

News story: New measure to tackle grade inflation at university

Universities will be discouraged from inflating students' results with 'grade inflation' one of the key criteria institutions will be measured against in the government's national rating system, Universities Minister Sam Gyimah announced today (22 October).

The Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework (TEF) rates universities with gold, silver or bronze scores based on a number of criteria including their overall provision, student experience, teaching quality and whether courses are sufficiently stretching enough – the government is also piloting a subject specific version of it.

Announcing a second year of pilots to move subject-level TEF a step closer, Sam Gyimah confirmed today that these will also look at grade inflation, with TEF panellists reviewing evidence to see whether universities are taking a responsible approach to degree grading and not awarding excessive numbers of firsts and 2:1s. It means a university's provider-level rating of gold, silver or bronze will take their approach to tackling grade inflation into account.

Grade inflation will be an important feature of the criteria considered alongside how a university is stretching its students through course design and assessment, and through their ability to develop independence, knowledge and skills that reflect their full potential. It forms a key part of the government's commitment to delivering real choice for prospective students.

This is one of the first measures taken by the government to tackle grade inflation, with the plans confirmed in the government's response to the [subject-level TEF consultation](#).

In the last five years alone, figures from the Higher Education Stats Authority show the proportion of graduates who gained a first class degree has increased from 18% in 2012/13 to 26% in 2016/17, which means over a quarter of graduates are now securing the top grade.

Universities Minister Sam Gyimah said:

When you look at what makes our universities so prestigious, it comes down to the value of our degrees – they open up a huge range of opportunities and the chance to step into a rewarding and highly-skilled career.

The value of those degrees is threatened by grade inflation and that is a problem for students, employers and the universities themselves. These new measures will look at how we can protect our globally recognised higher education system by discouraging universities from undermining the reverence a degree qualification

from the UK commands.

The Universities Minister has also outlined in the government's consultation response that a year of pilots will take place this academic year to see how this works in practice, involving 50 higher education institutions.

The government's response additionally confirmed that plans to extend TEF to subject-level have moved a step closer, meaning individual subjects will also be rated with a gold, silver or bronze rating in the coming years.

Subject-level TEF builds on the greater choice being made available to prospective students by letting them look behind provider-level ratings and access information about teaching quality for a specific subject.

The new subject-level framework will take into account student feedback, drop-out rates and graduate outcomes – helping students to make the right decision, which for many is life-changing.