

The impact of scholarship on quality assurance and assessment in college higher education

Introduction

This guidance note addresses the impact of college higher education scholarship on successfully meeting Quality Code expectations, its relevance to the TEF, provider submissions and, if appropriate, achieving degree awarding powers.

As Quality Assurance develops from a focus on review to a focus on metrics, the need to consolidate and build on the enhancing impact of scholarship becomes increasingly relevant. The impact of scholarship stretches beyond its contribution to complying with external criteria. It directly impacts on student learning opportunities, thereby enabling students to progress and succeed. This places scholarship at the heart of Quality Assurance.

Scholarship in college higher education is an important focus for a number of the key developments in the regulatory environment. Its link with the Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) is explored below, but its linkage to the Revised Approach to Quality Assessment is similarly worth considering, specifically through the baseline regulatory requirements, most clearly couched in the Framework for Higher Education Qualification (FHEQ) and Quality Code criteria.

Revised Approach to Quality Assessment:
<http://www.hefce.ac.uk/reg/QualityAssessment/>

Evidence of good practice from Higher Education Review (HER)

The college higher education sub-sector has great strengths around scholarship, which capitalise on the strong vocational emphasis demonstrated by many providers, and their focus on teaching. These were evident in some of the outcomes from Higher Education Review against specific expectations (and which will endure in the new quality assurance arrangements).

For instance, Grimsby College is identified as having good practice in *'the institutional support for staff development relating to professional updating and scholarly activity'*. This is embedded in an institutional strategy that encourages a culture of staff development.

The review team wrote: *'Continuing professional development plays a key role in promoting enhancement and is linked to individual staff appraisals. This is supported by the Institute's higher education fellowship scheme and Higher Education Academy (HEA) accreditation of its leadership and teacher excellence programme.'*

'A teaching, learning and scholarship wiki provides an online forum for academics to disseminate their research through a peer-reviewed process. Staff teaching vocational-professional subjects maintain their skills through relevant industrial updating. Staff members are supported in acquiring HEA Fellowship status and benefit from fee remission when studying for higher qualifications.'

This example emphasises the importance of embedding scholarship in a broader strategy of skills and knowledge development, echoed by the review team at West Nottingham College, which wrote: *'The College has a strategy for scholarship in higher education including potential support for conference attendance for staff who are presenting papers and for journal subscriptions.'* And at Newham College, where *'the College's approach to research and scholarship are underpinned by the higher education Teaching, Research and Scholarly Strategy 2015-18.'*

At Leicester College, this strategising of scholarship extends beyond the individual provider. Reviewers wrote: *'The College has taken a distinctive approach to scholarly activity, by working with other colleges to form a peer review and research development group in 2012. Work in this area has included conferences and other activities aimed at embedding scholarship and research, to enhance college higher education learning and teaching.'*

These examples demonstrate the importance of a strategy that embeds scholarship as an essential component for a culture of staff development, linked to the development of HE students.

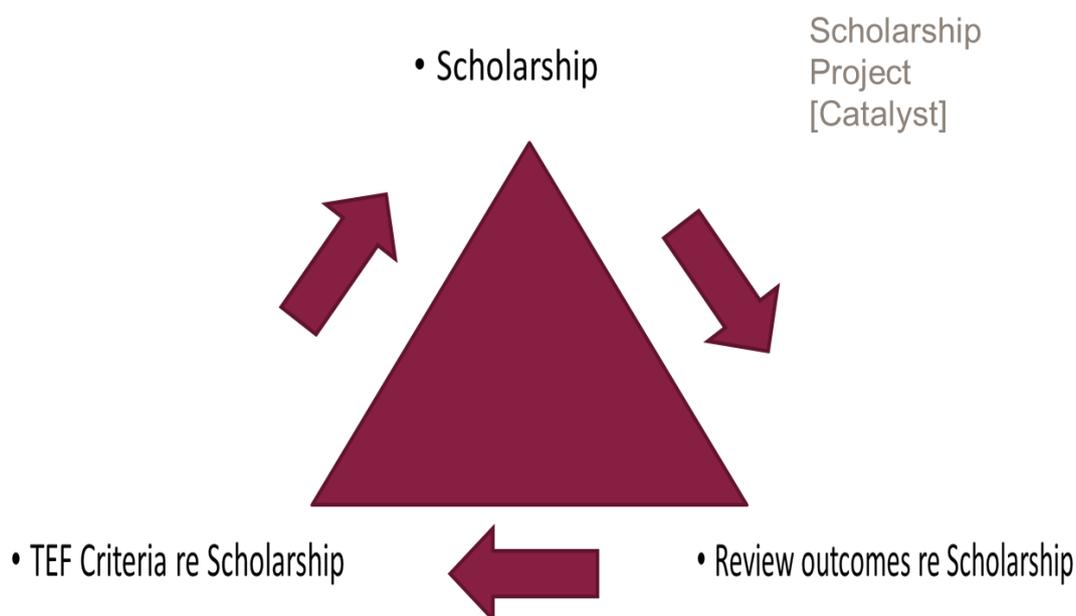
The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) and Annual Provider Review (APR)

This strategic focus is echoed in the TEF metrics, which talk about scholarship, research and professional practice (LE2). It says that: *'The learning environment is enriched by student exposure to and involvement in provision at the forefront of scholarship, research and/or professional practice'* and talks about the *'extent and impact of student involvement in or exposure to the latest developments in research, scholarship or professional practice (one or more).'*

Through these metrics, TEF explicitly picks up on the theme of scholarship and on the inflection of scholarship on teaching quality. However, other TEF criteria describe a more implicit relationship with scholarship through its impact on outcomes. They talk about scholarship as part of the learning environment; about how scholarship enriches learning; about provision that is focused on scholarship; and about how students benefit from exposure to a curriculum informed by scholarship.

TEF is not alone in its focus on metrics. Annual Provider Review uses the same or similar material. These initiatives present a new culture to use data in a transformative way, with the intention of positively changing teaching. This emphasises the importance of reflecting good practice in the data that records its outcome.

This relationship between scholarship, good practice revealed (for instance) in review and TEF criteria regarding scholarship can be shown in a diagram:



Essentially, the Scholarship Project, review activity and TEF are about the same thing. The three components are interrelated. They share the same objective – to improve higher education for students.

In addition to establishing a strong relationship between the outcomes of review and its impact on data, a provider might, in preparing its TEF submission, choose to use some of the evidence that it used during HE Review, or evidence that emerged during the review to contextualise data.

Here are some examples drawn from HE Review that indicate approaches to scholarship in colleges and might impact on teaching excellence:

- engagement of staff in research, scholarship and professional practice and the positive impact this has on the student experience. (Hartpury College)
- support for the scholarly development of teaching staff through mechanisms such as scholarship platforms and bulletins. (Havering College)
- involvement of staff in research and scholarly activity which contributes to an enhanced student learning environment. (Hull College)

All this suggests that there is a wealth of scholarly activity that can be drawn on in matching evidence against TEF criteria. However, it is important to remember that TEF assumes baseline quality assurance criteria have been met, so it's not enough to simply assume that what was deemed good practice in HER will serve the same purpose in TEF. Providers need to show how they have developed scholarly initiatives and, importantly, this will need to be reflected in benchmarked data.

So, how providers engage in scholarship has the potential to impact on TEF metrics, which are the starting point for TEF assessment. Similarly, scholarly activity can be used as evidence for meeting broader TEF criteria such as 'valuing teaching', where a provider might be expected to show how it encourages scholarship and professional practice to improve teaching; or 'positive outcomes', where a provider can demonstrate how scholarship informs approaches to learning gain, to improve progression.

TEF Year 3: <http://www.hefce.ac.uk/it/tef/participants/tef3/>

http://www.hefce.ac.uk/media/HEFCE.2014/Content/Pubs/2017/201725/HEFCE2017_25.pdf

Degree Awarding Powers (DAP)

Linkage to Degree Awarding Powers is, perhaps, more explicit, outlined in the DAP criteria and the 'Guidance on scholarship and the pedagogical effectiveness of staff: Expectations for Foundation Degree-awarding powers and for taught degree-awarding powers' (which is subject to review).

Useful links on Degree Awarding Powers:

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/526812/BIS-15-532-foundation-degree-awarding-powers-october-2015.pdf (specifically criterion C1)

and

<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/publications/information-and-guidance/publication?PubID=3108#.WnhDtfnFLIU> (subject to review).