14 January 2016

Alison Haines
Higher Education
Department for Business, Innovation and Skills
Level 1, 2 St Paul’s Place
125 Norfolk Street
Sheffield
S1 2FJ

Dear Ms Haines,

The IET’s response to the BIS Green Paper on “Fulfilling Our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice”

In response to your call for evidence, we would like to submit our comments on the BIS Green Paper on Fulfilling Our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice.

The Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) is Europe's largest professional engineering and technology organisation comprising over 160,000 members worldwide. The response to the Green Paper represents the views of members of our Education and Skills Policy Panel which consists of senior representatives from engineering academia and industry.

If the IET can be of any further assistance please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

[Signature]

Paul Davies
Head of Policy

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The IET welcomes the proposals which aim to ensure that students benefit from high quality teaching. However, it is notable that the proposals do not specifically define teaching excellence, and the measures for this (graduate employability, destination data and the NSS) do not necessarily equate to identifying high quality teaching. We are also concerned about the administrative burden on universities. Graduate employability is very dependent on the date at which the data is collected: students sometimes choose to take ‘timeout’ before they start on their chosen career and the reliability of destination data (collected at six months after graduation) is questionable.

The current proposals focus on TEF at the institutional level. We agree with the response from Engineering the Future (alliance of the professional engineering institutions) that further breakdown will be necessary for the following reasons:

a. an institutional (only) score will not necessarily confirm excellent teaching in all disciplines
b. it may not provide meaningful data to a student on specific degree programme and thus could even mislead the audiences that it is supposed to assist
c. Very different approaches to teaching are required in, say, the humanities and lab-based subjects, which suggests that teaching metrics will need to be different by discipline.

We believe that the establishment of discipline-focussed TEFs might be more meaningful. As an example, for engineering, the accreditation process provides a possible mechanism to contribute to this. Engineering Accreditation is an established and effective method of ensuring quality in engineering degrees and supports links between academia and industry.

Accredited status of degree courses informs potential students, their advisers and employers about degrees that meet the standards set by the engineering profession. The accreditation process gives HEIs a structured mechanism to assess, evaluate and improve the quality of their programmes. This is an established, mature and respected process, undertaken by panels comprising employers and academics, and therefore provides a potentially important contribution to a TEF discipline-specific judgment. Degree accreditation offers the independent review cited in the Green Paper, with the added bonus of international recognition.

The engineering profession broadly welcomes the opportunity afforded by the Green Paper/TEF to raise the profile, value and credibility of the profession’s degree accreditation process.

We strongly encourage BIS to consider utilising similar existing mechanisms overseen by the professions or Learned Societies as measures of teaching excellence. The IET would welcome a discussion with BIS to explore possibilities with regard to the profession’s standards and processes for engineering degree accreditation playing a key role in the TEF, the resourcing of this, and issues that would need to be addressed to enable this to happen. This would include broadening accreditation to all engineering departments and programmes and maintaining accreditation as a threshold standard alongside a series of levels that can be ranked.