addition to the use of existing quantitative metrics, with individual institutions having the opportunity to produce evidence-based narratives about their teaching quality and the use of independent panels of experts to make such critical judgements, continues to be debated. Louisa Darian for example, has argued that HE needs to learn from other sectors, such as schools and public health, when designing the TEF and advocates a more holistic, qualitative approach to measuring quality than is currently being proposed, including expert-led inspection visits (Darian, 2016).

Arguably, excellence in teaching is more than can be counted or measured. Indeed, those metrics that have been put forward to support the English TEF seem to be much more about outcomes as opposed to the teaching and learning process and experience. There are real concerns that the metrics currently being put forward will not accurately reflect standards of teaching in English universities. Moreover, their focus seems far removed from the individual academics directly involved in the delivery of teaching in universities. Passion, creativity, relationship building and transformation – all recognised qualities of teaching excellence are notoriously difficult to quantify, mostly because their existence is so context-specific, so personal and so situated. Rather like the schools sector, which has engaged with the problematic of measuring teacher performance and effectiveness for many years, the challenge for the HE sector is that this is a contested issue and there is no clear consensus on shared understanding of how it should be done. This is reflected in Vicky Gunn’s recent report for the Higher Education Academy on ‘considering teaching excellence in HE’ and the work of Graham Gibbs and William Locke on dimensions of quality in HE teaching (Gunn, 2015; Gibbs, 2010; Locke, 2012). Metrics are often «soft» rather than «hard» – and arguably more subjective than those used to assess research performance. Teacher competency models only go so far in testing threshold or baseline performance and run the risk of dumbing down more aspirational notions of excellence. HE researchers have been grappling with the question of how universities can recognise, embed and enhance teaching quality for some years (Biggs, 2011; Buchanan, Gordon and Schuck, 2008; Gibbs, 2010; Ramsden, 2003). Their work suggests a strong need for the HE sector to develop more sophisticated tools for evaluating teaching quality which move beyond rather narrow process-product models.

There is uncertainty about how students will view and use the TEF in making decisions about their choice of university. Indeed the UK National University of Students has responded negatively to the proposals in the White

Paper – and in particular the linking of higher TEF ratings with inflated tuition fees. Universities will need to consider how they demonstrate teaching excellence and how this is communicated to students, staff, parents and stakeholders. For research-intensive institutions in particular, the stakes are high and pressures on research-intensive universities to perform well are acute. In addition to maintaining research productivity of a high international standing, they must also embed new professional cultures and mechanisms for evaluating and rewarding high quality teaching and learning. Moreover, how they meaningfully demonstrate the power of the relationship between teaching and research will be critical. Though the proposals for the English TEF might not be fully worked through, at least they put firmly on the policy and research agenda the primacy of teaching excellence and it is hoped that this will generate further research and elaboration of the meaning of teaching quality in higher education. We now examine one such recent empirical study whose focus on teaching in research-intensive universities has begun to address some of the fundamental questions raised by debates around the English TEF.

3. Framework for the Empirical Study

The empirical study which this paper draws upon was Hilli's funded doctoral project which examined how research-intensive universities in England evaluate, assess, value, reward, and align institutional activities with a renewed focus on high quality teaching. The study explored how institutional activities and policies have been experienced and played out in the lived realities of academic life. Three key research questions underpinned the study:

- What are research-intensive universities doing to evaluate, assess, and reward effective teaching?
- In what ways do professional cultures and practices accommodate institutional mechanisms for valuing and rewarding effective teaching
- What experiences do the individual academics working in these contexts have of the institutional cultures and practices?

The perceived tension between the importance of focusing on high quality teaching as well as producing high quality research causes different kinds of challenges in different types of universities – but particularly those which are research-intensive. Hilli's study sought to fill a gap in existing research in this area. The study was based on documentary and empirical data, including an interpretive analysis of policy, a systematic review of research and four institutional case studies, which included a series of interviews with academics. Data from these interviews are used to illustrate some of the main challenges surrounding

the valuing and rewarding of teaching in research-intensive universities that are discussed in this paper and that have become particularly prominent in debates surrounding the English TEF.

Using convenience and snowball sampling a cross-section of 33 academic staff with teaching responsibilities at four research-intensive universities (referenced as RIU 1-4 in quotations below) were identified and invited to participate in the study. The participant sample included sixteen academics with research and teaching responsibilities and seventeen with teaching-only responsibilities, working in the following disciplines: Law; Medicine and Education. Their length of service varied, with some being relatively early career, and others more experienced. Semi-structured interviews, which were audio-recorded, were conducted between June and August 2014. The discussion in the interviews focussed on experiences of teaching, working with students, institutional support and recognition, the teaching culture and opportunities for professional development. A modified form of grounded theory was used to analyse the interviews. (Dey, 2008; Egan, 2002; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Lodico, Spaulding, Voegtler, 2006) Open, axial, and selective coding of the verbatim interview transcripts was used to generate meaning from the data. The interviews uncovered individual academic's views and experiences of a range of interrelated issues. These included: the different roles and responsibilities for academics; teaching; relationships with students; the demands of academic work; the relationship between research and teaching; pressures around resource and funding; qualifications for teaching; professional and career development opportunities; and institutional drivers related to teaching. The empirical research was fully informed by an appropriate ethical framework and informed consent from participants.

4. Emerging Findings from the Interview Data

Hilli's research has emphasised the huge complexity of the nature of academic work in research-intensive universities. Her empirical data shows that the people working in them are student-focused, versatile academics who are passionately interested in both research and teaching. However, the relationship between research and teaching was found to be troublesome. Five core themes were identified from the interview data which are elaborated in the thesis: «the versatile academic» as someone who juggled multiple aspects of their professional role; the varied nature of «academic work»- what it entails and how it has been impacted by the volatile external and internal environments ; academics' «understanding of the broader higher education context»; «current teaching practices»; and academics' experience of institutional and external «mechanisms for professional development». It is not within the scope of this particular paper to explore all of these themes and only

those findings which highlighted academic attitudes towards teaching and the associated perceived tensions between the competing demands of teaching and research in a research-intensive environment are presented.

3.1. *Devotion to Teaching*

One of the most powerful findings from the interview data was the apparent willingness of participants, regardless of their specific role, to talk about the importance they placed on their work with students. This included the satisfaction of being able to see and follow the development of students; enjoyment arising from discussions with students, leading student learning and learning with them, and working together with high quality students. Participants expressed a strong personal interest in student wellbeing, achievement and progress. One teaching-oriented participant reflected, for example, on his students in relation to his motivations for working in higher education:

... over time what I have come to understand is that I have a natural interest and empathy with the student experience and not in the glib PR way like a lot of the universities talk about it, you know, a lot of people package the student experience in a sort of advertising sense saying that universities, you know, are giving you a great experience but, you know, I actually care about the students on a day-to-day level and supporting them effectively and making sure that they get a great educational experience out of it because when you think about, you know, my parents' generation and their chance to get to university, which was very limited and within a generation going from that to almost every everybody having a chance to have a real opportunity to go to higher education if they, you know, work hard and get the right qualifications, I think it's just an incredible opportunity for people and they really need to make the most of it and that is something that is being made obvious to me in my time working in the sector and I do passionately believe in that and I do care about the students on a day-to-day level both in an educational sense and usually pastoral sense because the two are interlinked, you know, fundamentally always, I care how they feel and how they are doing and whether we can do things better at [name], um, so over time they are the feelings that I have developed... (Teaching-focussed academic, RIU 4).

So powerful was the theme of this strong commitment to delivering a high quality learning experience for students, that the word «devotion» was frequently used to describe this experience. Such devotion encompassed a desire to developing personal skills and knowledge as well as teaching practices and methods. Many participants talked about how this devotion was shared by their colleagues. One teaching-oriented participant talked about his devotion when discussing the importance of blurring the lines between the education environment and the career environment. He expressed his concerns about the employability of his students in the following way:

...generally based on evaluations I am happy that we are giving them [students] enough but ... I think that because especially these, the postgraduate students especially, are competing in a highly competitive job market in [subject] ... it would be very useful again to blur this boundary between the education environment and the career environment and to have more time to do that than we do at the moment because they are kind of highly vocational areas, so partly it is under our control, relating the curriculum strongly to careers as far as we can and we work on that and we think about that a lot... I am devoted to thinking much more about getting people onto careers and so on and so forth and we have more universities stuff about that but it would be nice to do that bit more at our institute level but I personally find that it is difficult to find the time for it because I'm teaching so much... (Teaching-oriented academic, RIU 2).

Another teaching-oriented participant from the same university spoke about his frustration relating to the limited career prospects of his role. His testimony also highlights ongoing tensions between the perceived valuing of research and teaching in the university culture with excessively heavy and often unmanageable teaching loads for teaching-oriented staff:

... people on the [name] top do not care about teaching full stop, they care about teaching in the way that it makes them look, they care about teaching because they know that they have to but actually the main reason for the university is the production of research and you know that's kind of frustrating for somebody who is devoted to teaching, it's very frustrating ... it depends on what you mean by professional advancement because teaching is so low on the list of peoples' priorities ... we understand, obviously the university management understands that we have to teach students, we don't have a choice in that, we are a university ... the reason that they would devote attention, I mean the university does devote attention to teaching, there are opportunities for you in that they do, they offer you the opportunity to become a member in the Higher Education Academy or those kind of things, um, but what is, also does, or has, in my department is that people don't have time to do those kind of things because they just teach all the time... (Teaching-oriented academic, RIU 2).

The idea of devotion to teaching was found across all of the sample universities and across the various roles of the academics. A research-oriented participant described, for example, how he and his colleagues devoted time and effort into teaching in the following way:

The good ones [academics] devote time and effort and get the feel good factor from having done a job well. Some others see it as a chore and believe it's a box they have to tick to gain advancement and will drop the teaching as soon as possible. This is often reflected in student feedback and as a coordinator, it's sometimes easier to teach the course oneself than have it half-heartedly done. It seems the faculty relies on the same few people who actually care about the students to take up the slack and believe everything is going well as they have little clue about the effort that those individuals have to put in to teaching so other people don't have to (Research-oriented academic, RIU 3).

Devotion to teaching included aspirations to do the job in the best possible way. For some participants this meant not counting the hours or having a «tick-box» mentality of playing the game of rewards and recognition. Deep interest in teaching and a desire to engage fully with it was highlighted by one participant in a teaching-oriented role:

...it's just that actually there's an art in being an educator and actually it's quite good when you have a few people who have spent their lives doing that, so they are actually experts in it (Teaching -oriented academic, RIU 3).

3.2. *The Relationship Between Teaching and Research*

The interview data suggests that for the participants there was a strong awareness of the relationship between research and teaching – perhaps not surprising given the context in which they were working. This relationship was often described as difficult and troublesome. Concerns were raised about the competing demands of research and teaching and a perceived lack of parity in how these two areas of work were valued, recognised and rewarded. The demands of academic work were often connected to additional tasks, time pressures, and meeting targets and expectations. Just under half of the participants expressed a view that in their institutions, teaching was not as highly valued as research, often experiencing this in the way in which resource and time was allocated to teaching or research activity. For those academics whose main role was teaching, they felt a strong sense of hierarchy within their academic departments, with teaching-focused staff being placed firmly at the bottom. This was further compounded by a view that institutional systems for recognising quality research were perceived to be much more robust than those for recognising teaching excellence.

Both research and teaching-oriented participants were found to experience the relationship between research and teaching as problematic:

...in terms of producing individual research around medicine or medical education or my field specialty which is [subject], um, it's simply not being allowed to start because of the lack of time doing the day-to-day [subject] support job... so it hasn't really started in a way that I would have liked it to, um, for a variety of reasons, a lot of it has to do with the way that the school runs at the minute or doesn't run as well as it should...I have sort of hit a brick wall now in terms of the backing and support, and a lot of it is to do with money and how money is spent ... there are signs that things are changing, ... the money that is spent and the value given to teaching has a direct impact on what I am trying to do in medicine, so if money, if there is only a certain amount of money to go around in an university and emphasis is put skewedly rather towards research in a quite uneven way, it means that that has a direct impact on things like employing people to support my role, buying [specific means of support]

to change practices and offer students new opportunities, that's where the day-to-day reality is affected, but it all comes back to that same tension and the uneven priority given to research in a university like [name] that's how it affects someone like me... (Teaching -oriented academic, RIU 4).

Another research-oriented participant described this troublesome relationship in the context of her understanding of how teaching was valued and rewarded by her university and considered that teaching was much less robustly valued and rewarded than research:

... so a couple of years ago I had no research funding whatsoever, no research projects, um, and what I was asked to do was to cover lots and lots of teaching on lots of courses and my time was much more structured by that, um, and I was constantly asked to demonstrate my, that I was in a sense covering my own salary by teaching, um, and it was a very, you know, a very irregular process, so you realised that if you do lots and lots of teaching, you're much more closely managed than if you do research where you're kind of left alone basically if you can bring in research income, you know, they don't, you're left to get on with it in a way that you are just not if you do a lots of teaching... um, so that's the form of recognition, that you can be trusted and to manage your own time, manage your own development in some ways, and for me that's a massive bonus of this area of work, is that you, yeah, that you're not called to justify yourself all the time, um, ... there's just the more informal process of recognition that ... how you get identified, how you get called to assume certain strategic roles within the university, so most of that goes to people who have a good research profile so... there's very, I mean there are awards for, and prizes for, you know, teaching as well but that feels much more evasive... much more kind of in-permanent or ephemeral than other aspects of what the institution does ... because it is a research institution there is quite a strong emphasis on autonomy, there are very large departments, people tend to work very much on their own, so actually there isn't a well formalised... um, structure of recognition for work... (Research -oriented academic, RIU 2).

Many of the participants argued that universities need to work harder to improve the parity of esteem between research and teaching, so that the perceived gap between research and teaching could be closed. There were suggestions for improvements including re-balancing the distribution of research and teaching-oriented staff, and giving equal amounts of support and guidance for managing and succeeding at both. However, many of the participants expressed a strong interest and commitment to enjoying both research and teaching and valued them.

For those participants responsible for research and teaching, it was their involvement with research and the intellectual stimulation of research which was identified as the main reason for coming to work in HE and staying in it. Many talked about how they would not want to have a job without a research aspect in it, even though the demands of meeting expectations for publications and

research funding were a challenge. For some participants, it was their research that informed their academic identity. For teaching-only participants, this strong sense of identity was not so strongly expressed.

4. Concluding Comments

Wider research in the field suggests the need for much more sophisticated understandings of teaching quality than that currently being promoted in the context of the English TEF. Gibbs' work, for example, defines various dimensions of teaching quality that use student feedback in combination with structured activities which are designed to maximise student engagement with their learning and teachers' ability to constructively reflect and change their practice. (Gibbs, 2012; Gunn & Fisk, 2014). Such activities involve, for example, collaboration between teachers and students in learning activities, facilitation of peer-peer work between students and giving students responsibility for sharing feedback. The emphasis here is on the transformative power of learning and not just on baseline quality assurance or compliance metrics.

Emerging findings from Hilli's study indicate that the academics in her sample of research-intensive universities were very conscious of the external policy context and environment and associated pressures on expectations for high quality research and teaching. Though her sample was largely positive about their institutional cultures, there was a strong sense of a perceived gulf between the competing demands of teaching and research. Most significant was the idea that teaching was not as highly valued as research, as reflected in opportunities for promotion, even though institutional policies were formally in place to reward both activities. This suggests that though the research-intensive universities believed themselves to be actively valuing and promoting high quality teaching as well as research, the reality on the ground for some academics was not so clear cut and there may well be some way to go before some of the ideas and principles currently being discussed in the context of a national TEF are fully embedded in practice and in the culture of universities.

Furthermore, given the ongoing political uncertainties and confusion about the purpose and practice of a TEF, research-intensive universities find themselves in a somewhat ambiguous position. Much of the discourse around the TEF implies a commitment to a set of minimum threshold expectations for teaching quality in English universities – with opportunities for institutions to then further demonstrate excellence to varying degrees on an upward scale. This would mean that some universities could argue that they offer a better educational experience than others and will then be in a position to charge higher tuition fees, should

they wish. Such a model could send out quite confusing messages to potential students and may well ultimately damage the overall reputation of the English university system by eroding confidence in perceptions of the quality of provision. Those positioned at the top, as it were, would be fine – but what would this mean for those in the middle or bottom? Ironically, many of the highest ranked English universities, globally and nationally, have earned their reputation because of a sustained historical track record of excellence in research and the production of new knowledge – not necessarily based on the quality of teaching and learning. The increasing marketization of higher education has certainly shifted attitudes and perceptions of what teaching and learning in universities might offer, but ultimately students will make choices based on their own academic abilities, affordability and the reputation of the institutions. Currently it is the reputation of the university which impacts on students' future employability prospects and graduate earning potential. Just how prospective students will interpret a TEF higher education landscape is unclear. Arguably, for universities, a meaningful demonstration of teaching excellence should go beyond the quantitative metrics and embrace many more qualitative and affective dimensions - but current signs are not hopeful in this regard. To do this properly will be costly.

Though a TEF is now set to be the new reality for English HE, it remains an uncertain reality. Hilli's study only goes so far in considering some of the cultural challenges facing research-intensive universities in promoting and valuing high quality teaching but it does throw an interesting light on the challenges. Effective teaching in the school sector is a well-established, though contested field in educational research. However, research on effective teaching, teaching quality and the measurement of teaching practice in the HE sector is relatively new and emergent. Similarly, research on the experience of academics as teachers and the multitude of factors that could influence their practice – such as race, gender and ethnicity as well as the type of HE institution to which they belong is also emergent, but prescient in the current policy milieu. Somewhat missing from the current English debate on the TEF is a discussion about different approaches to pedagogy, curriculum and different teaching and learning styles in HE and the impact that these might have on student learning and outcomes. It is ironic that with its strong focus on social mobility and diversity, that the White Paper makes no reference to the potential of emancipatory and critical pedagogies and curricula in universities and a wider interpretation of the transformative power of learning and knowledge creation. This is a research area which warrants further investigation. Looking ahead for the study of the field, there will be considerable scope for further research and evaluation, both of the higher education policy landscape and the implementation and impact of a TEF on English universities, as well as some of the more holistic aspects of teaching and learning in HE.

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