
SCONUL response to HE Green Paper

1. Background

The HE Green Paper released in November includes a broad range of proposals that could potentially transform the HE sector. Given the breadth of the subject matter, it is not appropriate for SCONUL to attempt to answer each consultation question in full. Rather, we will use our response as an opportunity to assert the strategic importance of the library and librarians in developing, delivering and evaluating excellent teaching. We have chosen questions 6, 10 and 14 where this is most relevantly done.

There will be a technical consultation in 2016 with regard to what metrics will be used in evaluating the TEF. The Transformation Strategy Group will make a detailed response in consultation with members when the time comes.

2. Response to questions

Questions 6: Do you agree with the proposed approach to TEF assessments on... Timing.... assessment panels.... and process?

With regard to assessment panels:

SCONUL feels strongly that in order for panels to achieve a broad and holistic understanding of teaching at an institution, professional librarians should be included in assessment panels.

Librarians have a key role in the academic enterprise of their institutions. They are responsible for directly teaching students in areas that are essential to a graduate's career readiness and academic success, such as information literacy and academic skills. Many have received recognition for their commitment to teaching and learning with HEA fellowships and accreditation.

They work alongside academic colleagues to ensure students have access to quality resources and environments (online and physical) designed to facilitate teaching and learning. Librarians across the sector have strategic and practitioner-level responsibility for delivering these resources and spaces.

The three areas of focus mentioned below (teaching quality, learning environment, and student outcomes and learning gain) are areas where librarians are well positioned to provide expertise and relevant experience in evaluating excellence. It is also a group with a strong history of using data to evaluate and improve services. It would be wise to include these voices alongside those of academics, students and employers in a panel charged with assessing an institution's teaching excellence.

Question 10: Do you agree with the focus on teaching quality, learning environment, student outcomes and learning gain? Please give reasons for your answer.

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We agree that the three areas of focus provide a good starting point for evaluating teaching excellence. We look forward to responding in full to the technical consultation on specific metrics related to these areas.

SCONUL notes an absence in the descriptions of these areas with regard to learning space, particularly the library, and professional services staff. Strategically designed learning spaces, both physical and virtual, are supported by professional staff and connect students to the resources and services required to enable their learning. Librarians provide teaching staff with the scholarly content for remaining up-to-date in their academic fields and pedagogical practice. Choosing metrics in the areas of teaching quality and learning environment that do not regard the value of learning spaces, particularly the library, will provide review panels with less-than-adequate information with which to evaluate teaching excellence.

Under 'teaching quality', we propose to amend the third bullet point to read:

- The courses, curriculum design, **learning spaces (eg, the library)**, teaching and assessment are effective in developing all students' knowledge and skills.

Under 'learning environment', we note the description: 'this is the wider context of teaching and associated resources to support learning within an institution, and ensuring the student develops the ability to study and research independently' (Chapter 3, point 8). The bullet points which follow, however, fail to include any indication of how these supporting resources are developed and delivered. The library provides these resources and supports students with services to develop these independent research skills essential for employment.

We recommend including an additional bullet point in this description:

- Quality assured learning resources and professionally supported services and spaces are in place to ensure academic success and employability of students.

Question 14: Do you agree with the proposed single route into the higher education sector? Please give reasons for your answer, including information quantifying how the potential cost of entry would change as a result of these proposals.

Throughout Part B, Chapter 1 of the Green Paper, there is mention of minimum standards for new entrants, though they are not stated explicitly. SCONUL advises that any minimum requirements embedded in this single

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route recognise the strategic value of the library for higher education providers of all mission groups and modes of learning.

New entrants may rely heavily on online delivery of teaching and learning. It would be an uninformed position to allow the minimum standards to reflect a view that an academic library with its provision of space, resources and professional support is not essential in these virtual environments.

- An abundance of online resources has made the library's role in quality assurance and strategic purchasing of content increasingly important to institutions. Professional librarians deliver value for money in a way that individual academics or departments cannot.
- Though more and more resources are available online, students have shown no decrease in their usage of library space and services. See [‘Changing trends in loans, visits & the use of e-books’](#), SCONUL, 2015.
- Collections of resources (electronic or print) that support teaching and research excellence require a professional understanding of a complex and changing scholarly communications market as well as an understanding of the institution's academic enterprise. This knowledge and expertise lies with librarians.
- Creating the learning spaces (virtual and physical) to meet the needs of a diverse student body requires significant investment, not just in the structures themselves, but in understanding and evaluating the student experience to make those spaces fit for purpose. Librarians are equipped with the skills and information to develop and support these spaces.

We feel a danger in creating an abbreviated process is that it may make simplifying assumptions about the investment required to lay the necessary foundations for creating a sustainable higher education provider. One of these foundations for any HE provider is certainly the library.