



How Will the Government's Higher Education Green Paper Impact the Industry?

Description

A higher education green paper – [*Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice*](#) – was published by the Department for Business, Innovation & Skills last week. It includes a list of new proposals targeting improved productivity, transparency and accountability in the sector. Of the points covered in the green paper, the most notable are details on how the previously announced teaching excellence framework (TEF) will be set out.

Teaching Excellence Framework

The introduction of the TEF means that universities that provide a high standard of teaching by its measures will be allowed to raise their annual tuition fees in line with inflation. The minister of state for universities and science, Jo Johnson, has repeatedly stated the importance of ensuring teaching is a top priority in universities, and not just a hoop to jump through in order to receive funding for academic research.

“For too long, teaching has been regarded as a poor cousin to academic research,” Johnson states in the paper’s foreword. “The new Teaching Excellence Framework, which we promised in our manifesto, will hardwire incentives for excellent teaching and give students much more information, both about the type of teaching they can expect and their likely career paths after graduation.”

Universities will be ranked on a scale of one to four, using data from surveys such as student satisfaction, graduate employment, and degree completion. The new framework encourages transparency from both sides, making universities more accountable for their levels of teaching, and proposing more detailed grading of university degrees, adding a grade point average alongside the traditional honours grading of university degrees.

Creation of Office for Students (OfS)

The green paper also proposes the creation of an Office for Students (OfS), which would provide a greater focus on protecting student interests than the Higher Education Funding Council for England ([HEFCE](#))

). Indeed, the proposals would see the newly created OfS absorb both the HEFCE and the Office for Fair Access ([OFFA](#)), with the goal of strengthening effectiveness and reducing the duplication of work.

Professor Madeleine Atkins, the chief executive of HEFCE, commented, “The higher education green paper proposes a reshaping of the higher education system which puts students at its heart. We look forward to contributing to the debates and developments it will foster”.

Fewer higher education market entry restrictions

Many of the green paper’s proposals aim to create a more competitive higher education market, and one way of doing that is to increase the number of competitors. It looks at how the process of universities gaining degree-awarding powers can be streamlined, as well as making it easier for new universities to enter the market.

The simplification of the current system would mean that deserving universities and institutions could compete with established universities on the merit of their teaching standards and academic research. The main concern around this, however, is that the simplification of market entry could inadvertently lead to a devaluation of higher education – particularly if we see US-style “diploma mills” enter the fray.

While many of the proposals in the green paper are still a long way from being put into action, many of the proposals – such as the TEF – will not require changes to primary legislation. How many of these proposed changes actually come to pass, and in what form, remains to be seen.

What do you think about the Teaching Excellence Framework and the other proposals laid out in the green paper? Let us know on [Twitter](#)!