

The Teaching Excellence Framework's Role in Constituting Gendered Inequalities in the Neoliberal University

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Abstract

This thesis builds on feminist literature critiquing gendered practices in the university. Drawing on the feminist new materialist onto-epistemology of Karen Barad, which brings our attention to the productive nature of measurement apparatuses, it explores how neoliberal measurement tools in higher education help (re)constitute gendered inequalities amongst academic staff. Specifically, the research aims to ascertain how the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), a recently introduced measurement tool in the university, intra-acts with neoliberal values, research-intensive university cultures, and gendered norms, to produce gendered inequalities.

The research analyses government policy papers surrounding TEF and qualitative provider submissions from the twenty-one Russell Group universities that applied for a TEF accreditation between 2017 to 2019. It analyses these documents using Bacchi's framework, *What is the Problem Represented to Be?*, to interrogate and make visible the values and assumptions underpinning TEF and its emergence in its particular shape and form. It further examines how TEF in turn embeds and enacts these values and assumptions across three key aspects of higher education. First, the very nature of the university and its institutional goals and objectives. Second, the conception of teaching excellence within institutions. Third, the academic subject, and the production of 'valued' and 'marginalised' academic identities.

The thesis analyses how these processes intra-act to constitute gendered subjects, practices, and inequalities. It shows three key dimensions of the gendering process. First, that the TEF process represents a continued privileging of 'objective' measurement practices, which feminist scholars have argued to be deeply flawed. Second, that TEF (re)produces the devaluation of practices that have historically been feminised. Finally, that the material effects of these practices reinforce patriarchal norms, by homogenising spaces where knowledge is made at the expense of a more inclusive set of values and identities.

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This research is evidence that an academic pursuit is not just the endeavour of one person.

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List of Abbreviations

AS - Athena SWAN

DfBIS - The Department for Business, Innovation, and Skills

DfE - The Department for Education

DHLE - Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education Survey

EDI - Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion

HE - Higher Education

HEFCE – Higher Educational Funding Council for England

HESA - Higher Education Statistics Agency

KEF – The Knowledge Exchange Framework

KPIs – Key Performance Indicators

LEO – Longitudinal Educational Outcomes

LSE – The London School of Economics and Political Science

NSS – National Student Survey

NTFs - National Teaching Fellowships

OfS – The Office for Students

QMUL – Queen Mary University of London

PSRB – Professional Statutory and Regulatory Bodies

REF – The Research Excellence Framework

TEF – The Teaching Excellence Framework

THE – Times Higher Education

UCL – University College London

WPR - What's the Problem Represented to Be?

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Introducing the Gendered University

1.1.1. *Why study gendered inequalities in the university?*

UK universities are organisations at the forefront of cutting-edge ideas and advances in research, bringing about new innovations, technologies, and forward-thinking projects. Despite this, their record on gender and other forms of inequality appear to be somewhat less futuristic, as numerous studies have shown (e.g., Baker, 2012a; O'Reilly et al, 2015; Travis et al, 2009). In 2020, universities recorded a 14.7% median pay gap between male and female employees, and a mean bonus gap of around 27% between male and female employees (Corden, 2021). When we take the makeup of academia as a whole, 47% of academics are women compared to 53% men. Although this is a fairly small gender disparity, amongst professors the number of women drops to only 28% compared with 72% men (HESA, 2022). Figures from the 2020/21 academic year show that Black and Minority Ethnic academics made up just 17% of staff and 11% of professors (HESA, 2022). Shockingly, 2021 data on the professoriate from Advance HE showed a total of 13,335 (63.5%) white male professors, compared with 5,385 (25.6%) white female professors and only 575 (2.7%) Black and Minority Ethnic female professors (AdvanceHE, 2021:258).

There is an underrepresentation of women in senior roles in arts, humanities, social sciences, business as well as a significant drop in women in senior positions in STEM subjects: 17% of computer science professors are women, 17% of science professors are women, and just 16% of maths professors are women (Berger, 2019). In 2019/20, while both male and female academics held teaching and research contracts, proportionally more men held these contracts than women (47.8% of men, compared with 39.4% of women). More women had teaching-only contracts (36.6%, compared with 28.8% of men) (AdvanceHE, 2021:199). This is important to note due to the current prestige gap between teaching and research (Blackmore et al, 2016; Fleming, 2021). Outside of solely academic roles, men also make up the majority of senior managers across all subjects at 65.1% (AdvanceHE, 2021:200). When taking into account only science, engineering and technology (SET subjects) this rises to 71.9%, exemplifying the differences and discrepancies between departments (AdvanceHE, 2021:200). Given that the proportion of female staff on the highest pay spine range was just

over half that of the total proportion of male staff (11.0% of total women compared to 20.6% of total men) (AdvanceHE, 2021:200) it is unsurprising that the pay gap is still so high.

Furthermore, research shows women receive fewer invitations than men to speak at universities and conferences (Nitttrouer et al, 2017; Klein et al, 2017; Nature, 2016) and women delegates can feel less able to participate at these events (Hinsley et al, 2017; Salem et al, 2021). Women are less successful in gaining research funding (Bedi et al, 2012; Bornmann et al, 2007; Van der Lee & Ellemers, 2015), are published less than men (Bendels et al, 2018), receive less credit in collaborative publications (Filardo et al, 2016; Walker, 2020) if they are included at all (Ross et al, 2022), and receive fewer citations even when publishing in high impact journals, particularly in the STEM subjects (Chatterjee & Werner, 2021; Grogan, 2019; Ghiasi et al, 2015). Many institutions have tried to bring about change with gender equity initiatives, such as Athena Swan, but progress is slow, and many feel these types of accreditations are just one more metric to add to an ever-increasing set of standards by which universities advertise themselves to the world rather than a means of inducing systemic change (Harrison, 2018; Yarrow & Johnston, 2022). Additionally, the burden of producing these documents falls predominantly on female and/or minority faculty members (Henderson, 2019; Tzanakou & Pearce, 2019).

The recent global pandemic has also been a shock to the system, showing just how fragile the gains that women have made have been (e.g., Minello, 2020; Motta, 2020; Utoft, 2020; Guy & Arthur, 2020; Güney-Frahm, 2020). For example, multiple studies found that female authored journal submissions plummeted when the lockdowns began, (Fazackerly, 2020; Matthews, 2020b; Ross, 2020), a trend which was not replicated in male authored submissions (Fazackerly, 2020); and mothers in particular were unable to meet funding application or fellowship deadlines (Ross, 2020). Research shows that perpetual gendered inequalities in divisions of labour in the home was a contributing factor to women's reduced productivity (Ferguson, 2020; Power, 2020).

Research demonstrates many reasons for the inequalities in gendered outcomes in HE. These include, the impact of motherhood and maternity leave on female academics (e.g., Ahmad, 2017; Baker, 2012b; 2013); the gendered division of labour inside the home, which leaves less time for women to focus on demanding work schedules in the university (Sümer

& Eslen-Ziya, 2023; Wolfinger et al, 2008); and the gendered division of labour inside the university, with women spending more time on 'academic housework', including administrative, pastoral, and emotional labour (e.g., Monroe et al, 2008; Morley, 1998; Watermeyer et al, 2020; Weeks, 2011). This is in addition to the disparity of time spent by women in teaching roles as opposed to research roles (AdvanceHE, 2021), where teaching holds less prestige (Morris et al, 2022) and is less valuable for gaining tenure or promotion (Baker, 2012a; Brommesson et al, 2022).

Moreover, perceptions of gendered attributes can also harm women's success in the academy, through their inability to 'fit' the image of 'ideal workers' (Baker, 2012a; Broadridge & Simpson, 2011; Ely & Meyerson, 2010; Rees & Garnsey, 2003; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012; Van den Brink et al, 2016). This is exacerbated by gendered perceptions of women in the classroom, which can harm their ability to leverage authority and respect (Morris et al, 2022), and lead to lower ratings in student feedback tools (Heffernan, 2021) which are becoming increasingly important measurement tools for judging academic performance (Theil, 2019). Due to pre-existing gendered vertical segregation in the university, those who have the power to affect change often do not have the will (Kelan, 2018; Monroe et al, 2008; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012), and academic gatekeepers are often masculine figures who are situated in male networks which contribute to the further marginalisation of women (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2014; Yarrow, 2020).

Given the wealth of feminist research studying gendered inequalities in academia - both theoretically and empirically - we have to ask why progress is so slow, and whether as-yet unidentified barriers may be hampering change. Research on organisations has shown that gendered inequalities can be rendered invisible behind a veil of supposedly 'legitimate' factors as to why women do not progress in the workplace in the same way as men. These factors are based around an essentialised view of gender, and in the context of neoliberalism, an assumption of 'meritocracy' and 'free choice' (Rottenberg, 2018). That is, for example, arguments surrounding innate differences between the sexes which means that it is assumed women do not display the necessary attributes for leadership roles (c.f., Eagly & Karau 2002), or more commonly today, that women simply have differing preferences regarding the family/work divide upon which they are acting (c.f., Rottenberg, 2018; Stephens & Levine, 2011). In the context of the university, this is framed as women simply 'opting-out' of

academic progression or academia altogether (Nielsen, 2017) which hides the structural barriers and systemic inequalities which lie behind this outcome (Nielsen, 2017; Utoft, 2020). Moreover, there is an argument that gendered inequalities, such as the gender pay gap, have become so naturalised that there is a lack of urgency to change (UCU, 2018). The naturalised and embedded nature of this phenomenon is vital to unpack, and this research turns its attention to the relative lack of analysis as to the 'neutral' practices and processes which are (re)producing gendered inequalities and making strategies to combat the material outcomes of inequalities more difficult to implement. Given the slow rate of change in gender equality within the university, despite years of feminist work, this study examines the underlying ways in which gender and gendered inequalities are constituted in the first instance, rather than assessing their outcomes.

1.1.2. The intersection of neoliberalism

To this end, this thesis focusses on how the underlying processes and practices of the university may be (re)producing gendered inequalities. This entails interrogating policy and practices within and surrounding HE, in particular, examining the measurement apparatuses which have proliferated in the university under neoliberalism (Craig et al, 2014; Deem, 1998; 2003; Jones et al, 2020; Shore, 2008; 2010; Shore & Wright, 1999; 2000; 2015; Spooner, 2015; Strathern, 1997; 2000; Tourish et al, 2017; Welch, 2016). These practices are marked by an increased focus on measuring performance, competition, and efficiency; and the marketisation of academic work (Shore & Wright, 1999). The influx of measurement tools in HE can be observed in apparatus such as the Research Excellence Framework (REF), the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), the Knowledge Exchange Framework (KEF), and the National Student Survey (NSS), as well as a rise in other internal mechanisms of audit such as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

These practices present themselves as neutral and objective through the presentation of their measurements as 'self-evident and benign' (Shore & Wright, 1999:566). However, measurement practices necessarily centre certain goals and values whilst marginalising others, as well as constituting subjects in particular ways. They have been shown to shape the focus and behaviours of institutions (Jones et al, 2020; Welch, 2016) as well as acting as coercive tools on the behaviours of academics (Shore & Wright, 1999). For example, the NSS

shifts the university's focus onto prioritising 'student experience' (Bell & Brooks, 2018) and has been argued to produce the academic subject as 'competitised' and 'responsibilised' (Theil, 2019:539) and students as 'consumers' of higher education (Naidoo & Williams, 2015).

The inclusive and exclusive constitutive effects of these instruments of measurement may also be reconstituting gendered hierarchies and (re)producing gendered inequalities. For example, the import of the measurement apparatus of REF shapes the priorities and actions of institutions and is an indicator of prestige for individual academics (McManus et al, 2017). An academic's so called 'REF-ability' is associated with advantageous career gains (Yarrow, 2018). However, historically REF has served to sideline female academics due to the entanglement of many of the issues referenced above – for example, divisions of labour which restrict women from spending time on their research (Davies et al 2015; Yarrow, 2018), informal male networks (Kellard & Śliwa, 2016; Yarrow, 2018), unconscious bias (ECU, 2013; Yarrow, 2018), the demographics of gatekeepers e.g., editorial boards or REF panels (Yarrow, 2016), and the undervaluation of collaborative working (Davies et al, 2015; McManus et al, 2017). These disparities also intra-act with notions of excellent research which are themselves constituted through cultural gendered value systems (Morley, 2016; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2011; Yarrow, 2018). The conception of intra-action versus interaction will be explained in Section 1.2 below and unpacked in detail in Section 4.2.3 of the Theoretical Framework which explores the onto-epistemological assumptions of this research.

Since universities are sites at the forefront of knowledge production, the sidelining of certain groups in academia has implications both for those who are directly marginalised by measurement practices, and for our wider knowledge-making practices, as it impacts who is legible as a legitimate 'knower' and what is legible as legitimate knowledge (Fricker, 2007; Lund et al, 2022; Morley, 2016). Thus, this research focusses on the effects of measurement apparatuses which are presented as neutral but have gendered inclusive and exclusive constitutive effects, aided through the use of a Baradian theoretical lens which turns our attention to the productive nature of these apparatus in constituting the world. This lens will be laid out in section 1.2.

1.1.3. TEF as a measurement tool and its intra-action with gendered inequalities

This thesis takes TEF, as a recently adopted measurement tool in the university, as its object of study. TEF was introduced under the UK government's *Higher Education and Research Bill* (2017) and is a tool which is posited to measure teaching excellence in the university. It does so by measuring three categories which it constitutes as surmising 'teaching excellence': teaching quality, learning environment, and student outcomes and learning gain. TEF is primarily a quantitative tool, with two core metrics serving as the measurement for each of these categories, using data derived from the NSS (teaching on my course, assessment and feedback, academic support), the Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA) (continuation), and the Destination of Leavers Survey (DLHE) (employment/further study, highly skilled employment/further study). There are also additional materials which institutions may submit: three supplementary metrics (grade inflation, sustained employment/further study, above median earnings) and a qualitative provider submission which outlines the wider context of an institution and where performance against the metrics can be explained.

TEF warrants examination for four key reasons:

- 1) TEF both exemplifies a neoliberal measurement apparatus and is built upon metrics derived from a range of other apparatuses, highlighting how these tools become embedded and their metrics imbued with normative value. Student feedback tools such as the NSS have already been shown to embed gendered inequality (Heffernan, 2021), and yet the NSS is mobilised here for three of the six core metrics.
- 2) TEF includes a qualitative text, whereby universities are able to produce their own account of excellence apart from the metrics. This allows for a wider conceptualisation of the constitution of excellence, and so has the potential to make visible more of the gendered labour conducted in the university.
- 3) Because of its focus on teaching, TEF has the potential to make visible academic labour which has been hidden in other measurement practices such as REF, and to disrupt the hierarchy between research and teaching which has been shown to have a gendered aspect (Yarrow, 2018).
- 4) The relative infancy of TEF increases the urgency at which it should be analysed and its effects assessed.

This research assesses the assumptions that are embedded in TEF, and how as a boundary-making measurement practice, TEF produces what is valued in the university. That TEF is a tool for measuring teaching, as opposed to research quality, marks a change in the way that universities – and individual academics – have traditionally been measured by 'excellence' frameworks and metrics. Its focus on teaching has the potential to disrupt the traditional valuation of types of academic work. It ties into the tensions and hierarchies in prestige and value given to research versus teaching, which tend to fall along gendered lines (e.g. Aiston & Jung, 2015; Baker, 2012a; Davies et al, 2020; Davies et al, 2016; Symonds et al, 2006; Santos & Dang Van Phu, 2019; Subbaye & Vithal, 2017; Yarrow, 2018; Zulu, 2013). However, from the research conducted on other tools of measurement we know that what is left out of being measured can serve to marginalise certain groups, and TEF must be similarly interrogated to judge its inclusionary and exclusionary constitutive effects. Studying TEF is therefore a novel way of exploring gender issues in HE. Thus, this thesis seeks to understand how TEF constitutes the university, teaching excellence, and the academic subject in particular ways, *producing* specific gendered effects which may impact the effectiveness of gender-based equity initiatives.

1.2. Theoretical Underpinnings

This study is distinctive in adding to an emerging body of work on these issues, conducting the research through a new materialist framework, founded predominantly on the work of Karen Barad (2003; 2007) and their metaphysical theory of agential realism. Agential realism is a metaphysical approach which turns our attention to the agency of materiality and its role in the continual 'becoming' of the world (Barad, 2007). It aims to eliminate the material/discursive binary by conceptualising 'the material' and 'the discursive' as inseparable and entangled phenomenon. To understand this, Barad provides us with the conception of intra-action, replacing interaction, to understand how there are necessarily no 'fixed' bodies which exist before their interaction. Instead, all phenomena or bodies which make up the world, emerge through specific intra-acting agencies (Barad, 2007). Importantly for this research, agential realism draws our attention to the import of measurement apparatus in knowledge-making practices, whereby the apparatus is responsible for producing specific phenomena. In Barad's (2007:148) words, 'apparatuses are the material conditions of possibility and impossibility of mattering; they enact what matters and what is

excluded from mattering'. This means that any instrument of measurement is a 'boundary-drawing practice', determining which concepts take precedence over others, and therefore what comes to 'matter' (Barad, 2007:140).

Therefore, the adoption of agential realism in the context of the neoliberal university helps to uncover how the influx of measurement apparatuses, such as TEF, which are cast as 'neutral' or 'innocent' tools, are in actuality playing a part in the constitution of the organisation, including the (re)production of gendered inequalities found within. Agential realism provides a way to cast into sharp relief what is measured and what is not, to identify the underlying values guiding these measurement decisions, and the potential gendered effects of what is (and what is not) being captured and then produced by TEF. Agential realism also makes us think about our own measurement practices, and the researcher's intra-action with their methods producing the object of study in particular ways. Following the work of other feminist scholars such as Donna Haraway (1991), this allows us to think about how our research - rather than revealing something about the world – actively makes it.

This approach opens up for investigation the mechanisms by which the category of gender and gendered inequalities are constituted, highlighting how the mutual intra-action of material and discursive practices in TEF come to continually (re)constitute the phenomena that it measures. The approach also alerts us to the boundary-marking practices of TEF, whereby one concept is prioritised or centred necessarily at the expense of another. Under this lens, TEF is a productive apparatus, therefore its conception of excellence becomes how the phenomena is constituted, embedding and normalising it throughout the university. The intra-action of this with gender and gendered practices, turns our attention to how these apparatuses play a part in co-constituting gendered subjects and gendered inequalities. This is important to establish, as the way in which gender is conceptualised impacts how gendered inequalities are approached and consequently the solutions posed to try to remedy it. This will be outlined in a discussion of the trajectory of feminist organisational theory in Section 3.3.

1.3. Aims and Objectives

This thesis scrutinises TEF as a measurement tool used to assess excellence in the university. It assesses the framework itself, the surrounding government policy documents, and the twenty-one Russell Group qualitative ‘provider submissions’ alongside their ‘statement of findings’ which outline the TEF panel’s award decision. The data focusses primarily on the Russell Group universities – a group of 24 UK based, research-intensive universities who self-describe as ‘world-class’ (Russell Group, n.d.), because research-intensive universities tend to grant far more prestige to research than to teaching (Baker, 2012a). Using the Russell Group allows for an examination of the tensions between how these universities have traditionally been measured, through research excellence, and how TEF, which elevates teaching excellence, may shape their behaviour and expand or change how excellence is constituted within the institutions. TEF also allows for an examination of student-focussed academic labour which has historically been feminised but may come to ‘matter’ under this framework.

Overall, this study addresses the extent to which TEF - by focussing on teaching - signifies a shift in how excellence in HE is constituted. In doing so, the research has three key aims. First, it interrogates TEF’s underpinning assumptions and how these are presented as objective. Second, it asks how TEF’s specific formulation of excellence and the indicators used to measure it, constitute the university’s goals and values, the practice of teaching, and the academic themselves. Third, it asks how these practices – what they value and what they sideline – may be constituting these phenomena in gendered ways and the effect that this may then have on the (re)production of gendered inequalities. Studying TEF is therefore a novel way of exploring gender issues in HE.

The questions guiding this research are as follows:

RQ1: What are the assumptions embedded in TEF and how is it being presented as an ‘objective’ measurement tool?

RQ2: How is TEF constituting higher education? (The university, teaching excellence, the academic subject)

RQ3: How is this constitution being produced in gendered ways?

RQ4: What is the effect of this constitution and how is it producing gendered inequalities?

1.4. Key Findings and Contributions

In alignment with the research objectives and research questions, this study found three key dimensions of the gendering process produced by TEF, which are outlined below.

1.4.1. TEF embeds the privileging of 'objective' measurement practices

First, this research finds that the TEF embeds measurement practices that are assumed to provide objective assessments of teaching excellence. In doing so it continues to *privilege* 'objective' measurement practices, at the expense of broader explicitly situated practices. These measurement practices are embedded and normalised so as to become unseen and unquestionable, making points for disruption and other ways of being increasingly unthinkable. However, measurement tools are not neutral, and this research shows that TEF is underpinned by, and reproduces, a distinctly neoliberal logic. How it conceives 'teaching excellence' is deeply entangled with norms regarding the purpose of the university and who it is intended to serve. In this paradigm, HE is an individualistic model with the university situated as a private good primed to maximise the utility of the student in the job market. This focus is what the measurement apparatus is built around as well as reproduces, excluding other possibilities such as social good or the value of knowledge from its purview, and thus constitutes a very narrow conception of excellence.

Furthermore, TEF uncritically embeds pre-existing measurement apparatus, relaying their findings as both objective and as accurately reflecting the phenomena that they are mobilised to measure. This is identified in the TEF metrics themselves (Chapter 6) which derive their data from the NSS, HESA, and the DLHE. The emphasis on pre-existing measurement apparatus also continues in the university submissions (Chapters 7-9) which 'evidence' their excellence in various dimensions through the emphasis of League Tables, REF, and other tools of measurement, whilst rarely explaining how these tools reflect a measure of teaching excellence. The centring of these tools helps to (re)produce what they measure as an unquestionable good, as well as assuming that what they capture is an accurate

reflection of this 'good'. TEF, as a productive measurement apparatus, then produces these measurements as constitutive of excellence.

1.4.2. TEF (re)produces devalued feminised practices and spheres within the university

Second, this research demonstrates that TEF embeds gendered norms and gendered inequalities in the university, through the unequal stratification of, and value given to, gendered labour. Despite TEF being introduced to shift institutional focus towards teaching, in an attempt to value areas of university provision which had been devalued, feminised work such as pastoral labour and university 'housework', even in regard to teaching, is still sidelined. Again, this is produced both through the TEF framework itself and through the university submissions. TEF's measure of 'teaching excellence' tends towards a measurement of 'student outcomes', which is implied to be indicative of excellent teaching. There is no measure of the labour which takes place to conduct teaching in the classroom, nor is there substantive discussion of classroom teaching in the university submissions. Further, the data showed that it is not just the types of labour conducted in the university whose value is (re)produced along gendered lines, but gendered notions of value are also replicated across disciplines and subject areas. TEF centres those subjects which fit into the paradigm of high-value employment, devaluing other areas of study and research such as the arts and humanities where women are disproportionately situated.

Through their TEF submissions, the Russell Group produce a broader conception of teaching excellence than the metrics alone. Shaped by the TEF framework, they continue the prioritisation and centring of student outcomes such as high-value employment, as well as maintaining a focus on student satisfaction as a measure of success. What is additive, in the main, still centres historically gendered notions of excellence in academic work, namely, a focus on research-led teaching. This intra-acts with tools for measuring research prestige, such as REF and global league tables which themselves are brought into being through gendered conceptions of research excellence. Whilst there is also clear evidence toward a shift in value bestowed upon teaching, through discussions of the introduction of mechanisms such as teaching tracks for promotion, the submissions themselves still reinforce the research/teaching hierarchy. The work which is produced as skilled and embodied is the work of researchers. Excellent teaching is positioned as a skill which naturally follows research,

sidelining the labour which goes into the day-to-day aspects of teaching. Here, it is the feminised labour of the teacher which is lost through a lack of extrapolation of the roles.

1.4.3. TEF produces the university as a homogenised site, further excluding diverse identities

Finally, the thesis shows that the intra-action of TEF which both measures and constitutes notions of excellence, the devaluation of feminised labour, and the increasingly neoliberalised HE sector, reinforces patriarchal norms in the university, with material effects to women. TEF homogenises universities through its narrow constitution of excellence, at the expense of a broader, more inclusive set of values. This excludes feminised practices and knowledges from this sphere of excellence and as a result delegitimises them as valuable assets in HE spaces. This is exacerbated by the intra-action of TEF with a deregulated, competitive higher educational sector, which makes the impetus to align with its narrow purview of teaching excellence all the more potent, with significant risks involved in non-conformity and the pursuit of other goals and visions, as these become inconsequential in performing teaching excellence. TEF, through its rankings systems of gold to bronze, and the embedding of the ideological tenets of competition, produces institutions which can become coded as HE 'winners' and 'losers'. This materially effects the kinds of subjects, knowledge bases, and labour which are valued in the university and sidelines those who do not fit with this specific constitution of excellence, which as identified, is a masculinised conception. The metrics shape the behaviour of institutions and in turn the submissions demonstrated institutions' promotion of tools of measurement and observation designed to make staff compliant to their wider goals, measuring and shaping individual academics' performance. Through embedding these practices, the submissions also (re)constitute what it is to be embodied as an ideal academic, in a paradigm where excellence has been shown to be constituted through a gendered lens.

1.4.4. Contributions

This research provides four key contributions. First it provides a theoretical contribution by demonstrating the value of utilising an agential realist approach to explore the effects of measurement apparatus in understanding their role in the constitution of inequalities. Second, it provides a contextual contribution, as the first in-depth study which

assesses TEF's role in producing gendered inequalities in the university. Third, it provides a methodological contribution by reading Bacchi's (1999) *What is the Problem Represented to Be* analytical framework through an agential realist lens, extending its utility to examine material-discursive apparatus. Fourth, it offers a pedagogical contribution through situating this research as a form of feminist praxis in its own right, disrupting naturalised narratives, and foregrounding that which we want to 'matter'.

1.5. Thesis Outline

The thesis begins, in Chapter 2, by establishing the wider political and socio-economic context of this research. It outlines the current neoliberal landscape of the UK and explains its ramifications on HE. It then examines the current gender regimes in the UK and discusses the changing logics of feminist approaches to addressing wider issues of gendered inequality. In doing so, it brings these two themes together, discussing how neoliberalism has both affected gendered inequalities and interpolated itself into new feminist subjectivities with implications for the progression of feminist goals.

Chapter 3 turns its attention to the practices of the 21st Century university. It charts the ways differing schools of feminist thought have addressed gendered inequalities in organisations. It then provides an overview of gendered inequalities in the university, the attempts to affect change, and examines why these attempts may be stalling. The chapter then discusses how these theories have been applied and critiqued in the context of subjectification in the university, delving deeper into how these neoliberal practices intra-act with gendered inequalities. It highlights an emerging body of agential realist work focussed on the university and uses this to present the research problem addressed by this thesis.

Chapter 4 outlines the theoretical underpinnings of this research, specifically the feminist new materialist lens of agential realism. It examines how agential realism extends post-structuralist thought to provide a useful new frame for conceptualising the issue of gendered inequalities within organisations through an in depth focus on the role of measurement apparatuses in universities. It also shows how Haraway's (1991) concept of 'situated knowledges' can help us to think about knowledge-making practices.

Chapter 5 explains the rationale for choosing the TEF as an object of study. It details the specific data set used in this thesis, and lays out the analytic framework of 'What is the Problem Represented to Be?' (Bacchi, 1999; 2009; 2021) through which the data are collected and analysed.

Chapters 6 to 9 present the findings of this research. Chapter 6 develops a genealogy of TEF, and analyses the assumptions contained in the wider policies around HE that shaped TEF's emergence and particular form. It examines the 'problems' that TEF was introduced to address, the indicators that TEF uses in making its assessments, and the values and priorities which the framework embeds and enacts. In chapters 7, 8 and 9, I examine how the university submissions constitute the university, teaching excellence, and academic subjectivity in response to the TEF framework, and assess the gendered effects of these constitutions. Chapter 7 shows how TEF constitutes the university, its purpose, and its role in a particular way. Chapter 8 discusses how TEF constitutes 'teaching excellence', what teaching *is* and how it is measured. Chapter 9 analyses how TEF constitutes academic staff, and how it is used as a mechanism for shaping academic subjectivities, or academic 'responsibilisation' (Foucault, 2004).

Chapter 10 provides a discussion of how TEF, the university, teaching excellence, academic subjectivity, gender, and gendered inequalities are intra-acting phenomena, entangled together with iterative effects. It also outlines evidence from the provider submissions that indicates that there may not be a cohesive neoliberal narrative. This thesis closes in Chapter 11 by outlining the contributions and implications of this study as well as further lines of research that could be conducted in light of these findings.

Chapter 2. Research Context

2.1. Introduction

This chapter provides the research context of this study. It examines how the political, social, and economic landscape of the UK, shaped by neoliberal ideology, has had a profound effect on shaping the modern HE sector. In so doing, the chapter outlines how neoliberalism has been theorised and conceptualised, to understand how its underlying mechanisms shape state policy and practice which in turn underlies the “common-sense” assumptions and values embedded in neoliberal higher educational policy such as TEF. Additionally, through providing an outline of the key aspects of gender regimes in the UK, the chapter shows how the assumptions of neoliberalism have both exacerbated gendered inequalities and been inculcated into the logics of some feminist perspectives, bringing forth a particular neoliberal approach to “fixing” these inequalities. This context is crucial in setting the stage to understand the trajectory underlying universities’ shifting internal mechanisms, as well as to understand how neoliberal and seemingly gender-neutral policies may contribute to gendered inequalities in the university and the difficulties in affecting change.

The chapter is in three parts. The first unpacks the conceptual underpinnings of neoliberalism, examining how it has been understood as an economic system and as regime of power. This provides the foundations for the second part of the chapter, which gives an overview of neoliberal policies that have been rolled out by successive UK governments over the last two decades, affecting British universities. It also provides a foundation for the analysis throughout this research, which conceptualises TEF as an implicitly neoliberal instrument of measurement informed by distinctly neoliberal values. This section covers the policy of austerity and other factors aligned with the neoliberal landscape of the UK which now inform the HE sector, these being the rise of anti-intellectualism and Brexit. The final part of the chapter examines this neoliberal agenda against the backdrop of gender regimes in the UK and changing feminist approaches to instilling equality. This gives grounding to the issues raised in the literature review concerning gendered inequalities in the university to understand how they are part of a much larger entangled socio-political system of gendered inequalities.

2.2. Neoliberal Regimes

2.2.1. Conceptual clarification

Crucial to this research is how the current context of the neoliberal university constitutes gendered inequalities in a particular way. I begin by clarifying what is meant by neoliberalism: first as an economic ideal and a particular iteration of capitalism and second as an all-encompassing regime acting on the social, cultural and individual realms. Neoliberalism as regards economics pertains to a particular set of values relating to free-market economics, namely marketisation, financialisation, and privatisation, which became mainstream after the Washington Consensus in 1979. It marked a shift away from Keynesian economic policies, investment in public services, and support from ‘cradle-to-grave’ which was dominant in the political and economic landscape in the UK since the end of the second world war (Peck, 2010). The years since 1979 have established neoliberalism as the dominant economic system in the UK, as well as the dominant ‘common-sense’ politics - so intertwined with economic systems that the state must shape and embed the policies necessary to uphold neoliberal economic logic. Thus, neoliberalism has become a ‘paradigm shaping all policies’, economic, political, or otherwise (Gamble, 2009:76). This thesis takes this conceptualisation of neoliberalism as an all-pervading paradigm which enacts itself not only in state and organisational policy decisions centred around economic rationale, but also as something which affects our individual identities and notions of self, the effects of which are outlined below.

2.2.2. Neoliberal economics

The primary understanding of neoliberalism is as an economic system favouring free market economics, with policies aimed at a smaller state, particularly as regards the welfare state and redistributive taxation, the privatisation of public services and infrastructure, and the deregulation of finance and capital flows (Brown, 2020; Harvey, 2005). Examples of its modern iteration in the UK in policies such as austerity will be explored in Section 2.3.1 of this chapter. The focus on economic competition is also key to the workings of neoliberalism, whereby the state is responsible for policing the economic system and ‘will establish the conditions favourable to competition’ (Friedman 1951, cited in Porion & Mort, 2022:14). This economic model has caused a shift in the way the state operates, as neoliberal governments

instil policy that favours free market rationales and state retrenchment, ultimately though ‘introducing the disciplines of the market into the state’ (Gamble 2009:83). As Gamble (2009:87) elucidates, ‘competitive pressures force the convergence of all capitalist models in all national economies into neoliberal institutions and policies’, meaning that under a neoliberal system, all policy, at both a state level and within public and private organisations, end up aligning with a neoliberal rationality to survive.

These primary economic arguments are important to understand in the context of this research not just as building blocks upon which a neoliberal rationale is built, but also because of their effect on public spending policy and university funding, and the priorities that the state requires in return for this funding. Interrelatedly, ideological arguments about *who* should fund HE under a neoliberal paradigm are raised, with the shifting of the conceptualisation of the university from a public to a private good demonstrated in the introduction of tuition fees (Mintz, 2021), and the conception of the university as a business-like organisation within an economic free market (Olssen & Peters, 2005). Furthermore, the fetishisation of competitiveness under a free-market rationale pits organisations and institutions against each other, constituting winners and losers and providing ripe ground for comparison tools such as league tables and benchmarking which are now embedded in the modern university (Herschberg et al, 2018; Lorenz, 2014; Shore & Wright, 1999; Shore, 2008). These tools will be unpacked further in section 3.2. of the literature review.

2.2.3. Neoliberal rationalities

The reason that neoliberalism can be described as a regime, is that for it to work as an economic model, it must be subsumed into all areas of life, requiring a restructuring of the whole of society around these rationalities. The advancement of free-market neoliberal capitalism cannot be achieved without major shifts in society and culture. Economic models are extrapolated out, whereby it is not only markets that are assumed to be logical and (economically) rational utility maximisers, but also the state, organisations, and individuals (Nash & Churchill, 2020). Brenner (interviewed in Brogan, 2013:185) describes this as a ‘process’ of *neoliberalisation*: rather than simply an ‘ideological movement’ it is a ‘trajectory of regulatory reorganisation’. Similarly, Brown (2005:40) argues that neoliberalism is an all-consuming and transformative rationality, whereby ‘all dimensions of human life are cast in

terms of market rationality'. Thus, she states that a key feature of a neoliberal political rationality is that all processes and practices are *only* valued by their profitability, efficiency, and utility (Brown, 2005). Furthermore, she argues that persons and states - and here I will posit organisations - are all organised to maximise their capital value, since any regime which goes counter to this pursuit, will suffer a significant loss of 'legitimacy' (Brown, 2020:22). This is important because it valorises an economic framing of all areas of life, at the expense of a political, social, ethical, or moral one. This change in priorities leads to a shift in the way that organisations must justify themselves, particularly those set up for the public good which now find themselves situated as profit-maximisers. Again, we begin to see how this connects to HE, as universities become situated as organisations focussed on economic maximisation, catering to economic growth (Giroux, 2020; Fleming 2021), and focussed on the employability of their students as contributors to the economy (Ingleby, 2015; Mintz, 2021; Nixon et al, 2018).

Individuals are situated in this paradigm as 'homo-economicus', wholly rational actors who act to maximise their economic profitability and productivity, and responsible for their own success in the marketplace (Brown, 2005). Hence, the ideal of 'meritocracy' is a hallmark of many neoliberal regimes (Littler, 2018). This tenet of individual self-maximisation implies a landscape of equality where everyone has equality of opportunity, masking structural inequalities and consequently, framing those who are "left behind" as wholly responsible for their circumstances. These structural inequalities tend to hit women particularly hard, as well as being mediated by class, race, sexuality, age, and disability (Evans, 2015). For these people, things are made more difficult as their problems are individualised and internalised (Blackmore, 2006; Nash & Churchill 2020).

An acute problem in tackling issues deriving from neoliberalism, is that its sensibilities and processes have become so all-consuming and pervasive that its underlying rationale is 'incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world' (Harvey, 2005:3). Indeed, in economic terms, late-term neoliberal capitalism has seemingly successfully cast itself as having no alternative, making a vision of an alternate paradigm impossible to imagine. So argues Mark Fisher (2009) in his book *Capitalism Realism: Is There No Alternative?*, a reference to the Thatcherite claim that there was no alternative to free-market capitalism no matter its drawbacks. Indeed, the term 'cognitive locking' has been

given to the inability to envision any kind of policy outside of the neoliberal orthodoxy (Blyth, cited in Harvey, 2005:114) and this concept helps to explain why, even after failures in neoliberal economic policy such as the 2008 financial crash, neoliberal ideas bounced back with relative ease, in some cases becoming further entrenched (Mirowski, 2014) as was the case with the austerity programmes rolled out by the UK government in 2010. It is also why advocates of neoliberal ideology do not need to defend it, instead claiming that it is 'just the way things are', making it even more difficult to pin down and confront (Evans, 2015). Gill (2003:117) agrees that the 'transformative practices' of neoliberalism are captured as 'capitalist progress' - a forward drive of history - that make it difficult to see outside of the paradigm and to mitigate its worst effects.

2.2.4. Neoliberal subjects and governmentality

If we conceptualise neoliberalism not just as an economic system, but as a form of reason which constitutes norms, the site of power moves from the direct rule of the state and onto the subject. It is not enough for the state to enact free-market economic rationale throughout its own policy and practice, it must continuously and deliberately 'develop institutional practices and rewards for enacting this vision', through mechanisms of reward and punishment, wider norm-making discourses, and normative reason (Brown, 2005:41). Grzanka et al (2016) take this view, conceptualising neoliberalism as a process whereby individuals' behaviours are regulated and shaped through tools of surveillance and self-discipline. Foucault (2004) terms this process 'governmentality', again, conceptualising neoliberalism in terms of the way that power functions within it, changing from a power that is wielded from above to a pervasive form of self-management and tool of behaviour modification (Brown, 2005; Foucault, 2004; Read, 2009). Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983:30) describe governmentality as: 'that which conditions, limits, and institutionalises discursive formations', and this definition brings us to the way in which (and the confines within which) the subject is constituted. The extrapolation of economic rationale onto the individual, as well as these mechanisms of control and behaviour modification, combine to constitute a specifically neoliberal subject, defined as 'individualised, entrepreneurial, and self-investing; [and...] cast as entirely responsible for their own self-care and well-being' (Rottenberg, 2018:8) with profound implications for how we assess gendered inequalities and subjects within organisations against the backdrop of supposedly meritocratic systems.

However, whilst as outlined, neoliberalism has become so embedded as to become invisible, the concept of neoliberalism is still ‘a loose and shifting signifier’ (Brown, 2020:20) changing from location to location and context to context. In many ways the concept itself is a specific material-discursive arrangement that is constantly in the process of being remade. In other words, there is no one fixed conception of what neoliberalism is, instead it exhibits variety in its ‘discursive formulations, policy entailments, and material practices’ (Brown, 2020:20). This diversity of how neoliberal sensibilities manifest is echoed across the literature (e.g., Brown, 2020; MacNeil & Paterson, 2012; Gamble 2009; Plehwe, 2009). MacNeil and Paterson (2012) are at pains to acknowledge that ‘all neoliberalisms are distinct...[with] competing logics and interests that fight for expression in the policy process’ (MacNeil & Paterson, 2012:232). For example, many would conceptualise a key aspect of neoliberalism as the ‘roll-back of the state’ – however as MacNeil and Paterson (2012) explain, neoliberal policy is not about free market ideology replacing state power, instead, it is a reorganisation of the relationship *between* institutions and the state. The fluctuating nature of neoliberalism is particularly important to keep in mind in policy which would not traditionally be associated with free market economics and neoliberalism. For example, aspects of welfare policy, can be redrawn and strategically applied for new goals and to push certain agendas, e.g. tax breaks for married couples as informed by the UK Marriage Allowance, can be argued to push the ideal of the traditional nuclear family. As Harvey (2005) elucidates, these tensions are not *failings* of neoliberal governmentality but, rather, the way in which neoliberal rationality operates. Consequently, in attempting to subvert neoliberal agendas, it is crucial not to identify one specific thread as an essential “truth” about its nature or the key to its operation. In the case of academia, ties with the government are closer than they have ever been, and the state is central to the form that university policies take, responsible for shifting priorities universities must conform to, as to retain funding. Thus, no matter the specific dynamics, neoliberal ideology can shape and affect organisations and institutions in various ways to subsume them into its rationale (Nash & Churchill, 2020).

To summate, neoliberalism influences not only policy and practice of the state, but its rationale has also been subsumed into organisations and individuals, shaping how we see ourselves and the world. Neoliberalism’s defining characteristics, the fetishisation of economic pursuit, focus on competition, individualism, and meritocracy have all shifted the

case for universities and a university education and the way in which workers within a university are situated, which will all be discussed in depth in Chapter 3.

2.3. Neoliberalism in the UK

The following section takes the theoretical conceptions of neoliberalism and shows some of the ways it has unfolded in practice in the UK. It highlights its impact on the realities of the political, social, and economic landscape, with a particular focus on the changing context of HE. The evidence and impact of neoliberal regimes replicating themselves *within* universities will be unpacked further in section 3.2, alongside how they have been seen as exacerbating or constituting gender inequalities. This section begins by outlining the flagship neoliberal programme of austerity and its effects on HE, as well as reflecting on the rising tide of anti-intellectualism, and the inputs and consequences of Brexit, all of which are entangled to constitute the very particular context in which the research-intensive university now operates.

2.3.1. Austerity measures

Although the effects of neoliberalism had been taking shape since the Washington Consensus, the 2010 UK Conservative-Liberal Democrat Coalition Government solidified some of its blunt economic practices through embarking on a programme of austerity, defined as deep and rapid cuts to public spending (Abed & Kelleher, 2022). This meant a plummeting in the amount of spending in the public sector with services being hit particularly hard, aligning with the free market ideals of a smaller state, and the undermining of the state welfare system. This model emphasised the responsibilities of the individual – through discourses of getting people ‘back to work’ (McKee et al, 2012), as well as ‘communities’ stepping in to replace the state, captured in the idea of the ‘Big Society’ (Coote, 2010). Some examples of the austerity measures introduced in the first austerity budget include cutting the welfare budget by £11bn – a third of the total budget; a freeze on public sector pay and child benefit; and cuts to various government departments (Elliott & Wintour, 2010; Seely & Webb, 2010). Further, although some taxes were raised, these hikes took the form of ‘regressive taxation’, whereby the proportional burden of tax falls harder on the poor than the rich (Tax Foundation, n.d.). In this case, a rise in VAT meant that the poorest were disproportionately affected, whilst concurrently corporation tax was lowered, with the assumption that the private sector holds

the key to economic growth and as such should not be privy to government interference (Seely & Webb, 2010).

It is worth noting here the specific links between austerity and the entrenchment of gender inequality. A recent report published by Oxfam argues that austerity measures ‘blend patriarchy and neoliberal ideology’, citing the example of the ‘commodification and exploitation of women’s labour’ (Abed & Kelleher, 2022:5). They continue that ‘austerity is not just a gendered policy; it is also a gendered process in its ‘everydayness’ – the way it permeates the daily lives of women specifically: in their incomes, their care responsibilities, their ability to access [essential services], and in their overall safety and freedom from physical violence in the home, at work and on the street’ (Abed & Kelleher, 2022:5). Indeed, in the UK, the cuts were shown to be gendered, both directly through cuts to women’s services such as rape crisis centres and domestic abuse services (Towers & Walby, 2012), and indirectly in our current paradigm, with women relying more on public services, and cuts to care and children’s services individualising a disproportionate burden of care on women (Abed & Kelleher, 2022). Women were also more likely to become ‘shock absorbers’ of poverty, for example by being more inclined to skip meals to feed children (WBG, 2022) and are more likely to occupy roles which faced job losses or wage freezes, particularly in the public sector (Abed & Keller, 2022; EWL, 2012). Similarly, the ‘Big Society’ has been criticised as being primarily ideological ‘rhetorical cover’ for deep spending cuts, with a lack of scrutiny over this kind of community-based policy particularly as it relates to the entrenching of gendered inequalities (Corbett and Walker, 2012:487), given that it is the valorising of unpaid volunteering stepping in for the role of the state in terms of care and civic responsibilities. As James (2010) expressed at the time, ‘the Tories ‘Big Society’ relies on women replacing welfare’.

The deep cuts across public spending were echoed in HE and combined with a wider reorganisation of the sector with a distinct trajectory towards neoliberalism (e.g., Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017; Fraser & Taylor, 2016; Heath & Burdon, 2013; Radice, 2015; Troiani & Dutson, 2021). The full depth of this reorganisation will be explored in detail in Chapter 6, when analysing the HE policy documentation which ushered in the era of TEF. Here, however I will give an overview of the immediate impact of austerity and specific cuts to HE to understand the key issues facing the sector under this paradigm. The way in which neoliberal policy was replicated *within* the university is outlined in the next chapter.

One of the largest shifts in HE was produced through the introduction of tuition fees and a move away from a state-funded system, brought about as part of the Teaching and Higher Education Act 1998. At this stage, fees were means tested and capped at £1000, but the introduction of fees in and of itself signalled a change in the principle of free higher education, and the beginnings of the reconstitution of HE from a 'public' to a 'private' good (Mintz, 2021:80). The 2004 Higher Education Act allowed fees to rise to £3000 plus inflation, and in 2010, under the austerity measures, the Coalition Government raised fees to £9000. A key attribute of privatisation and marketization is the shifting of the economic burden from the state to the individual. Additionally, tuition fees produced a market mechanism whereby – alongside the lifting of student caps – more students equal higher income for universities (Foskett, 2011).

Shifting the economic burden away from the state and toward a market model was also framed as enabling increased competition, permitting the UK to continue to compete on the world stage and reinforcing the rise of the competitive global free market (Portnoi et al, 2010; Rust & Kim, 2012; Sutherland-Smith, 2013; Zajda & Jacob, 2022), another key hallmark of neoliberalism. The extent of the student contribution – £27,000 often in loans – changes not only the relationship between the student and their education but inculcates them into the market model producing the 'student as consumer' (Ingleby, 2015:518; Mintz, 2021:80; Nixon et al, 2018:927). The assumptions underlying this conception reproduces neoliberal discourses of individualisation, specifically producing students as homo-economicus, 'investors in the self' (Budd, 2017:23) making rational decisions for their own economic maximisation and with an assumption that a university education is a primarily individual gain, delinking HE as a communal public good.

In rearranging the sector to put the financial onus onto the student, austerity measures slashed levels of state-funding. The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) saw large reductions in its budget from 2012 (Bolton, 2021) and in 2018 was shut down completely, with its funding responsibilities as regards teaching being taken over by the Office for Students and research funding to Research England (Bolton, 2021). In this rearrangement teaching was particularly affected, with a recent report showing that in the years since 2012, funding has plummeted to 78% below the 2011/12 level in real terms (Bolton, 2021). Although this gap was partially plugged by the rise in tuition fees, these have

remained frozen since 2012, and there is a great fear within the sector that universities have been pushed to a 'tipping point' toward absolute financial crisis (Adams, 2024). Although austerity measures primarily affected university resources aimed at teaching, there was a smaller impact on funding ringfenced specifically for research, however this has primarily been impacted by a decrease in funding from other factors, namely as a result of Brexit, which will be covered in the following sections.

Overall, austerity measures significantly impacted the socio-economic landscape of the UK with immediate and long-term effects. In HE, reduced public funding led to increased tuition fees, job insecurity, and put pressures on research output and quality. Austerity is arguably also tied to discontent and the rising tide of anti-intellectualism (Aronowitz, 2014) covered in the following section, which has led to a change in how the university is perceived and profoundly altered its justification for its existence. At the same time, austerity had gendered impact, as services that were relied on disproportionately by women saw the harshest effects of cuts, and it was women who were primarily retrenched into roles which had previously been seen as, at least in part, the responsibility of the state. These shifts in economic models were accompanied by an entrenching of discourses around individual responsibility and a rearrangement of priorities around economic goals to justify cuts and wider retrenchment.

2.3.2. The rise of anti-intellectualism

Anti-intellectualism, characterised here as a generalised hostility or 'mistrust towards intellectuals and experts' (Merkley, 2020:24), has seen a rise over the last decade across the West. This has manifested in several ways in the UK, with potentially profound effects on universities at an existential level, as explored below. Perhaps the most famous example of anti-intellectualism in the UK was during the 2016 EU referendum campaign, in which Michael Gove, a cabinet minister and at the time *Education Secretary*, stated explicitly that 'the people of [Britain] had had enough of experts' (Institute for Government, 2016).

Social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have amplified anti-intellectual sentiments, whereby conspiracy theories and misinformation campaigns often target intellectuals and experts, leading to widespread public distrust in academic and scientific communities (Guo et al, 2022; Hannan, 2018). Hannan (2018) argues that extreme anti-

intellectual and ‘post-truth’ discourse has become so mainstream that it has moved from corners of the internet to being contained in rhetoric from politicians and media commentators. Indeed, the trend towards anti-intellectualism is evident in political rhetoric such as the above quote from Gove, as well as being impossible to disentangle the messaging projected by the media. Tabloid newspapers, in particular, have fuelled negative sentiments towards HE by portraying experts and academics as out-of-touch elites; ridiculing academic research and framing it as irrelevant or pushing a particular agenda; and universities as the playground of the elites (e.g. Goodwin, 2023; Stringer, 2023). The Goodwin (2023) article from the Sun for example, is entitled ‘How Britain is being run by a ‘New Elite’ of radical woke middle-class liberals completely out of step with the public’, and states that the class of out-of-touch people are ‘often defined by their elite education at the most prestigious Oxbridge or Russell Group universities’. Stringer (2023) explicitly ridicules the research conducted at universities describing it as ‘peddling an agenda’ to their students. Indeed, Paul Nurse, former head of the Royal Society, stated that the extent of the derision of ‘experts’ has an effect in ‘undermining science’ (Katz, 2017). In terms of wider public attitudes towards HE, a survey conducted by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) found that there was a year-on-year decrease in the number of people who think universities are important to the UK economy; and that a fifth of people think ‘a university degree is a waste of time’ (HEPI, 2022:3). This trend poses significant challenges to the HE sector and requires universities to justify themselves, branches of research activity and their funding anew.

The COVID-19 pandemic also demonstrated the rising tide of anti-intellectualism. During the pandemic, public health experts and scientists faced significant pushback and scepticism (Chen et al, 2023; Merkley & Loewen, 2021). Despite clear evidence supporting measures such as mask-wearing and vaccinations, a segment of the population rejected and protested against expert advice, which Merkley & Loewen (2021) attribute primarily to anti-intellectualism rather than other factors such as political position. Similarly, the phenomenon of climate change denial, which despite overwhelming scientific consensus, sometimes results in a backlash towards those who represent their research (Dunlap & McCright, 2010). Jylhä and Hellmer (2020) found a correlation between climate change denial, pseudoscientific attitudes, and a distrust of the establishment. Interestingly they also found that the strongest predictor of these attitudes was a negative view towards egalitarianism such as feminism and

multiculturalism (Jylhä & Hellmer, 2020), which echoes research which finds that the rise of anti-intellectualism also tallies to a rise in scepticism over research and policy conducted toward gender and inequalities (Gaufman & Ganesh, 2024; Unal, 2024; Peters, 2018).

The mainstreaming of anti-intellectualism culminates in specific issues for the HE sector as rhetoric is inculcated into attitudes towards HE and related policy areas. This is particularly true in attitudes towards the arts, humanities, and social sciences, which are entangled with the higher neoliberal valuation of clear economic gain, rather than intellectual pursuit for its own good (Ashton et al, 2023) as well as the aforementioned target of increased scepticism. This is reflected and entrenched in the devaluation of these subject areas in government discourses labelling them as ‘low value’ (DfE, 2023) or even ‘mickey-mouse’ courses (Ferguson, 2024), unpacked in detail in the HE policy documentation analysed in Chapter 6. Even this increasing marketisation of HE, where universities are pressured to operate like businesses, can be seen as a form of anti-intellectualism as it prioritises profitability over the pursuit of knowledge for its own sake, creativity, or any other social benefit of research. Thus, university practices can be limited through government policy driven by political agendas or popular opinion rather than academic merit. This is particularly acute in a model whereby universities are already strapped for cash and must justify their funding – it is notable that in the TEF framework, a positive result was linked to the ability to increase tuition fees, shaping practice through financial reward and punishment.

2.3.3. Brexit

Brexit is not a direct input into TEF itself, its material impact coming after the TEF was first announced and the publication of the documents analysed in this research. However, it is touched upon here as it contributes to the financial pressures on the university and the rise of anti-intellectualism. It was also part of the context against which, I, the researcher, was collecting and interpreting the data, whereby some of the acute effects of the implications of Brexit were clearly entangled with the wider trajectory of the HE sector. Brexit’s implications are also important when considering the continuation of TEF and its future iterations, especially as it becomes further embedded into the operations of the university.

June 2016 saw the UK vote to leave the European Union (EU) in the Brexit referendum. The long referendum campaign highlighted many of the issues discussed above:

neoliberalism, austerity, and trends towards anti-intellectualism. Anti-intellectualism came to the fore as shown in the Gove quote above which happened during his campaign for the leave vote. Alongside Trump's election, the Brexit vote was seen to many as the boiling point of anti-intellectual and 'post-truth' rhetoric, with many politicians abandoning the pretence of backing up their claims (Bristow & Robinson, 2018; Flood, 2016; Wright, 2016). In terms of how decades of neoliberal policy came to shape the results of the vote, areas most likely to vote for Brexit were those which were the worst hit by austerity measures (Wahl, 2016; Worth, 2016).

As well as compounding the shifting position of academia and research in this climate of anti-intellectualism and anti-elitism (Bristow & Robinson, 2018), Brexit also had a profound effect on the financial position of an already damaged sector. For example, Oxford and Cambridge universities went from gaining more than £130 million a year combined from European research programmes, to, in the years following Brexit, a combined £2m (Matthews et al, 2023). Whilst this funding gap was supposed to be plugged through domestic funding, introducing domestic alternatives like the UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) fund, the transition has not been seamless, with concerns about its adequacy and continuity of funding (Wilsdon, 2016), as well as taking funds away from other areas of HE. What is more, the UK also now must contribute independently to European research programmes such as Horizon, which comes directly from existing research budgets in science threatening up to £2bn a year in cuts (Morgan, 2021).

This funding gap is exacerbated by a reduction in the number of international students post-Brexit. The UK has one of the highest numbers of international students in the world, and this plays a major role in universities' funding model. In 2022/23 for example, income from international students was placed at £11.8 billion, 23% of total income (Bolton et al, 2024:6). However, since Brexit the UK has seen a decline in the number of international students (OfS, 2024), which poses a great financial risk to HE institutes (Lewis & Bolton, 2024). As well as declining international students there has also been a negative impact on collaboration with international researchers (Highman et al, 2023). UK researchers face additional administrative and legal hurdles to participate in EU-funded projects and the end of free movement has impacted researcher mobility, making it more difficult for UK researchers to work in Europe and vice versa (Highman, 2018; Highman et al, 2023). The perception of UK universities on the

global stage has also been affected, with the uncertainty and challenges associated with Brexit impacting the UK's reputation as a welcoming and collaborative academic environment. For example, 64% of potential students from the European Economic Area stated that the UK was now a less attractive study destination (Van Vugt & Neghina, 2019), and many have warned about the potential downward spiral of risk to research as the UK becomes less attractive and less likely to attract the best talent (Syal, 2017; Zubascu, 2022). Furthermore, the Russell Group have a higher number of EU staff than UK universities as a whole and are therefore most vulnerable to the effects of a brain drain (Baker, 2017; Highman, 2018). Ultimately Brexit has compounded the issues facing the sector which show no signs of improvement in the coming years.

2.4. Gender Regimes in the UK

The previous section showed the conditions that the HE sector is currently operating in, with the financial and reputational pressures making the impetus to adhere to external priorities all the more acute. Here, we turn our attention towards how these priorities are entangled with gender regimes in the UK. Gender regimes refer to the multi-dimensional social and institutional arrangements that shape gender roles and expectations, with the overriding pattern of gender relations constituting a regime (Connell, 2006; Walby, 2020). This concept examines how societies structure tasks, responsibilities, and opportunities for men and women, within families, workplaces, and public life, and individual practices (Connell, 2006) and is reflective of wider gender norms and the challenges for those attempting to implement change. Connell (2002; 2006) points to four major points of gender relations which constitute an overriding regime, these being the gendered divisions of labour, both private and within organisations; gendered relations of power, including hierarchies, legal power and violence; human relations, for example prejudices and solidarity movements; and gendered culture and symbolism, i.e. prevailing attitudes about gender. The university as an organisation is a site in which wider gender regimes are reproduced and reoriented.

The key aspect of gender regimes in the UK focused upon here, is the gendered unequal division of labour, with women still disproportionately conducting the majority of domestic and care work. Even though on the surface gender roles have evolved, studies continue to show that women in the UK spend more time on domestic duties compared to men, even when engaging in paid labour full time, referred to as the 'second shift' (Hochschild,

2012b). A time use survey conducted by the ONS (2016) showed women conduct double the proportion of unpaid labour in terms of childcare, cooking and housework. They also calculated that the average woman would earn £259.63 per week on average if this labour were paid (ONS, 2016). Recently, the COVID-19 pandemic brought the inequality in this kind of labour into sharp relief, with women taking on a significant share of additional care work as schools and care services closed (Ferguson, 2020; Power, 2020). Whilst the UK has seen significant changes in women's participation in the workforce, women are more likely to be unemployed than men, and far more likely to work part-time (38% of women compared to 14% of men) often to balance these caregiving responsibilities (Francis-Devine & Hutton, 2024).

This kind of labour is similarly gendered when it is extended into remunerated work. Firstly, some researchers have found that “feminised” labour also is ‘devalued’ monetarily (Hochschild, 2012a) and in terms of prestige (Bubeck, 1995; Okin, 1989) because it is coded as feminine, for example a link between paid ‘care’ roles to unpaid caring labour conducted in the private sphere. There remains gendered segregation within and between occupations. For instance, care work, teaching, nursing, and the service industry are disproportionately represented by women, while men dominate sectors like construction, engineering, and technology (Francis-Devine & Hutton, 2024). The former tend to be lower paid roles, arguably because of their gendered nature (Hochschild, 2012a). This division serves to reinforce gender regimes by perpetuating stereotypes about “appropriate” work for men and women. Even in similar roles, types of work which are conducted can affect women’s recognition and progression through the workplace because the work itself is undervalued (Gibson-Graham, 2006). These reasons are often put forward as substantial factors behind gendered issues such as the persistence of the gender pay gap which currently stands at 14.3% (Francis-Devine & Hutton, 2024).

Government policy and the welfare state also have a role in shaping gender regimes, through reinforcing or challenging them, as can be seen clearly in the above section on austerity. Other areas of policy which embed gender regimes include maternity and paternity leave, which both reflect and entrench societal assumptions about the primary caregiver role, reconstituting the gendered nature of reproductive labour. Research from UCL has shown the UK’s paternity leave as the worst in Europe, describing the system as ‘implicitly matriarchal’

(Moss & Koslowski, 2021). Although some changes have been made in shared leave, the uptake among men remains low (Moss & Koslowski, 2021), which also suggests enduring cultural expectations around caregiving. Similarly, welfare policies, particularly those related to childcare subsidies and flexible working rights, can influence the division of labour within households. For example, limited affordable childcare can push women to reduce their working hours or exit the workforce altogether (Javornik, 2023).

In summary, gender regimes in the UK are evolving but remain deeply embedded in traditional norms. The division of labour — both paid and unpaid — continues to reflect and reinforce gender inequalities.

2.5. The Changing Logics of Gender Equality

These gender inequalities, and their perceived causes and solutions, have been and continue to be understood in different ways across distinctive strands of feminist thought. In the following section I provide an overview of some of the main trajectories of feminist approaches to garnering equality: liberal, socialist, cultural, and neoliberal. Although these threads are deeply complex containing nuances within each approach and overlap between the approaches, there are some key indicators which set each apart. These differences primarily come from the posited main source of oppression which affects the primary focus for those attempting to affect change and the tools needed to do so. Thus, we move from liberal approaches which centre individual rights and liberties, to socialist approaches which focus on economic redistribution and social justice, to cultural approaches which concern societal attitudes towards women, and finally to neoliberal approaches which are heavily influenced by the individualist attitude and ideologies encountered at the start of this chapter.

2.5.1. Liberal approaches

A liberal feminist approach deals primarily with formal equalities and addresses female exclusion within social and organisational structures, for example, women's access to the workplace; as representatives in politics; and inequalities under the law (a prime example of liberal feminist action being the suffragist/ette movement). Stemming from the political ideal of liberalism, liberal feminist approaches adopt the ideals of the individual, reason, freedom, choice, and anti-intervention, but widening these conceptions to include women (Beasley, 2005). It is the role of the state to ensure these freedoms so that individuals have the right to

self-determination, thus, liberal approaches tend to focus on equal rights, with changes being of a predominantly legal nature, appealing to liberal values around equality of opportunity and freedom of the individual (Beasley, 2005).

Liberal feminism is concerned with women's representation. Pitkin's (1967) theory of representation is useful here to show the differing levels of representation that this approach might be concerned with, and how this equates to inequalities in the UK. The levels of representation taken up by feminist scholars are descriptive, substantive, and symbolic. Descriptive representation alludes to the correspondence of characteristics between representatives and those who are represented, for example sex and gender. In the UK, for example, 51% of the population is women and girls (ONS, 2023) but only 35% of UK MPs are women and 30% of the cabinet (Buchanan, 2024). This however is a historic increase since the introduction of all women shortlists by New Labour in 1997, an example of the kinds of tools that liberals might adopt to increase gender representation. The next level of representation is substantive representation which alludes to whether the interests of groups are actually being represented. For example, if there are more women in the legislature are they introducing legislation which represents women's interests and perspectives? For example, the budget for the women and equalities department was cut by over £1 million under female Prime Minister Theresa May (Oppenheim, 2019). However, it is generally agreed that a rise in the representation of women will help to aid substantive representation, although these numbers must be of 'critical mass' (Beckwith, 2007).

Finally, symbolic representation has been understood by some as the effect that female leaders and representatives have on the wider population of that group, e.g. how having women in politics or on boards changes societal attitudes, for example, that these roles are not viewed by society as more broadly the domain of men (Childs, 2008). Lombardo and Meier (2019) expand the import of this definition, stating that symbolic representation is important because it constitutes signifiers which reflect and shape power relations. They use the example of bank notes, which are used to present a signifier of society, what it stands for and wants to project (Lombardo & Meier, 2019). The case of the plan to replace Elizabeth Fry on a bank note with Winston Churchill, left women absent from the bank notes – which it was argued not only erased the historical achievements of women, but also suggested that women

are not central to public life given the lack of state representation of women in the symbolic construction of the nation (Lombardo & Meier, 2019:236).

According to Nussbaum (2021) liberalism is beneficial for women as it frees women to be individuals rather than being subsumed into the family. In the examples we raised in this chapter, this could also be through a focus on changing gender roles of men through legal means, through an equality in paternity and maternity leave for example, so that either partner are not siloed into a particular role. However, this position has been critiqued as the capacity to act on individual freedoms is not the same for women and men when considering wider cultural blockers and systemic inequalities which transcend legal frameworks (Philips, 2001). Ultimately, formal equality of men and women under the law does not equate to equal outcomes for women and men (Dhamoon, 2013). Individualist assumptions in liberalism, can both obscure patriarchal structures, and make it more difficult for women to act as a collective. Even when women are integrated into public life and institutions, it can be argued that women are shaped to fit pre-existing masculinised structures and that it is impossible to have “equality” under patriarchal law (e.g. McKinnon, 1997; 2006). In the context of organisations for example, legislation which allows access to women, or workplaces which offer training programmes to try to increase female representation in management, merely puts the onus on women to adopt the norms of masculinised work environments (Leahy & Doughney, 2014; Brescoll et al, 2013; Humbert et al, 2018; Haslam & Whelan, 2008; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012). Finally, this approach does little to break down the public/private divide. It may even entrench the lack of regulation in the private sphere, due to the principle of freedom from state intervention – so that women’s subordination can be maintained domestically (Higgins, 2004).

2.5.2. Socialist approaches

In response to the limitations of liberal feminism, socialist feminists argue that both patriarchy and capitalism contribute to the systemic oppression of women. It rests on the belief that gender and class inequality are mutually reinforcing systems, and both must be addressed together to achieve real emancipation (Brenner, 2014) taking a structural rather than individualist approach (Dhamoon, 2013). Thus, it is predominantly occupied with the patriarchal differences in gendered labour and economic distribution, viewing the discrepancy as a specific product of the capitalist mode of production (Jaggar, 1995). It argues that

capitalism exploits and is dependent on the labour of women, particularly in unpaid domestic work and underpaid jobs, while patriarchy reinforces the subjugation of women in the public and private spheres (Dhamoon, 2013). Interrelatedly, reproductive freedom is a key concern with control over reproductive rights; as well as reproductive labour—the unpaid domestic work, caregiving, and emotional labour women are expected to perform, central to analyses (Jaggar, 1995). They argue that this type of labour is central to the functioning of capitalist economies but is undervalued or invisible under patriarchal capitalism and in standard Marxist economic critiques (Hartmann, 1997). Consequently, attempts to move toward gender equality cannot be achieved only through laws but through a seismic shift in the distribution and valuation of gendered labour, in particular the divide between labour in the public and private spheres (Jaggar, 1995).

Socialist feminists advocate for collective, inclusive and systemic change. Examples include supporting labour movements, organizing against austerity programmes, demanding reforms in policy particularly around gendered labour (such as childcare) or the formation of cooperatives (Brenner, 2014). In the UK, the Women’s Budget Group (WBG) for example, analyse how economic policies in the UK affect women. They cite unpaid care as ‘the heart of gender inequalities’ (WBG, 2020:1) and other work has highlighted how cuts disproportionately harm women, particularly those from working-class and marginalized communities, describing austerity as ‘gender-based violence’ (WBG, 2022). Similarly feminist groups such as Sisters Uncut (e.g. 2019) advocate collective action against gendered austerity measures. Socialist feminist approaches also support policies such as universal basic income, arguing that it would help alleviate the economic burdens faced by women, particularly those who perform unpaid care work, single mothers, and women in low-paid jobs (Uhde, 2018; Weeks, 2020).

2.5.3. Cultural approaches

Unlike liberal and socialist approaches, cultural approaches embrace the concept of femininity, highlighting and celebrating the “differences” between men and women. It sees women’s oppression as deriving predominantly from patriarchal societal cues which mark feminised qualities as lesser, leading to biases against women’s abilities and an undervaluation of women and their labour (Alcoff, 1988). Ultimately, women as a group have been defined by and in relation to men (Alcoff, 1988). This has led to a devaluation of feminine characteristics

which should be corrected by more accurate feminist description and appraisal (Alcoff, 1988). Whilst it has overlap with Radical Feminism regarding the patriarchal differences between how women and men are treated and perceived, it promotes the idea that feminised traits such as care, cooperation, and emotional intelligence should be embraced and celebrated, rather than advocating for an uprooting of society to rid it of these gendered norms altogether. Although it does not necessarily draw a divide as to whether these differences are innate or socialised (Raymond, 1979), it celebrates female biology, and advocates women's repossession of their bodies against the way they have been used as a tool of subjugation by the patriarchy (Rich, 1977). Iterations of this can be seen in the eco-feminist movement, and the conception of the exploitation of women as akin to the exploitation of animals, natural resources, and 'mother' earth by capitalist patriarchy (Adams, 1990; Shiva, 1993).

Thus, key aspects of cultural feminism include the affirmation of femininity, seeking to reclaim and validate qualities typically associated with women that have been devalued in patriarchal societies for example through the development of the ethics of care (Gilligan, 1982). Cultural feminists often seek to create spaces where women's voices and experiences are centred to reorient the narrative around woman and as a consciousness raising tool (Lugones & Spelman, 1983). Cultural feminism differs from other feminist approaches, such as radical feminism, in that it doesn't solely focus on dismantling power structures but also emphasizes "feminised" cultures and identity. In the context of the UK today, we might point to festivals and exhibitions celebrating women and female culture such as the 'Women of the World' Festival (WOW, n.d.) or campaigns addressing maternal care, access to period products, and dignity in healthcare (e.g. freeperiods, n.d.).

However, critics of cultural feminism argue that it reinforces gender stereotypes by overemphasising gendered differences, and that female culture itself is constituted under systems of oppression (Radin, 1993). Furthermore, the idea of being able to emphasise female culture within a patriarchal society without dismantling its core structures has been critiqued (Echols, 1983). It is also critiqued from black and intersectional standpoints as not only essentialising but homogenising women (e.g. hooks, 2000; Lorde, 2007; Lugones & Spelman, 1983; Mohanty, 2003).

2.5.4. Neoliberal approaches

Following from these three approaches is the rise of neoliberal feminism. As discussed in the first section of this chapter, part of the process of neoliberalisation is its subjectifying nature, inculcating itself into identities. Thus, it has been argued that with the emergence of neoliberal regimes is the emergence of neoliberal feminist subjects, marked by an emphasis on individual empowerment. Neoliberal feminist approaches can be viewed as decentring gender altogether, potentially belying some of the current forces which are hindering change in modern organisations. It can only truly be understood in the context of its place under a neoliberal rationality outlined at the start of this chapter. I shall go into some depth here, as this is the most crucial approach to understand for the context of this work, both because of its proliferation in the present day and because its drawbacks serve as a present danger in harbouring equality.

Neoliberal feminism can be categorised as a branch of post-feminism, characterised by the absolute incorporation of feminist agendas into political and institutional life (McRobbie, 2009). It associates feminism with key tenets of neoliberal discourse such as 'individual empowerment' and 'individual choice', depoliticising structural issues that women face, and arguably decentring gender altogether (McRobbie, 2009:1). We see therefore that this is fully in line with the way that we understand how power operates under neoliberal regimes, by taking those parts of political and civic life which could cause disruption or points of resistance and incorporating them. McRobbie (2009:1) is explicit in her analysis of post-feminism that ideas are disseminated through the media and popular culture as well as the state to 'ensure that a new women's movement will not emerge' and this is true of neoliberal feminism.

Although neoliberal feminism itself can, and has, been conceptualised in varied ways - starting as it did as a lens for the changing landscape of the portrayal of the female subject in feminist cultural studies - here I follow the path set by Rottenberg (2018) in her book *The Rise of Neoliberal Feminism*. Neoliberal feminism in many ways returns to an essentialist view of gender; it holds a blindness to the many inequalities that women currently face - specifically structural barriers; and tends to have neoliberal values as its reasoning for empowering women, for example backing a 'business case' for gender mainstreaming, often

aligning gender equality and women's empowerment with economic gain (Elias, 2013). Its link to the promotion of meritocracy and neutralising of structural inequalities upholds its role in disguising gendered inequalities, which makes it difficult for women to be able to articulate their oppression (Kelan, 2009; Nash & Churchill, 2020), instead putting forth the image of a level playing field, where everyone ends up in their rightful place (Rottenberg, 2018) or are positioned to succeed regardless of structural (dis)advantages (Blackmore, 2006; Nash & Churchill 2020). Thus, neoliberal feminism signifies a shift away from the struggles of previous strands of feminism predominantly through implying that these struggles are no longer necessary (Elias, 2013). However, it also relies upon the recognition that gender equality is a 'good' and 'necessary thing', to assert that previous waves of feminism have successfully done their job and there is no need to think about it anymore (Evans, 2015). Rather than a backlash against feminism as the 'post' in post-feminism perhaps implies, neoliberal feminism must selectively incorporate parts of feminism to move past it as a movement (Budgeon, 2013).

Given that normative neoliberal rationalities, as shown in the previous section, led to the production of neoliberal subjects, this included producing new feminine subjectivities (Gill & Scharff, 2013), and new feminist subjects (Rottenberg, 2018). It has been suggested that neoliberal feminism serves to actively restructure female subjectivities based around neoliberal discourses such as ambition, choice, risk-taking, self-expression, individualism and consumption (McRobbie, 2009; Budgeon, 2013; Elias, 2013). Consequently, a change in feminist vocabulary from 'autonomy, rights, liberation and social justice' to 'happiness, balance and 'lean in'' has been noted (Banet-Weiser et al, 2020). This restructuring has therefore included forming new 'feminist' ambitions. For instance, Rottenberg (2018:14) notes the rise in discourse surrounding the 'work-family balance' as a key indicator of female ambition, and a means to engender a 'new model of emancipated womanhood: a professional woman able to balance a successful career with a satisfying family life'. Thus, it is a 'happy work-family balance' that is presented as the modern progressive feminist ideal and a new model for women to strive for. Despite this, Rottenberg (2018:50) argues that whilst there is a desire to view feminist struggles as complete, ever-present in the constitution of the female subject, is that 'women's very identity as women always already includes within it a discursive link to the realm of encumbrance'.

Neoliberal feminism also tends to make the case for gender equality as serving a particular purpose, rather than as an innate good. Usually, this reason has to do with economics or growth as we see in countless 'feminist' adverts advocating for 'the girl effect' from brands such as Nike, particularly potent when they are advocating for the empowerment of women and girls in developing countries (Kanani, 2011). Indeed, Calkin (2015:654), stresses that girls are positioned as the subjects of corporate development initiatives predominantly because they 'represent an "untapped resource" for growth'. Elias shows how the World Economic Forum (WEF) has also turned its focus towards issues of gender equality and women's empowerment, but once again does this through aligning gender equality with national economic competitiveness (Elias, 2013:152). Repo (2018) demonstrates how centring and naturalising economic rationalism in the individual, especially in the context of meritocracy and the discourse of 'free choice' can also serve to entrench and normalise gender roles. She argues that under the guise of free choice, EU gender equality programmes have reconfigured the act of having children as a decision exercised by 'individuals based on their personal preferences in the marketplace of choice', and thus this gendered division of labour can be considered as legitimate utility maximisation (Repo, 2018:241). This can be seen even more potently when we consider that, ironically due to the gender pay gap, financially it often makes more 'rational' economic sense for the mother to take more time away from paid work to minimise financial loss. This ends up as a self-fulfilling economic rationale that can be framed as a rational decision under homo-economicus. Thus, Repo (2016) argues that gender equity initiatives in the EU over the last 20 years have been based fundamentally around economic factors and the fear of a declining population rather than for innate sense of justice, a case in point of how feminist goals can be inculcated in a particular form of behaviour management.

Evans (2015) outlines four key challenges which the dominance of neoliberal feminist subjectivities pose for those seeking to further gender equality. The first is discourses which centre freedom, choice, and empowerment making collective efforts toward gender equality more difficult. She argues neoliberal discourse also reframes what these terms mean, whereby freedom is the ability to 'pursue individual ends free from the state', choice is understood in terms of being a 'consumer in the marketplace', and empowerment is about 'entrepreneurialism and consumerism' (Evans, 2015:42).

Evans (2015) argues the supposed 'amorality' of neoliberalism is a second challenge for feminists (Evans, 2015). Amoral – meaning having neither good nor bad morals – neoliberalism posits itself as rational and outside of ideology as opposed to ideologically-laden and driven by states and governments, aligning with the 'common sense' conception. However, this is an ideological position, not an objective one. One way this can become more problematic, is that it affects the underlying reasoning for why a policy which purports to address gender equality, may in fact be used as a tool to serve other interests. Examples include Repo's (2016) study of EU demographics policy; and the promise of female empowerment, which was mobilised to sell cigarettes, with the infamous marketing ploy of 'torches of freedom' (Maclaren, 2012).

The third challenge is the market solutions aspect of neoliberalism. When thinking economically these kinds of free market ideas affect the poorest in society the hardest and often have a disproportionately negative effect on women, the working class, disabled people, and ethnic minorities (Gayle, 2015). Market rationality which puts profit above social good will always hit the most economically vulnerable disproportionately, turning focus from the social to economic efficiency and profit maximisation.

Finally, the fourth challenge for feminists under neoliberalism is the prevalent and widespread embrace of individualism (Evans, 2015:45). This discourse has subsumed all levels of society from the state to the citizen, its corresponding belief in 'self-autonomy, self-reliance, and self-discipline' is a means to put the burden of responsibility of one's situation at their own feet (Evans, 2015). This responsabilises women to make 'correct' choices as individuals whilst concealing structural issues and making collective action more difficult. Feeding into this is the corresponding link to competition, not only in the marketplace but between individuals which again has the result of overriding collective feminist goals and female solidarity (Evans, 2015; Güney-Frahm, 2020; McRobbie, 2009). Ultimately, in this frame feminism becomes internalised and individualised.

Evans's (2015) analysis shows how neoliberalism, feminist action, and gendered inequalities are entangled on a political, cultural, social, and individual level, affecting everything from policy that is put in place, the gendering process, our sense of self, and most importantly here, the routes available for tackling gendered inequalities.

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter has laid out the theories behind the economic system and ideology of neoliberalism, to show how it weaves into every aspect of life. It has then shown the wider context of how this has affected policy in the UK, shaping it in specific ways with far-reaching ramifications. This is linked to the contextual landscape in which the modern-day research university sits and is perceived, conveying the core challenges facing the sector and how these are entangled with its future actions. It has also explored some of the primary ways gender inequality has been conceptualised in the UK and linked this to the trajectory of feminist approaches, ending with an overview of how the now dominant thread of neoliberal feminism threatens gains which have been made. With all these aspects in mind, the literature review brings together these threads, addressing how the university is not only situated *within* a neoliberal landscape but is part of it, inculcating its principles into its own policies and practice. The chapter links this to gendered inequalities within the university as a site where gender is (re)constituted, addressing how specific neoliberal policy and practice has helped to entrench or constitute these inequalities.

Chapter 3. Literature Review

3.1. Introduction

This chapter turns to the processes and practices that have arisen within the neoliberal university and their entanglement with the constitution of gendered inequalities. First, it provides an account of how neoliberal regimes – theorised in Chapter 2 – have marked a shift in the aims, values, and wider practices of HE as these processes are replicated *within* the university. Understanding the practices of the neoliberal university is vital in understanding their intra-action with higher educational norms, wider neoliberal values, and the constitution of gendered inequalities. Second, it provides an overview of scholarship on gendered inequalities in academia to date and the difficulties in posing effective solutions to combat it. In doing so it addresses the ways inequalities have been conceptualised by differing schools of feminist thought, what these perspectives help to highlight, and what remains under-analysed. This leads to the introduction of the framework of agential realism which is beginning to be harnessed in wider critical university studies and is utilised in this research to understand the constitution of gendered inequalities in the context of the proliferation of neoliberal measurement apparatus. The chapter closes by outlining the research focus of this study, which centres an understudied measurement apparatus – TEF – and shows how a feminist agential realist framework may help to understand the role TEF plays in materialising gender and gendered inequalities.

3.2. Neoliberal Policies and Practices in the 21st Century University

As discussed, HE has not been immune to the process of neoliberalisation in the UK which has escalated over the last 30 years (Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017; Fleming, 2021; Fraser & Taylor, 2016; Giroux, 2020; Heath & Burdon, 2013; Radice, 2015; Shore, 2010). Addressing the context of the modern neoliberal university is crucial in answering the question as to why we see such sluggish change in gender equity. Chapter 2 demonstrated increasing financial pressures on HE, and the ways it must justify itself under a neoliberal paradigm. However, internal practices in the university have also undergone a process of neoliberalisation, which has led to a rise in interdisciplinary scholarship labelled ‘critical university studies’, seeking to critique this period of rapid change (Boggs & Mitchell, 2018).

These changes and their potential effects are outlined below to provide a picture of the current landscape of the neoliberal university.

A key hallmark of the increasing neoliberalisation of universities is the focus on performance, the marketisation of academic work, competition, efficiency, and quantifying these aspects in a process of 'metrification' (Herschberg et al, 2018; Lorenz, 2014; Shore & Wright, 1999; Shore, 2008). Processes of metrification include the rise in performance measurement, such as the influx of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), the Research Excellence Framework (REF), the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), and the National Student Survey (NSS), which pertain to judge staff performance, research output, teaching quality and student experience respectively. Similarly, there are now countless University league tables put together by various businesses and media institutions, e.g. 'The Guardian', 'The Times', and 'The QS World'. These too, utilise an array of metrics including 'value-added', 'student-satisfaction', 'library and computer spending', and 'entry requirements' to judge and rank university performance.

The influx of these kinds of tools, known as 'audit culture', are well-recorded in the literature on critical university studies and new managerialism in the work of scholars such as Cris Shore and Susan Wright (e.g., Shore & Wright, 1999; 2015; Shore, 2008; 2010), Rosemary Deem (e.g., 1998; 2003) and many others (e.g., Craig et al, 2014; Jones et al, 2020; Spooner, 2015; Strathern, 1997; 2000; Tourish et al, 2017; Welch, 2016). These tool have a tangible effect on shaping the focus and prioritisations of the university (Jones et al, 2020; Welch, 2016); as well as embedding the perception of the student as consumer (Ingleby, 2015; Mintz, 2021; Nixon et al, 2018); shifting perceptions around what constitutes an ideal outcome of a university education; and marking a shift in the running of the university to a more 'business-like' approach. Importantly, these aspects of neoliberalisation prioritise and quantify certain aspects of labour at the expense of others, which intra-act with exclusionary notions of value and excellence regimes with gendered exclusionary effects (e.g., ENQA, 2014; European Commission, 2004; Fassa, 2015; Herschberg et al, 2016; Jenkins & Keane, 2014; Lund, 2012; Morley, 2003; 2016; Rees, 2011; Śliwa & Johansson, 2014; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2011; 2012; Wolffram, 2018).

Whilst audit culture is framed as a tool for improving accountability and efficiency, Shore and Wright (1999) argue that it is instead, a paternalistic means of surveillance and coercive control. They state that accountability is a means of punitive policing introducing disciplinary mechanisms ‘that mark a new form of coercive neoliberal governmentality’ (Shore & Wright, 1999:557). Importantly, they highlight that audit culture serves as a mechanism in changing ‘the way people relate to the workplace, to authority, to each other and to themselves’ (Shore & Wright 1999:559), as professional relations are reduced to crude measures which can be quantified. Although this culture espouses empowerment and self-actualization, in actuality it takes accountability from the organisation and puts it onto the individual. This sense of individualism is compounded by the increasingly neoliberal governance of the university which is recognised in much of the literature on the trajectory of higher education (e.g., Gill, 2017; Taylor & Lahad, 2018; Utoft, 2020; Shore & Wright, 1999).

This analysis is crucial in examining the intersection of neoliberalisation with inequality. As discussed, neoliberalisation brings in a new way of looking at and understanding power as something which works ‘most effectively when it is largely invisible to those whom it dominates’ (Shore & Wright, 1999:559). Audit culture, presents itself as a neutral, scientific, and common-sense set of procedures, concealing the ways in which ‘institutional mechanisms operate to introduce new forms of power’ (Shore & Wright, 1999:560). There has been a change in buzzwords which have been introduced alongside this shift in governance, associated with: ‘transparency’, ‘accountability’, ‘quality’, and ‘performance’, all of which are said to be ‘encouraged and enhanced by audit’ (Shore & Wright, 1999:566). Shore and Wright (1999:566) stress that these words are used in documents throughout the university as if their meanings were ‘self-evident and benign’, when in fact they may differ sharply in theory and practice to the interpretations of academics – for instance, who is defining what “quality” actually means?

Measures of quality and performance in teaching have also gone through a dramatic shift whereby ‘good’ teaching is now considered quantifiable, meaning that any teaching that happens outside of the classroom, in informal situations such as after class, in the office or over coffee, are now no longer measurable and therefore ‘do not count’, particularly in terms of funding (Shore & Wright, 1999:567). Staff rankings also do not consider personal circumstances (such as illness, bereavement, or family circumstances) which we see can easily

be affected through the gendering process given that women are more likely than men to be primary caregivers (Shore, 2008:285). In an example of the creeping inculcation of quantitative metrics, the University of Liverpool's plan to make the redundancies of nearly 50 staff was based predominantly on two metrics for judging research (Else, 2021). These metrics were academics' mean research grant income – using REF data – and a citation score (UCU, 2021). The mobilisation of these metrics as redundancy criteria were critiqued as an unfit measure of individuals and for measuring only a fraction of the work which academics conduct (Else, 2021). After outrage from the UCU the university amended their methodology, but this was still based around research grant income and received continued criticism for its opaqueness (UCU 2021). Finally, after a 10-day strike the compulsory redundancies were abandoned and instead made on a voluntary basis. Although no statistics were released about the demographics of those at risk, we see the potential intersections with gender in the use of blunt indicators to make decisions about jobs in the context of gendered invisible labour, discussed in the latter half of this literature review. Interrogating these kinds of processes, begins to show how inequality is built into the very structures of institutions when using these kinds of quantitative tools.

It is worth noting that the normalising and embedding of these kinds of neoliberal regimes into the university is also important in terms of contributing to the relentless projection of the neoliberal regime, with universities being specific sites of knowledge production and critical thinking. Through the lens of power-knowledge (Foucault, 1980), universities become a key structure which needs to be successfully inculcated into these patterns of thought, discourse, and subsequently 'being'.

3.3. Feminist Theories on Gender and Organisations

Against the backdrop of the university as a site undergoing a period of rapid change under neoliberalism, it is vital to discuss how feminist theory is addressing these changes, especially as issues of inequality continue to persist. As Calás et al (2016:18, emphasis added) state, the persistence of gendered inequalities is 'a manifestation of social dynamics and social processes changing over time, and thus requires understanding *the changing conditions of its reproduction*'. Therefore, the following section assesses how feminist scholars have addressed and conceptualised gendered inequalities in the university to date. First, it maps some of the conceptual contours of feminist theorising on gender in organisations, including the impact of

their ontological and epistemological assumptions. It then shows how these accounts are brought to bear in scholarship on gendered inequalities in the university, highlighting the breadth of issues which have already been brought to light and gaps that remain which point to future trajectories of study.

This section addresses four core approaches to gendered inequalities, deriving primarily from Marxist, Standpoint, Critical Realist, and Post-structuralist feminist thought. Although these four traditions are discussed broadly chronologically, it is vital to understand that neither the problems being targeted were ‘fixed’ nor was there a coherent or linear development through each theory. On the contrary, we still see organisational solutions from each strand proposed to address a diverse array of problems. Furthermore, when categorising threads of feminist thought it is crucial to underline that this act – or ‘cut’ (Barad, 2007) - can obscure differences *within* threads, as well as hide shared interests and overlap *between* threads. Often, there is no ‘neat’ fit (Dhamoon, 2013). It is worth emphasising, then, that these theoretical frameworks should not be seen as inherently opposed to one another. While tensions do exist, it is equally important to acknowledge areas of overlap and the potential for constructive critique (Ferguson, 1991). In most cases, feminist theory builds upon, and addresses gaps within, previous work.

Haraway’s notion of ‘irony’ is useful here: ‘the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true’ (Haraway, 1991:149). This captures how we read these theories through each other - ‘diffractively’ (Barad 2007) - to encourage conversation between them, a key to the ethos of contemporary feminist praxis.

3.3.1. Marxist Feminism

Providing a structuralist approach to gender in organisations, Marxist feminism conceptualises gender inequality as a socialised product of capitalist structures, whereby the breach in the differing valuation of gendered labour maintains the power structures of a capitalist patriarchal society (Halford & Leonard, 2001). This reflects a deeper epistemological understanding of how inequality is underpinned by material relations – where materiality is understood as ‘social structures’ (Reckwitz, 2002; Mauthner 2018) – with feminist scholarship required to take the standpoint of an ‘oppressed class under capitalism’ (Calás & Smircich, 1996). From this perspective, unjust divisions of labour (reproductive and domestic) in the

home hinder women's ability to climb the ladder in the workplace (e.g., Federici, 2004; Weeks, 2011). These divisions are replicated in the workplace, with women disproportionately siloed into "feminised" roles, which are undervalued precisely because they are seen as woman's work (Phillips & Taylor, 1980; Pringle, 2020; Weeks, 2011), reducing the power of women in the workplace, and furthering gendered hierarchies (Halford & Leonard, 2001).

Under a feminist marxist lens, this divide can be deemed a deliberate move which serves capitalist institutions, entrenching a segment of the workforce into low paid, precarious roles which are *perceived* as readily dispensable in times of economic downturn and therefore often bear the brunt of cutbacks (Bruegel, 1979; Halford & Leonard, 2001; Rubery & Rafferty, 2013). As outlined in Chapter 2, this proved to be the case with job cuts and wage freezes under UK austerity measures (Abed & Keller, 2022; EWL, 2012). Such structural devaluation also "enables" women to conduct unremunerated reproductive labour in the home, producing male partners as 'unencumbered' in the workplace (Marçal, 2015; Wright, 2014). This relationship between labour and power means that capitalist institutions reproduce dominant patriarchal values, naturalising the economic and social roles assigned to men and women.

Power, in this framework, derives from the ability of dominant social groups to control social and economic relations (Halford & Leonard, 2001), and is exerted in all interactions, even when there is no visible sign of conflict. In other words, people are always acting within power relations; a lack of conflict may either mean that women have been subsumed into accepting male domination through the legitimisation of patriarchal values and beliefs, or that the threat of power is enough to keep women from pursuing conflict (Halford & Leonard, 2001). Therefore, power can be embedded within a stable dynamic where 'one set of interests (more or less) constantly prevails over another' (Halford & Leonard, 2001:30). Further, organisations are not considered neutral, but rather reflections of these power dynamics.

This position, whilst bringing to the fore the nature of segregation in the workplace, particularly as regards women's tendency to be devalued and more disposable, has been critiqued for the homogenisation of large categorical groups, with little regard paid to

individual differences between women's experiences, as well as the intersection of other categories of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989; Lloyd, 2013). Its emphasis on conflict between categories has been argued to fix immutable differences between groups (Halford & Leonard, 2001). It also often provides an account of gender *in* organisations, rather than an offering an understanding of how organisations are sites of the gendering process (Huppertz, 2023), which forecloses analysis of processes which help to constitute gendered roles in the first instance.

3.3.2. *Standpoint feminism*

Standpoint feminist analysis is a broad category of feminist thought but ultimately emphasises an epistemic point, that power and knowledge are shaped by the specific experiences from the position of women or other marginalised groups within the organisation. Taking its cue from historical materialism (Cockburn, 2020), it highlights that just as there is a material separation in class groups, so there is too between men and women. This material separation affects knowledge of the world and understandings of social relations in particular ways, thus, women's experience could offer a valuable perspective on, and critique of, patriarchal capitalism and gendered organisations (Lund, 2023). The social position of women provides a specific epistemological vantage point to critique institutions and how they are structured in ways that reflect, reinforce, and perpetuate gender inequalities. A key tool of their analysis is a focus on women's experiences and knowledges, for example in the use of auto-ethnography or qualitative interviews with people from marginalised groups (O'Shaughnessy & Krogman, 2012). Standpoint feminist analysis highlights and takes advantage of female lived experience to show how experiences of inequality, exclusion, or discrimination provide a critical lens in exposing the ways gender inequality is reinforced, as well as providing a tool for consciousness raising (Collins, 1997). These perspectives can reveal blind spots in how power operates within organisations that may be invisible to those in dominant groups.

A standpoint feminist analysis also emphasises that organisations are shaped by gendered power relations, particularly with regard to epistemic knowledge – i.e., whose knowledge counts (Calás & Smircich, 1996). For example, they might turn their attention to the lack of female voice in organisations (Vachani, 2012), and the extent to which hegemonic male voices or practices serve to sideline feminine ways of being and doing (Cremin, 2020;

Lund & Tiernan, 2019; Pullen & Rhodes, 2014). It might also underline how gendered expectations influence workplace interactions, such as expectations on women to perform emotional labour or deal with conflict in ways that do not disrupt a male-dominated environment (Hochschild, 2012a). Thus, analyses also often focus on everyday relations from the standpoint and subject position of women (Smith, 2005). In terms of advocating for change, these kinds of analyses draw attention to understanding the standpoint of women through methods such as ethnography (Smith, 2005) and shape organisational practices to reflect the needs of marginalised groups. It also emphasises a change in praxis, to deliberately shift our writing to emphasising the female voice and standpoint (Fotaki et al, 2014; Fotaki & Pullen, 2024).

3.3.3. Critical realist feminism

Critical realist approaches and feminist standpoint approaches are often cast as contrary paradigms (Sweet, 2018) due to their differing assertions regarding social scientific knowledge and reality, with critical realism explicitly emphasising the ontological, and standpoint the epistemological. As a philosophical approach, critical realism maintains a strong divide between the ontological and the epistemological, situating itself as a middle ground whereby causal arguments can be made about ‘the real’, whilst still ‘admitting epistemic relativism’ (Sweet, 2018:222). In other words, there *is* a real world independent of the researcher, but it is not claimed that this world can be stepped out of and be directly and objectively studied and known (Clegg, 2016; Sayer, 2005). When applied to gender inequality in organisations, critical realism encourages an investigation into structural, cultural, and social mechanisms that produce and sustain gender inequality, even when those inequalities are not immediately visible. An organisation is itself an autonomous entity that exercises powers over human agency by ‘enabling certain behaviours and constraining others’ (Grahm, 2024:450). This also means that institutions are considered as causal structures, imbued with social norms which have gendering effects (Grahm, 2014). However, in this model this relationship is dynamic, with human agency able to ‘resist and redefine’ institutional powers (Grahm, 2024:450). Though a critical realist lens, feminist researchers can study the real material effects of institutional organisational norms and dynamics, whilst centring the role of human agency in reproducing, reorienting, or transforming these entities (Archer, 2003; Wimalasena, 2017).

In terms of gender, critical realism conceptualises it as actual and observable but generated through real institutional structures. In an organisational context, gender inequality is not just a matter of individual bias or cultural attitudes, but the result of deeply embedded social structures and material conditions that affect how people experience gender in the workplace. Critical realist feminists would look beyond the empirical facts of gender inequality and ask what deeper causal mechanisms create this pattern (Sayer, 2000). Within organisations, a critical realist approach might explore structures such as hierarchies, policies, and cultural norms which shape opportunities for men and women differently. In doing so, it emphasises that advocating for simple solutions, such as promoting more women to leadership positions, without addressing the structural and cultural mechanisms that marginalise women in the first place is ineffective (Thorpe, 2014). Whilst critical realism has much to offer in terms of thinking about underlying structures, once again it can be critiqued for its potential to inadvertently reinforce binary categories through seeking to identify "real" gender structures. As will be discussed in the following approach of poststructuralism, it is also limited in addressing the performative aspects of gender.

3.3.4. Post-structural feminism

In a post-structuralist account, both 'gender' and 'organisations' have no pre-fixed meaning, but instead are contingent and constituted in specific times and places. This approach shifts focus to the ways in which gender is (re)produced within organisations, rooted primarily in post-structural feminist accounts such as Judith Butler's (e.g., 1990; 2004) theory of 'doing gender'. Butler (1990) built on the anti-representationalist work of Foucault to focus on the gendered constitution of the subject (critiquing Foucault's work for being gender-blind). For Butler, gender, rather than being something that an individual 'is' or 'has', is a 'doing'. The gendering process then means 'the differentiating relations by which...subjects come into being' (Butler, 1993:xvi), rather than an individual agent with some kind of 'fixed' essence. The conception of performativity allows for an opening up of the different practices and mechanisms that produce (gendered) identities, rather than seeing them as something 'fixed'. Specifically, it focuses on social practices which appear neutral but are in fact (re)producing gender regimes that privilege men.

Post-structuralist feminist scholars argue that relying on fixed gendered categories risks reifying essentialist beliefs about difference, instead of seeking to deconstruct these categories altogether. The approach suggests a focus around a process of 'undoing gender' through in-depth critique and narrative revision (e.g. Butler, 1990; Martin, 2003; Ely & Meyerson, 2000). As Martin (2003:352) explains, gender norms are so powerful that 'over time, the saying and doing creates what is said and done' and these norms feed into systems of 'responsibilisation' (Foucault, 2004) affecting women's sense of identity. Power, in this assessment, is diffuse and contained within discourses which determine social knowledge and understanding, limiting the confines of these categories the 'conduct of conduct' (Foucault, 1982). Organisations are conceptualised sites where sets of discourses may help constitute gender and gendered subjects in particular ways. From a Baradian perspective, the conception of performativity under this frame is vital, however the focus on only the discursive limits our understandings of how phenomena (such as gender) as co-constituted through the discursive *and* the material. This means that we may miss fundamental aspects of how subjects are gendered through material-discursive practices, such as tools for measuring performance in organisations. These conceptions will be outlined in more detail in Chapter 4 when outlining in full the onto-epistemological framework of agential realism.

Each of these feminist perspectives offers a valuable part of the picture of the complex web of gendered inequalities. Through identifying these perspectives, we can start to understand their differing approaches in understanding gendered inequalities in the university and how they are constituted, and why, despite a wealth of gender equality initiatives, these have seemed unable to create holistic change (Humbert et al, 2018; Dennissen et al, 2018; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012). I now provide a synthesis of the work conducted in this area, before returning to Calás et al's (2016) question of whether these strands of thought have done enough to capture changes in our social reality under neoliberalism which affect how gendered inequalities are constituted.

3.4. Feminist Research on Gendered Inequalities in the University

3.4.1. Gendered divisions of labour in the university

Materialist feminist analyses in the context of HE highlight the structural and economic conditions that perpetuate gender inequality, particularly through gendered divisions of labour. This approach examines how broader unequal divisions of labour in the home affect female academics, as well as how gendered divisions of labour are replicated in within the university. For instance, there is the impact of motherhood on career progression (Ahmad, 2017; Baker, 2012a; 2012b). This impacts women because of time spent out of the workplace during maternity leave, the effects of maternity leave on academic identities (Maxwell et al, 2019), and the effects of the gendered distribution of childcare (Sümer & Eslen-Ziya, 2023; Wolfinger et al, 2008) and eldercare (Leibnitz & Morrison, 2015), which is unmediated by a lack of structural support in the university (Monroe et al, 2008:215). Van den Brink and Benschop (2012) also raise the issue of paternalism within institutions, citing an example in which male recruiters claimed they did not want to put ‘demanding responsibilities’ on women with families, as well as increased stigmatisation towards mothers from institutions due to perceived encumbrment (Gonçalves, 2019). This not only helps to create a glass ceiling but reproduces women as responsible for family duties, in an environment which rewards the unencumbered.

Gendered divisions of labour also seep into working patterns within the university, with women spending more time than men on academic ‘housework’, such as administrative and pastoral labour (Monroe et al, 2008; Morley, 1998; Watermeyer et al, 2020; Weeks, 2011). Echoing research conducted on the wider UK labour market discussed in the previous chapter, it has been argued that this “feminised” labour, is ‘uniformly lower status, and not rewarded or appreciated by the system’ (Monroe et al, 2008:220). Further, because of its time-consuming and labour-intensive nature, this also prohibits women from work which is more valuable for promotion, such as research (Baker, 2012a).

Elsewhere, women are overrepresented in teaching roles than researcher roles, compared to their male counterparts (AdvanceHE, 2021). Teaching is also argued to be a feminised role, especially regarding its pastoral aspects (Kandiko Howson, 2018; Morley,

1998). This is important to note due to research conducted on the prestige gap between teaching and research (Baker, 2012a; Blackmore et al, 2016; Fleming, 2021). Tierney (2019) even points out the lack of credence that is given to *research* on pedagogy in HE within REF. Because it holds less prestige, teaching garners less institutional support for those who carry it out (Morris et al, 2022), and again, is less valuable for tenure or promotion (Baker 2012a; Brommesson et al, 2022). Numerous studies have shown how tools which measure excellence in HE are predominantly focussed on research acumen (REF, journal rankings, number of citations) which then has gendered implications for the position of women (e.g., Aiston & Jung, 2015; Baker, 2012a; Santos & Dang Van Phu, 2019; Subbaye & Vithal, 2017; Zulu, 2013). Thus, the ramifications of this prestige gap can arguably be seen more acutely in the research-intensive Russell Group universities, whose gender pay gap has been noted as higher than in other types of university (UCU, 2017). These studies help to show structural barriers which underpin gendered inequalities, through the gendered divisions and valuation of labour which hinder women's career progression. However, this perspective may overlook cultural and discursive factors, such as the role of gendered expectations, which also contribute to inequality but are not easily captured by materialist analysis alone.

3.4.2. Gendered perceptions of women

Therefore, adding an additional layer to understanding how these inequalities come to be, discursive feminist analyses emphasise the performativity of gendered roles, shaped through normative discourse, language, and narratives. This is particularly acute in skills related to management and leadership in the university which are associated with 'masculinised' traits of dominance, ambition, and the ability to be flexible to work demands (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Thus, many feminist scholars have underlined the role of differing perceptions of women's skills and abilities which limit their opportunities in the university. Immediately, highlighting the discursive aspect of the gendered valuation of labour above, Monroe et al (2008) found that even specific positions become undervalued when a woman takes on the role. They discuss the position of department chair and found that when occupied by a man, 'the position confers status, respect, and power', for a women 'power and status seem diminished, and the service dimension becomes stressed' (Monroe et al, 2008:219).

In terms of behaviours, Madera et al (2009:1592) argue that men are expected - as well as perceived to be - 'agentic', and women are expected and perceived to be 'communal', which creates additional barriers for women. In the recruitment process for example, Madera et al (2009:1594) found that letters of recommendation were written in gendered ways, with female applicants far more likely to be described in 'communal terms' such as 'affectionate, warm, kind, and nurturing' as well as more 'social-communal terms' such as 'student(s), child, relative, and mother', while male applicants were 'more likely to be described in agentic terms' such as ambitious, dominant, and self-confident. Similarly, Van den Brink et al (2016) found that interview panels describe the attributes and potential of male and female applicants in different terms, inflating men's strengths while downplaying their weaknesses, whilst the inverse was true for women (Van den Brink et al, 2016). One reason for this appeared to be that it was 'easier to envision the men becoming successful managers', and 'more difficult to picture the women pursuing a similar career', particularly when the problem was a lack of prior experience (Van den Brink et al, 2016:30).

That women have more difficulty in gaining access to roles because they do not 'fit' the image of an 'ideal worker', and particularly an 'ideal manager' is a core argument in the literature that highlights the discursive aspect of gendering processes (e.g., Acker, 2006; Baker, 2012a; Broadbridge & Simpson, 2011; Ely & Meyerson, 2010; Rees & Garnsey, 2003; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012; Van den Brink et al, 2016). Women have reported dressing in a less stereotypically feminine manner, avoided having items such as family photos in their office (Monroe et al, 2008), and masked "feminine" emotions, which results in physical and emotional exhaustion from 'trying to uphold this façade of perfectionism' (Guy and Arthur, 2020). This highlights the extent to which women internalise responsibility for their individual behaviours and the pressure to conform to expected gender norms.

However, women appear to be in a double-bind, whereby they must act in a less "feminine" manner to be taken seriously but are also penalised for not performing in line with expected femininity, reflecting the diffuse power of gender norms. Hochschild (2012b), describes a study which compares student perceptions of male and female university professors. It found students expected women professors to be warmer and more supportive than male professors and given these expectations, 'proportionally more women professors were perceived as cold' because they did not meet their expected baseline, one which was

higher for female members of staff (Hochschild, 2012b:168). This leans into (unconscious) bias against female teachers, as shown in student surveys which often demonstrate both overt and covert sexism and racism (Heffernan, 2021). Alongside this is the conception of the 'genius model' of academia (Morley, 2013a), whereby perceptions of brilliance and prestige attach themselves more easily to male academics, who then hold more authority and respect in the classroom (Morris et al, 2022) and has a cumulative effect over career-spans (Coate & Kandiko Howson, 2016). These studies underline how everyday language and narratives around women's capabilities in academia reinforce and reproduce gendered expectations, and in turn, how these expectations construct gendered barriers which limit women's access to prestige in academia.

3.4.3. Entrenched hierarchies in university structures

Due to the difficulties which women face in 'climbing the ladder', a wave of analyses focus on the effects of patriarchal power structures within the university. Currently those in senior management positions are disproportionately male (Jarboe, 2018), but the roles and attitudes of people in these positions have been cited as a key factor in the ability to affect organisational change (Kelan, 2018; Monroe et al, 2008; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012). It has been shown that women in senior positions are more likely to change the structural environment to help enable progression for women at the start of their careers (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012; Monroe et al, 2008). Thus, the lack of senior women is not only a problem itself, but has a compounding effect (Humbert et al, 2018). For those women who do manage to reach the higher echelons of the university, an MIT Report (1999) found they tend to feel *more* marginalised and excluded, again reflecting the structural masculine hierarchies of these institutions.

Further, specialised training for women to reach these positions has been critiqued, as these initiatives often fail to get to the structural root of the problem. Programmes such as the coaching of women for leadership positions are twisting women to fit into a 'masculine world' (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012; De Vries et al, 2016) i.e., 'fixing women' (Ely & Meyerson, 2000). Whilst these measures are important as a primary solution, they do not go far enough in changing the structural norms and hierarchies within the university. Trying to create 'equal structures', through special positions designed for women such as special

women's chairs have been reported to have a negative effect as women feel they are often viewed differently after receiving such a position (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012). They also serve to 'trap' women in areas with women's funds when they could have gone through normal avenues to begin with (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012:84). Thus, there is consensus that any effective initiative should focus on transforming structural inequalities, 'changing everyday organisational routines and interaction so that they stop (re)producing gender inequalities' (Benschop et al, 2012:3) instead of viewing women as the 'problem' (De Vries et al, 2016:429-30).

3.4.4. The impact of the 'meritocratic' university

A recent wave of scholarship looks to unpack the claim of a meritocratic gender-neutral university, instead showing that universities are highly gendered, and that the neutral façade makes it even more difficult for women to name their oppression (Kelan, 2009; Nash & Churchill, 2020). The image of a meritocracy leads to the denial of structural privileges or inequalities related to gender, but also those of class, race, sexuality, and disability, putting forth the image of a level playing field, where everyone ends up in their rightful place (Rottenberg, 2018) or are positioned to succeed regardless of structural (dis)advantages (Blackmore, 2006; Nash & Churchill, 2020). Acker's work in her 2006 paper 'Inequality Regimes: Gender, class and race in organisations' is particularly pertinent here. In it, she unpacks the concept of intersectionality originally coined by Crenshaw (1989), to further examine 'the mutual reproduction of class, gender, and racial relations of inequality' within organisations (Acker, 2006:441). She looks to explore how, by using these intersections, we can more effectively address structural inequalities within organisations (Acker, 2006:441). To this end, she develops the concept of 'inequality regimes' as an analytic approach to help to uncover inequalities in work organisations, these are defined specifically as the 'interlocked practices and processes that result in continuing inequalities in all work organisations' (Acker, 2006:441). For her, work organisations are 'critical locations for the investigation of the continuous creation of complex inequalities', not just because of the structures that are operating within them but because 'much societal inequality originates in such organisations' (Acker, 2006:441, emphasis added). They are productive of gender and gendered inequalities.

The notion of organisations as neutral, particularly under neoliberal meritocracy, creates internal resistance to measures designed to promote equality as they are seen as giving women unfair favourable advantage (Rosa & Clavero, 2022). In this view, gendered discrepancies are regarded as a women's personal choice or their lack of skills and experience, with a view that 'the system itself is beyond reproach' (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012:84). This perspective is exacerbated when inequalities have been naturalised and gendered inequalities are no longer seen as a problem (Broadbridge and Hearn, 2008; Humbert et al, 2018).

Some also argue that universities prioritise a veneer of gender equality, rather than changing the structures and hierarchies within the institution away from a traditional patriarchal model (Monroe et al, 2008). Ahmed (2012) points to a gap between the performativity of EDI discourses in the university and the reality of systemic change and action. Specific initiatives such as Athena SWAN have also been deemed as virtue signalling, or 'institutional peacocking', an extra accreditation for the university, rather than any systematic push for gender equality (Yarrow & Johnston, 2022). These initiatives can then exacerbate problems because institutions have a claim to being meritocratic and as a result covert inequality is much more difficult to challenge. In other words, the norms of "transparency", "accountability", and "gender equality", veil the *practice* of inequality (Van den Brink et al, 2010). Indeed, Ahmed (2012:26) describes those who have been actively employed by the university as facing 'resistance' akin to a 'brick-wall'. It has even been seen that women who try to force change through universities' own equity rules, have been 'subject to sanctions or ostracism' (Monroe et al, 2008:23). Even the burden of 'doing' this EDI work tends to fall on minoritized groups (Morris et al, 2022; Tzanakou & Pearce, 2019), as conceptualised in Henderson's (2019) 'gender-person', i.e. the individual who is seen as responsible for conducting this labour.

3.4.5. The exacerbation and highlighting effect of Covid-19

I would like to take a moment to highlight that this research was undertaken during a global pandemic. The literature published at the time and in its aftermath demonstrates the entanglement and iterative reproduction of gendered inequalities and brings together differing angles of critique to highlight the multifaceted production of inequalities. As with

other global events throughout history it was posited that Covid-19, in disrupting norms and fundamentally affecting our day-to-day ways of living and working, could be seized upon to bring about a paradigm shift in our values and working practices (Heintz et al, 2021). One example is that the potential opportunities presented by using technology to adapt and show that flexible working could be made to work (Bassa, 2020), another is that the value of care work was brought acutely to the fore (Alcadipani, 2020). It also blurred the lines between the delineation of the public and private spheres, shaking up one of the most gendered binaries with several potential consequences or opportunities (Johnson & Williams, 2020). Unfortunately, the effects of Covid-19 only served to further entrench inequalities along gendered lines, showing the fragility of gains which have been made. It was argued that women bore the brunt of Coronavirus disruption with effects that could long outlast the crisis (Ross, 2020). In the words of one university Vice-Chancellor, this represented an 'existential threat' to women in academia, disrupting all the progress made in garnering gender equality over the last two decades (Den Hollander, quoted in Bothwell, 2020).

The Covid-19 pandemic, and in particular the national lockdown, exposed the unequal division of labour for women across the board (Ferguson, 2020; Power, 2020). Across the UK mothers provided 50% more childcare than their male counterparts and spent 10-30% more time home-schooling, regardless of the employment status of either partner (Ferguson, 2020). That men were able to maintain their 'private' space separate from domestic concerns, was also noted early on. In discussions around the allocation of space in the home, it seemed that men were more likely to be able to 'lock themselves away in the study' whereas women found themselves 'at the kitchen table', working whilst trying to support others in the household (Ferguson, 2020). Almeida et al (2020) argue this burden was reflected in declining levels of mental health which were observed more acutely in women than men. Research conducted on academia in Spain echoed this finding, whereby 'female academics suffered extra anxiety and stress, felt more overwhelmed and lost more productivity compared to their male colleagues' (Matthews, 2020a).

Indeed, one of the most stark and immediate measurable gendered impacts during the pandemic was the rapid fall in women's publications, article submissions, and funding applications (Fazackerly, 2020; Matthews, 2020b; Ross, 2020; Squazzoni et al, 2021). This shift happened swiftly, with evidence showing that mothers in particular 'missed funding

application deadlines and postponed manuscripts, sabbaticals and fellowships' (Ross, 2020: n.p.). This would be less surprising if it were not that at the same time journal submissions from men increased, with some journals reporting a rise as large as 50% (Fazackerly, 2020). In fact, because of the nature of the Coronavirus research, papers published in both the medical and health sciences saw a significant increase (Matthews, 2020b). However, these are both fields in which women are better represented, responsible for 37.6% of first authored papers over the last five years, yet submissions from women still plummeted (Matthews, 2020b).

However, a lack of representation or involvement of women in research was not only due to unequal time pressures. One of the most visible differences in terms of academic research was the lack of female faces in the response to the Coronavirus. In an open letter in the Times Higher Education (2020) 35 female scientists pointed out the disparity in who was heard during the pandemic. They highlighted that that most highly visible articles in the media by or about scientists involved in the Covid-19 response focused on male researchers, despite there being many qualified women in the field (Times Higher Education, 2020). The letter argued that this was not a new phenomenon, but that the pandemic simply exposed the state of play within the university pre-pandemic whereby 'unqualified men's voices are amplified over expert women', due to, in their view, informal male networks and perceptions of men as more 'high profile' (Times Higher Education, 2020). Echoing the wider literature, the letter noted that women are disproportionately to be found conducting the work that is, to quote, 'getting shit done' i.e., the operational work and supporting 'decision makers', rather than writing scientific papers or gaining grants themselves, which would be more conducive to individual recognition (Times Higher Education, 2020).

The economic effects of the pandemic also affected women disproportionately. According to contemporaneous figures, 54% of university staff were employed in insecure positions, and female staff were over 50% more likely than male staff to occupy these roles (Collini, 2020). As well as highlighting a rampant inequality in who typically fills these low paid and precarious roles before the pandemic, it also meant that women were the most likely to be subject to university cutbacks caused by the pandemic (Collini, 2020). These cutbacks included many universities not renewing fixed-term contracts, which account for 34-50% of the workforce and are where many - in particular, young - women are concentrated

(Watermeyer et al, 2020). Given women disproportionately conduct the ‘housework of the university’ it was hypothesised that those who were left would be the most likely to pick up slack caused by letting go of casual staff (Watermeyer et al, 2020), to take on the extra pastoral work needed by students during a time of great stress and uncertainty (Gender & Society, 2020), and to spend a disproportionate amount of time transferring teaching programmes online (Ross, 2020).

Ultimately, the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted and exacerbated issues for women, and demonstrated the entangled nature of gendered inequalities in academia. The rendering of women invisible (particularly in STEM) removes female role-models; it entrenches the stereotype that women are not present in knowledge making practices; it undermines women’s ability to be taken seriously as experts; and it impacts career progression and research funding which in turn situates women in lower or more precarious roles. Gendered inequalities outside the workplace, such as disproportionate domestic responsibilities, in addition to an increase in feminised labour in the university, led to a decline in women’s ability to conduct promotable and prestigious work.

3.5. An Emerging Body of Work: The University Through an Agential Realist Lens

The feminist theories explored in this Chapter offer valuable insights into the persistence of gendered inequalities in HE: the structural barriers women face, gendered divisions of labour and the undervaluation of feminised roles; gender norms which shape perceptions and expectations of women; and mechanisms that sustain gendered hierarchies and resist change. However, these approaches, while rich in their explanatory power, tend to focus either on material conditions or on discursive constructions.

Further, returning to Calás et al’s (2016:18) statement that understanding gendered inequalities ‘*requires understanding the changing conditions of its reproduction*’, it is crucial to home in on the changing terrain of the university, as described at the start of this chapter. A key aspect of this is the influx of tools of measurement, and reliance on quantitative metrics in judging the performance of the university and its staff. Therefore, this thesis proposes integrating agential realism, to understand how gendered inequalities are constituted through these measurement practices, here conceptualised as *material-discursive*

apparatuses with performative effects. The feminist agential realist lens will be unpacked in the following chapter; however, this approach allows us to turn our focus to how gendered inequalities emerge through practices of measurement and evaluation within universities, highlighting the role of the material and the discursive in their constitution. In this view, gender inequalities are not simply the result of biased individuals or unjust structures but are continuously produced and reproduced through the apparatuses of measurement that define academic success.

Indeed, there is an emerging body of scholarship researching the university through an agential realist framework, upon which this thesis intends to build (e.g. Brøgger & Madsen, 2022; Morley, 2016; 2018, Theil, 2018; Zabrodska, 2011). The following examples are outlined here to exemplify the advantage and practice of studying the university through an agential realist lens, particularly as regards its emphasis on the constitutive effects of measurement apparatuses, which are a distinct aspect of the neoliberal university and left relatively under analysed in feminist study as shown in the above accounts.

Theil's (2018) article 'Student Feedback Apparatuses in Higher Education: an agential realist analysis', exemplifies how Barad's theory of agential realism can serve as an invaluable framework for assessing systems and mechanisms in the university, especially in its ability to make the previously unseen 'visible'. Theil uses a Baradian lens to show the effects of the NSS and how practices in the classroom, the university, and wider governmental policy, are entangled. He shows how the NSS produces identities, boundaries, and the exclusion of manifestations of alternative practices. The methodology consists of interviews and observations with academics in the university about student feedback. It then demonstrates how using an agential realist frame had profound consequences on how this research understood the *emergence* of academic practice through the intra-action of the NSS and academic anxieties. It also examined how the NSS drew boundaries around pedagogical practice, as this emergence excluded more experimental approaches to teaching (Theil, 2018).

Louise Morley's (2016) article, 'Troubling Inter-actions: gender, neoliberalism and research in the global academy' uses a Baradian lens to examine how the 'discursive-material' effects of neoliberal cultures such as marketisation and financialisation are entangled with

research processes and academic identities in the university. She argues that research becomes an instrument of power in terms of performance management and in the construction of academic identities, with material and gendered consequences. In particular, she argues that the installation of research financialisation and the on-going under-recognition of women as research leaders intra-act 'to produce a highly gendered and exclusionary neo-liberal research economy' (Morley, 2016:28). Morley uses agential realism because of the way that intra-action can help us to understand 'the mutual construction of entangled agencies' and to recognise that these distinct agencies cannot pre-exist independently, but rather emerge through their intra-action. She explains that: 'intra-action challenges the notion of a fixed, knowable form of quality in research and suggests that evaluations are complex entanglements of epistemologies, ontologies and beliefs systems' (2016:30-1). The specifics of these agential realist concepts will be unpacked fully in the following chapter, but already these articles provide an insight into the ways in which agential realism can be utilised to interrogate the multiple mechanisms and measurement instruments at the forefront of the modern university.

3.6. The Teaching Excellence Framework

With this in mind, I now turn to the object of study for this research: the Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF), one of the more recent tools of measurement which has been installed in UK universities. In line with an agential realist frame, and the feminist critiques of excellence regimes which are proliferated through the neoliberal university TEF was chosen as an under-examined instrument that could be analysed for its gendered effects precisely because it is not an explicitly gendered instrument. A full assessment of the design and context for TEF will be laid out in Chapter 6 to examine its underlying assumptions and its productive effects. Here I will lay out in brief its key details, as well as outline the research which has been conducted on it to date.

TEF was introduced in 2017 under the UK government's Higher Education and Research Bill. The core ambition of the framework was 'to raise the quality and status of teaching in higher education institutions' (Neary, 2016:691). It purports to be a tool to measure teaching excellence and utilises data from the NSS, the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) and the Destinations of Leavers from Higher Education survey (DLHE) to

measure three indicators which it constitutes as surmising ‘teaching excellence’: Teaching quality; learning environment; and student outcomes and learning gain. Alongside these metrics institutions may submit a qualitative provider submission which outlines the wider context of an institution and where performance against the metrics can be explained. Table 6, set out in Chapter 6, lays out the TEF metrics in full. Rather than a measure of practical teaching, it is argued that TEF is a measure of ‘teaching mission’, i.e. ‘both the taught part of a degree and the wider context in which this takes place’ (Gunn, 2018:134).

Much of literature conducted on TEF surrounded its introduction and its proposed metrics, with hypotheses about what its effects might be (e.g. Ashwin, 2017; Barkas et al, 2019; Berger & Wild, 2016; Forstenzer, 2016; Hayes, 2017; Neary, 2016; Robinson & Hilli, 2016). On a macro-level, many were sceptical about TEF as a tool for improving teaching quality and saw it instead as part of a broader shift in HE. Neary (2016:690) argued that TEF was a symbolic part of the move of universities from public educators to businesses and ‘revenue generators’, and similarly Gunn (2018) argued that TEF could only be understood in the context of the business case for universities, with students as consumers and fee-payers, an argument also echoed by Tomlinson et al (2020). After the first round of TEF results, Deem and Baird (2020:215) argued that TEF was primarily an exercise in increased competition between universities, despite this being counter-intuitive to a notion of teaching excellence.

Although there was some discussion which cautiously posited the worth of giving students more information as to the quality of university courses (Ashwin, 2017) and increasing the focus on teaching (Berger & Wild, 2016), there were also concerns about developing a new framework on the contested terrain of what teaching ‘is’. Gunn (2018:135) argued that ‘the process of defining, let alone the separate issue of measuring, teaching excellence would be as controversial as it would be challenging’. Indeed, the metrics that were ultimately chosen were criticised as being ‘unreliable’ measures of the quality of teaching and learning in higher education (Neary, 2016: 691). Canning (2019:322) goes further, pointing to the performativity of TEF, stating that it has no ‘traceable teaching elements’, and instead is based upon ‘ghost’ metrics, which ‘may or may not reflect the quality of teaching’. For Forstenzer (2016), the danger of TEF’s metrics is that they measure teaching through primarily market criteria, which risks obfuscating the wider purpose of HE, in particular the personal growth which comes from a university education. They argue that TEF could encourage both

students and academics to be motivated by 'self-interest and self-advancement at the expense of public service and civic engagement' (Forstenzer, 2016:6).

For those who agreed that there was a need to shift institutional focus toward teaching, there were concerns regarding how effective TEF would be in fulfilling this, with some pointing to the gap between TEF's aims and its ability to carry them out in practice. Frankham (2017) argued that despite the focus on employment outcomes in TEF, it served as a performative tool and would not help students increase their employability in reality. Similarly, Barkas et al (2019) questioned the gap between TEF's aims to improve student experience, and its ability to do so in practice due to the crudeness of the metrics. Hayes (2017) examined the potential of a policy such as TEF to help situate international students as 'equals' in the UK HE system but concluded that the TEF metrics and their limited disaggregation in their current form would provide no such thing. One of the only pieces which specifically centred TEF's potential to impact gender inequality, was an article from The Guardian, published before the TEF was fully implemented, raising concerns about the use of student evaluation as a key metric, due to the biases that students show towards male lecturers (Holroyd & Saul, 2016).

Others questioned the effect that TEF might have on research-intensive universities. Perkins (2019) posited that the introduction of a framework such as TEF may have effects on the identities of academics in research-intensive institutions, and identified this as a key area for further study once TEF was fully implemented. Forstenzer (2016) agreed that there was a discrepancy in focus between research and teaching but argued that the way to balance this out was to dispose of REF rather than introduce an additional measurement tool. After the initial round of results, Gunn (2018) noted that TEF disrupted the traditional hierarchy of institutions because traditional markers of prestige, derived from research, were removed. Deem and Baird (2020) raised concerns on this point, that TEF may ultimately damage the reputation of UK institutions globally, where universities are marked by a 'third-class' bronze award. Though they also credit the university submissions for ameliorating a complete disruption in where the most prestigious universities were placed (Deem & Baird, 2020). Quantitative research from Gillard (2018) bolstered this position, finding that, although there was no precise weighting given to the provider submission of TEF, it did have significant impact on the final award given.

Further research conducted after the first round of TEF include a report commissioned by the UCU, which found that academics had raised concerns about their lack of consultation regarding the TEF, criticising it as an inadequate tool to measure teaching excellence (O’Leary et al, 2019). The lack of involvement of staff in the TEF process was a finding echoed by Cui et al (2021), which highlighted that staff were more likely to be passive recipients of changes brought in by TEF, rather than actively engaged in them. The primary critiques of TEF from an equalities point of view can be found in a small collection of essays published in *Challenging the Teaching Excellence Framework* (French & Carruthers Thomas, 2020). These essays address the effects of defining ‘teaching excellence’ (Sanders et al, 2020), how TEF aligned with students’ definition of teaching excellence (Lawrence et al, 2020) and whether students can identify teaching excellence (French, 2020); whether TEF could in practice aid inclusivity in student groups (Crockford, 2020) and its broader impact on student learning (Bartram, 2020). The final essay asks if there is a way to resist the student-as-consumer model within the requirements of TEF (Brogan, 2020).

In their essays, Sanders et al (2020) and French (2020) both begin to consider the effects of TEF on the academic subject, and the effects of a specific definition of teaching excellence on academic identities who may not fit. This is the body of work upon which this research builds, by providing an empirical in-depth study of how universities’ constitution of ‘teaching excellence’ – through their provider submissions and in conversation with the TEF framework – intra-acts with specifically gendered practices in the university.

3.7. Research Gap and Research Questions

3.7.1. Research gap

The literature review has drawn our attention to the persistent and embedded nature of gendered inequalities in academia, and how its underlying ‘causes’ are messy, entangled, iterative, and shifting. It has shown the way that neoliberalism intersects with these issues by centring certain values and priorities at the expense of others; introducing an audit culture and faith in the ability of measurement tools to capture performance excellence; and entrenching the idea of meritocracy which makes structural inequalities more difficult to address.

The literature has shown that more research needs to be done to assess the linkages between measurement apparatuses, specifically TEF, and their effects on the *constitution* of gendered academic identities. It has also shown that although commentary in the early stages of the development of TEF speculated about its impact on gendered inequalities, since its launch there has been little in-depth empirical research conducted specifically on TEF's gendered outcomes. The fact that TEF centres teaching makes it an interesting point of study, to assess the wider gendered ramifications of universities being pressured to shake up the research/teaching hierarchy, which has been shown to have gendered effects (e.g., Aiston & Jung, 2015; Baker, 2012a, Santos & Dang Van Phu), and is particularly entrenched in research-intensive universities (Baker, 2012a).

The literature has also shown that while various models of feminism have offered valuable insight into these issues, they tend to focus either on material conditions or on discursive constructions. Therefore, drawing on an emerging body of work, this research will be conducted through an agential realist lens, which emphasises the inclusionary and exclusionary effects of measurement apparatuses and allows for a deeper understanding of the materialisation of gendered inequalities. The following chapter provides a deeper insight into the implications of this framework and its additive value.

3.7.2. Research questions

Given the prominent issues which have been examined in this chapter as regards the measurement apparatuses in the neoliberal university; the gendered nature of 'objective' notions of excellence and value in the university; the specific attributes of TEF; and the need to find effective solutions to gendered inequalities which may be being actively produced through these kinds of measurement instruments; as well as the ways the lens of agential realism draws attention to the constitutive power of measurement instruments, my research questions are as follows:

RQ1: What are the assumptions embedded in TEF and how is it being presented as an objective measurement tool?

RQ2: How is TEF constituting higher education? (The university, teaching excellence, the academic subject)

RQ3: How is this constitution being produced in gendered ways?

RQ4: What is the effect of this constitution and how is it producing gendered inequalities?

Chapter 4. Theoretical Underpinnings

4.1. Introduction

Despite the feminist frameworks discussed in the previous chapter, their theoretical advances, and their associated policies and approaches, problems of gendered inequalities in the university persist. As demonstrated, there is also evidence that progress on the issue is becoming stagnated or even reversed as the spectre of neoliberal feminism and after-effects of COVID-19 loom large over garnering effective solutions in the neoliberal paradigm. The literature review also highlighted the emerging branch of scholarship which has started to adopt a new materialist approach in conceptualising inequalities in higher education, particularly turning an eye to the exclusionary constitutive effects of measurement apparatuses. Building on this approach, this chapter outlines Karen Barad's feminist new materialism, and specifically their metaphysical framework of agential realism, as a lens through which to conceptualise gendered inequalities as the effects of intra-acting processes and practices in the neoliberal university.

Barad's theory of agential realism was outlined in their seminal 2007 text *Meeting the Universe Halfway* and is often viewed as a key text in the material turn. As a scholar, they have fallen under multiple disciplinary umbrellas. For example, they are rooted in a feminist tradition: the influence of feminist science scholar Donna Haraway in Barad's advancement of the field is clear to see, and in return Haraway's later work has been informed by Barad's work (e.g., Haraway, 2016; Haraway, 2008). They have been influenced by poststructuralism, specifically the work of Foucault and Butler, but also quantum physics - indeed their initial tenured appointments were in physics departments (University of California Santa Cruz, n.d.). They can be situated in the current wave of new materialist thinkers, a tradition which aims to recentre materiality (e.g., Dolphijn & Van der Tuin, 2013; Hekman, 2008; Sencindiver, 2017) but have also been mobilised by academics focussing predominantly on the post-humanist elements of their work (e.g., Chiew, 2014; Mauthner, 2018; 2021). Thus, Baradian theory itself focuses on the interdisciplinary, or perhaps it would be more accurate to say 'transdisciplinary' (Barad, 2007:25), embracing and extending poststructuralist and feminist theory and grounding it in theoretical and methodological frameworks from quantum physics and the philosophies of science. Throughout their work they deploy this transdisciplinary

ethos to discuss, analyse, and extend conversations around subjects such as gender, race, and class structures using examples from poetry and physics to industrial relations with an explicit aim to break down boundaries between subject, discipline, and discrete spheres of knowledge.

A Transdisciplinary Approach

It is worth mentioning here the ethos behind the process of working together multiple strands of theory from 'disparate' subject areas under an agential realist framework. As has been outlined, Barad explicitly embraces and draws together a number of different theories and disciplines, but it is crucial for them that in doing so, we avoid simply comparing theoretical or disciplinary works against each other, each as a separate body where one becomes central and the others become inherently comparative. Instead, we should aim to work approaches through one another to create a diffractive methodology which Barad terms a 'transdisciplinary approach' (Barad, 2007:25). This allows for a more holistic outlook, which breaks down the boundary-making practices of subject disciplines. It is important that as part of this approach one still remains true to the specific and specialised arguments in a particular theory or discipline to retain their nuance and to build upon them appropriately, but conceptualising bodies of work in this way allows us an important opportunity to 'foster constructive engagements across (and a reworking of) disciplinary boundaries and immerse ourselves as part of the *conversation*' (Barad, 2007:25). It is thus not just a particular theoretical or methodological approach, but also an attitude which seeks to actively embrace a dialogue in the interests of holistic solutions to shared goals (Evans & Davies, 2011). This kind of transdisciplinary engagement across fields, gives us the tools to move conversations from the boundaries of a defined discipline, and extends our ability to conceptualise mutually constitutive processes. For example, if we take the studies of natural and social sciences, working them together is not just an acknowledgement that the material and discursive or the natural and cultural both play a role in knowledge making practices, but specifically it is about how they come to be *mutually* constitutive.

With this ethos in mind, there are a few frames of theoretical thought which my own research will draw on. Firstly, it will bring to bear some of the key ideas and implications that emerge from Barad's metaphysical framework of agential realism. It will situate Barad's work

as part of the wider philosophical movement of new materialism, and the turn towards materiality as an object of study. It will then delve into their specific theory of agential realism, thinking about how the utilisation of this lens reshapes how we think about ontology and epistemology, our knowledge-making practices, and the methodological and ethical implications of these practices; as well as how it affects the wider ethos of the approach to this research. The influence of post-structural feminist Judith Butler (1990; 2004), and specifically her thesis on gender and performativity, is used as a grounding for Barad's discussion around performative versus representational understandings of the world, which will also be drawn on here.

After outlining these theoretical aspects, the chapter will demonstrate how Baradian agential realism can be applied as an effective means to approach the study of gender and gendered inequalities; as well as the constitutive effects of practices and processes at work in the twenty-first century university, with reference to the emerging body of scholarship on the subject. My research will also build on the feminist thought of Donna Haraway, an influential figure in philosophising how cultural beliefs about gender shape the production of knowledge in the natural sciences. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of Haraway's conception of 'situated knowledges' as a counter to the idea of 'objective' knowledge-making practices and mobilise her conception of 'staying with the trouble' to think about how we conduct research on gender without reifying it as a fixed category. Both of these concepts will be crucial in framing discussions of 'objective' measurement devices at play in the university, and alternate ways of conceptualising knowledge-making practices.

Barad also draws on elements of Foucauldian and feminist post-structuralism. Specifically, they build on Foucault's theories of governmentality (2004) and disciplinary power (2020 [1977]), and his methodological approach of genealogy (1998 [1978]; 2020 [1977]) which also interrogates knowledge-making practices. However, these specific methodological practices will be examined more thoroughly in the following chapter as they refer to specific methodological and analytical tools. Therefore, a brief note on the organisation of these sections. Given the structural limitations of the thesis, for the reader I shall be laying out these bodies of work - namely those surrounding Barad, Haraway, and then Foucault - separately as a heuristic device in an attempt to convey the key threads which have been vital for putting together the theoretical framework, research design and interpreting

the data. Narratively isolating these threads however, some might argue, goes against the ethos of Baradian theory, but it is important to note that these are conceptualised as an entangled and interconnected whole, the breakdown of them into parts here is a choice that I have made in order to convey the most important aspects that I have drawn on for my research. However, even this choice is important to highlight as an exclusionary decision on the part of myself the researcher, or more specifically a 'cut' (Barad, 2007) which is then implicated in the outcomes and the reading of the data. What has been isolated is the specific phenomena that I have chosen to study for this research, and the implications of this will be addressed further in the methodology (Chapter 5) and discussion (Chapter 10) of this thesis.

4.2. Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions

4.2.1. Key tenets of new materialism and feminist new materialism

New materialism is a heterogeneous field and Barad's commitment to the transdisciplinary is echoed throughout new materialist thought. The inspiration behind new materialist thought is derived from diverse philosophies which have then been deployed across a multitude of different disciplines. The variety of approaches is why the approach is sometimes termed as 'new materialisms' to reflect the plurality in the field (Coole, 2013). Although currently new materialist approaches are primarily deployed in the social sciences, new materialism itself has been influenced from schools of thought including Deleuzian theory (Bennett, 2010), evolutionary theory (Grosz, 2008), Derridian theory (Kirby, 2017), and in Barad's (e.g., 2003; 2007) case quantum physics. Whilst it cannot be described as a 'unified theory' or pertaining to a single 'methodological stance', there are overarching themes by which new materialists conceptualise the world (Van der Tuin & Dolphijn, 2010:153). Broadly, new materialism is a post-humanist metaphysics which gained traction at the end of the twentieth century and has been described as the revival of a material turn or the 'turn to matter' (Fox & Alldred, 2018). This foregrounded objects, bodies, technologies, and places as having a constitutive role in the production of reality (Fox & Alldred, 2018). It situated itself in part as a critical response to the limitations of the prominence given to discursive analyses which were centred in popular philosophical thought at that time, specifically at the *expense* of the material (Sencindiver, 2017). In recentring the constitutive effects of materiality, it problematises not the discursive itself, but the '(hierarchical) conceptual distinction between

a material and a non-material world', instead claiming that the 'differentiation between the human and the nonhuman is itself precarious and mobile' (Lemke, 2021:3). New materialist scholars argue the binary between the material and the discursive is the one hierarchy that poststructuralist thought was unable to dismantle. Coole (2013) describes three key areas which mark new materialist thinking. The first is how matter is conceptualised, through an 'ontology of becoming', in which the processes involved in the materialisation of matter are continually reinscribed, i.e., 'a process not a state', and therefore matter can be considered as 'lively', 'vibrant' or 'dynamic' and is imbued with power, often with references to it being 'vital' or 'agential' (Coole, 2013:453). A second aspect of new materialist ontology, as Lemke alludes to above, is its refusal of dualisms or oppositions, instead focussing on 'the actual entwining of phenomena that have historically been classified as distinct' (Coole, 2013:454). The third is that this renewed attention to *continual* material changes which carry world changing effects, imparts a sense of urgency to studies of emergent materialisations under this philosophy (Coole, 2013).

Aligning with Barad and Haraway, Hekman (2008) underlines that it is crucial that in the recentring of materiality in new materialism, analyses do not look backwards and the understandings of the world which were gained through feminist poststructuralism are still taken into account. As she explains, in finding a settled state, it must not be a privileging of 'reality' over 'constructivism' as in modernism, nor the other way round (Hekman, 2008:92). What we need instead is a conception that is not just finding ways to link the material and discursive so as not to define them as opposites; she states that we have learned from poststructuralism that 'language *does* construct our reality', but that this is 'not the end of the story' (Hekman, 2008:92). We must consider that language intra-acts with a wider set of bodies, and thus what we need is 'a theory that incorporates language, materiality, and technology into the equation' (Hekman, 2008:92).

We see that Barad's work emerges from multiple bodies of scholarship, but if we are to label them as a new materialist, it is from a distinct branch of explicitly *feminist* new materialism (Harris & Ashcraft, 2023). One reason for this which Barad cites, is that the foundation of the material/discursive or natural/cultural dualism is itself gendered. The cultural is active, gendered as male, and takes the 'role of agent' inscribing its effects on the passive natural, gendered as female (Barad, 2011). Consequently, 'to begin analysis with the

nature/culture dichotomy already in place is to begin too late' (Barad, 2011:421). A key effect of understanding the construction of the nature/culture dichotomy is crucial not 'simply to acknowledge *that* it matters, but [to] understand *how* it matters and for *whom*' (Barad, 2011:449). Connected to this, one of the key aspects of feminist new materialism is its emphasis on ethics and the embedding of ethics through 'practices' rather than 'principles'. The concept of emergence encourages researchers to consider wider material consequential effects, comparing the 'material effects of those practices in a way disallowed by a strictly discursive approach' (Alaimo & Hekman, 2008:8). This tenet is influenced by the work of Haraway and feminist science studies which is embedded in science and developments in technology, but which is also a political project that takes account of social relations and structures (Hekman, 2008:86). Thus, Barad states that whilst there are differences within feminist science studies, the key attribute is that it is not asking for a 'proper description of what it is that scientists do', but instead 'how might science be practiced more responsibly, more justly?' (Barad, 2011:450). For Barad specifically, they describe their concern as 'not being with women or gender as objects of study per se, but rather an engagement with feminist understandings of the political' (Barad, 2011:449). Thus, they state that they see themselves as part of:

'that longstanding tradition in feminist science studies that focuses on the possibilities of making a better world, a livable world, a world based on values of co-flourishing and mutuality, not fighting and diminishing one another, not closing one another down, but helping to open up our ideas and ourselves to each other and to new possibilities, which with any luck will have the potential to help us see our way through to a world that is more livable, not for some, but for the entangled wellbeing of all' (Barad, 2011:450).

After setting out some of the foundations of new materialism as an overarching philosophical approach, we now turn to Barad's specific theoretical lens, agential realism. The following section will outline some of the core attributes and implications of agential realism as a theoretical framework including its distinct ontology, its conceptualisation of materiality, and the profound effects of this approach, such as the new areas it opens up for analysis, and its ethical and methodological implications.

4.2.2. Extension of post-structuralist thought

For Hekman the brilliance of Barad's approach is that they have not thrown out the insights given to us by poststructuralism, but instead have integrated some of their thought into this 'new approach to materiality' (Hekman, 2008:104). She explains that whilst more traditional frameworks such as modernism did privilege matter, this was in conjunction with the presupposition of an objective reality independent of the researcher and about which we can gain knowledge. On the other hand, later theories which centred around the discursive, give a deeper understanding of the constitution of objects of study and the effect of culture on things such as knowledge-making practices, but they privilege language to the extent that the effect of matter is minimised. In contrast to both of these approaches, agential realism 'proposes the "intra-action" of matter and discourse - the inseparability of objects and agencies of observation' (Hekman, 2008:104).

Instead, Barad's work draws on and reads through ideas from poststructuralism, in particular the writing of Butler and her conception of performativity, discussed in the previous chapter (3.3.4). Barad elucidates the gain in the move away from representationalism, which also permits us to think about the researcher as engaging with, 'and as part of, the world in which we have our being' (Barad, 2007:133) rather than situated above a world which can be accessed and reflected on. The move towards this performative approach 'shifts the focus from questions of correspondence between descriptions and reality (e.g., do they mirror nature or culture?) to matters of practices, doings, and actions' (Barad, 2007:135), important in thinking about where the researcher is situated and their part in actively constituting an object of study. Further detail of the implications of conceptualising practices in this way will be outlined in the analytical framework in 5.4.

However, in terms of materiality Barad (2003) reads Foucault as positioning the body as produced through institutional and organisational power relations and local practices. They recognise Foucault's acknowledgement of the impact of the 'physical body', and that it is not that Foucault disbands with the material altogether. Barad's expansion of this conception is that neither comes first, it is not a *causal* relationship, but rather one which is 'bound together' (Barad, 2003:809). Although matter is included in Foucault's account, it is as a passive force. Drawing on critique from Hennessey they quote, 'an analysis cannot stop with

the assertion that a body is always discursively constructed. It also needs to explain how the discursive construction of the body is related to non-discursive practices in ways that vary wildly from one social formation to another' (Hennessey, quoted in Barad, 2003:810, emphasis in text). Barad's account opens up the productive nature of power to social and natural domains which cannot be delineated. What is needed, and what they aim to do through the conception of agential realism, is to provide 'a robust account of the materialisation of all bodies - "human" and "non-human" - and the material-discursive practices by which their differential constitutions are marked' (Barad, 2003:810).

Thus, Barad extends the analysis of performativity from the poststructuralist framework, whereby in agential realism, 'an elaboration of performativity allows matter its due as an active participant in the world's becoming, in its ongoing intra-activity...furthermore, it provides an understanding of *how* discursive practices matter' (Barad, 2007:136, emphasis in text). This differentiates it from philosophy which had come prior, which focused on primarily discursive constitutions of the world, or our objects of study. In their essay on the subject Barad (2003:802) states that:

'a *performative* understanding of discursive practices challenges the representationalist belief in the power of words to represent pre-existing things. Performativity is not an invitation to turn everything (including material bodies) into words; on the contrary, performativity is precisely a contestation of the excessive power granted to language to determine what is real.'

4.2.3. The metaphysical framework of agential realism: Onto-epistemology and the conception of materiality

Agential realism, therefore, is a metaphysics which shifts focus towards materiality in an attempt to eliminate the natural/discursive dichotomy, centring instead what Barad (2007) terms the 'material-discursive'. This linguistic move aims to demonstrate the way in which the material and the discursive are entangled together, rather than conceptualising them as two important, but separate (and hierarchical), phenomena. It is thus, not merely an acknowledgement that dualisms such as the material and the discursive (the human and the non-human, the natural and the cultural) are important aspects of knowledge production, it is an examination of the integral way in which 'these factors work together, and how conceptions of materiality, social practice, nature, and discourse must change to

accommodate their *mutual involvement*' (Barad, 2007:25, emphasis added). Hence, much of what taking a Baradian approach entails is a seemingly small but profound change in the way we conceptualise research and knowledge production, as well as the purpose, aims, and effects of both.

In discussing the way Barad expands on conceptions of performativity to include materiality in a way which had not been fully considered previously, it is important to establish what Barad defines as materiality. Where the linguistic turn and poststructuralism emphasised the epistemology, feminist new materialism refocuses *ontology* (Hekman, 2008). As such, the understanding of materiality under agential realism is that of *materialisation*, an ontological process, one which is not fixed but is continually reconstituting itself in a constant state of becoming (Mauthner, 2018). In conceptualising materiality in this way 'agential realism' as a metaphysical framework is ultimately 'concerned with the ontological process of formation through which all entities are brought into being' (Mauthner, 2018:51). As discussed, it is a framework which refuses to 'take separateness to be an inherent feature of how the world *is*' (Barad, 2007:136, emphasis added), where all 'phenomena' are inseparable and 'entangled'. It is therefore a relational ontology, in which both the human (discursive) and the non-human (material) hold agency and come into being through mutual constitution, the distinction between the 'material' and 'discursive' (or 'natural' and 'social') only emerges through specific intra-actions (Mauthner, 2021). Thus, we see that the world and our knowledge of it is continually constituted through entanglements of the 'social' and the 'natural' where 'things' are in a constant state of 'becoming' (Barad, 2007). This is a necessary facet of posthumanism, by which both human and the non-human are given meaning and agency. Consequently, it recognises that materiality is always discursive and vice versa, i.e., 'material phenomena come into being through, and are inseparable from, discursive practices' and 'discursive practices are ongoing materialisations of the world and not merely human-based activities' (Mauthner, 2016:261). Whilst agential realism does not view these separations as inherent, it also does not see them as inconsequential. In fact, it highlights how impactful these separations are, because they also participate in the continuous production of 'becoming'. In Barad's (2007:137) words:

'the agential realist ontology...does not take separateness to be an inherent feature of how the world is. But neither does it denigrate separateness as mere

illusion...Difference cannot be taken for granted; it matters- indeed, it is what matters...Matter is neither fixed and given nor the mere end result of different processes. Matter is produced and productive, generated and generative. Matter is agentive, not a fixed essence or property of things. Mattering is differentiating, and which differences come to matter, matter in the interactive production of different differences’.

Epistemology and ontology also become inseparable under this framework, as for Barad, the separation between the two is a false dualism, and is a feature of philosophies which create hierarchies between the human and the nonhuman, matter and discourse, and the subject and object. They therefore ask us to think about ‘Onto-epistem-ology - the study and practices of knowing in being’ - which helps us to think about and gain access to ‘how specific intra-actions matter’ between these previously viewed as ‘separate’ entities (Barad, 2007:185). To conceptualise this further, rather than thinking about and taking a particular object of study for our research which inherently instils boundary-making practices, agential realism studies ‘*phenomena*’, whereby ‘*phenomena are the ontological inseparability/ entanglement of intra-acting “agencies”*’ (Barad, 2007:139, emphasis in text) including subject and object, nature and culture, and crucially as will be explored in more detail, observer and observed, and that these ‘*phenomena are constitutive of reality*’ (Barad, 2007:206). It then conceptualises the relationship between phenomena as ‘intra-action’ rather than ‘interaction’, and this shifts our understanding from studying the relationship between two separate and independent entities, to an appreciation that phenomena cannot be separated and disentangled and are in a constant state of becoming. Thus, there are necessarily no ‘fixed’ bodies which exist before their interaction. Instead, all phenomena or bodies which make up the world, emerge through specific intra-acting agencies (Barad, 2007).

The researcher is also part of these intra-acting phenomena, and thus this ontology ‘assumes that concepts and theories have material consequences...There is a world out there that shapes and constrains the consequences of the concepts we employ to understand it’ (Hekman, 2008:110). Thus, where essentialist ontologies end up constituting the object of study, since subjects are presumed to be ‘fixed’ (e.g., gender, race etc.) agential realism with its non-essentialist ontology and performative conceptualisation allows a deeper understanding of materialisation. This also allows us to shine a light on how these materialisations affect gender and gendered subjects specifically.

4.3. Using Agential Realism

4.3.1. Apparatuses, measurements, and cuts

Importantly for this research, agential realism draws our attention to the import of measurement apparatus in knowledge-making practices. Based in the epistemological framework of Nils Bohr, agential realism further emphasises the ways in which all knowledge creation is reliant on measurement practices which have determinate effects, whereby the apparatus is responsible for producing specific phenomena. In Barad's (2007:148) words 'apparatuses are the material conditions of possibility and impossibility of mattering; they enact what matters and what is excluded from mattering'. This means that any instrument of measurement is a 'boundary-drawing practice', determining which concepts take precedence over others, and therefore what comes to 'matter' (Barad, 2007:140). To explain the underpinnings of this approach, Barad explains in detail some of key findings from quantum physics which can be extrapolated to give some profound insights into the nature of our research practices. For example, the implications of Heisenberg's uncertainty principle - that we cannot simultaneously know both the position and momentum of a particle with absolute certainty. Here, the more accurate the measurement of one, the more that is lost in the accuracy of the other - this conveys the extent to which our choices and focuses within knowledge-making practices come to matter. Second, is the phenomenon of wave-particle duality, in which light displays as both a particle and a wave depending on the type of measurement instruments used. Indeed, subsequent to his finding of wave-particle duality, Bohr himself argued that a new logical framework was required that had the ability to 'understand the constitutive role of the measurement processes in the construction of knowledge' (Barad, 2007:67) and this is something which Barad attempts to account for within the agential materialist framework. Bohr conceptualised measurement apparatuses as 'material arrangements through which particular concepts are given definition, to the exclusion of others, and through which particular phenomena with particular determinate physical properties are produced' (Barad, 2007:142). In their agential realist expansion of Bohr's findings, apparatuses '*are the material conditions of possibility and impossibility of mattering; they enact what matters and what is excluded from mattering*' they are '*boundary-making practices*' (Barad, 2007:148). This is an onto-epistemological concept because in Bohrian terms 'theoretical concepts are not ideational in character but rather are *specific*

physical arrangements' (Barad, 2003:814, emphasis in text) which come into being through observational apparatus.

Therefore, agential realism underlines the vital importance of recognising the effect that methods and measurement instruments have in determining which concepts are given weight over others. As Barad (2007:19) explains, with *any* type of measuring apparatus, an 'agential cut' is required in which, 'certain properties *become determinate*, while others are explicitly excluded'. This cut necessarily forms boundaries between intra-acting phenomena which are not ontologically separable. Crucially, which properties become determinate here are not necessarily governed by the desires or will of the experimenter but rather 'by the specificity of the experimental apparatus' (Barad, 2007:19). Following from Foucault's conception of the emergent subject – the processes and modes of objectification by which human beings are made subjects – Barad extends the conception of phenomena which partake in the process of constituting our reality, including the measuring equipment and apparatus used by the researcher which also play a part in constituting the object of study. This conceptualisation highlights that the thinkings and methodologies that participate in what we decide to measure and the tools we use to conduct these measurements must be accounted for; the 'cut' between what is left in and what is excluded from our analyses is unavoidable and the specific conditions, choices, and exclusions have determinate material effects. To take once again the example of wave particle duality, it is not that matter just *displays* as a wave or a particle under certain conditions, but that it really *is* (Mauthner, 2021). Thus, the import of the researcher, their methodology, and their measurement practices are brought sharply into view under this framework.

One of the implications of conceptualising measurement practices in this way is that it is not only ontology and epistemology which become inseparable (onto-epistemology), but neither does ethics ('ethico-onto-epistemology'), because this agential cut is necessarily going to be made which will inscribe certain commitments over others (Barad, 2007:185). The recognition of this is vital and must be accounted for. Here, method is recognised not as an unencumbered tool but a metaphysical practice which helps to materialise the object of study and as follows is part of the material-discursive practice (Mauthner, 2016). Ultimately, Barad's conception of materiality, the specificity of apparatus, and the idea of intra-action and entanglement gives us a deeper understanding of the processes at play in the continual

constitution of the world and our part in that entanglement, the implications of which will be examined further in the methodology chapter.

4.3.2. Using agential realism to conceptualise gendered inequalities in the university

A key reason that the framework of agential realism may help us to gain insight into the constitution of gendered inequalities in the university, is in its conceptualisation of the intra-action of multiple phenomena through which both idealised subjects and institutions are constituted. Agential realism allows us a deeper understanding of the many facets through which gendered inequalities materialise, and the ways in which they are entangled. It also makes us cognisant of how these inequalities are constantly reproduced, and that our research is entangled in this process, thus making us mindful of the reification of gendered norms. In 'Meeting the Universe Halfway', Barad draws on work by Fernandes (1997, cited in Barad, 2007) who describes the production of power relations of workers in a jute mill in Calcutta. Specifically, she addresses how these relations are iteratively (re)produced through the material conditions of the mill, for example through the spatial constraints placed upon the workers. As well as the practices of the mill managers, she also discusses the effect of the unions and male workers who participate in exclusionary gendered practices which in and of themselves produce specific masculinities and femininities. Through an agential realist lens, Barad (2007:237) shows how the intra-action of the managers and the workers produce a space which is 'marked by the topological enfolding of gender, community, and class', and therefore, 'the jute mill can be understood as an intra-acting multiplicity of material-discursive apparatuses of bodily production that are themselves phenomena materialising through iterative intra-actions among workers, management, machines, and other materials and beings which are enfolded into these apparatuses'. This gives us clear insight into how any institution is produced and reproduced through a multiplicity of intra-acting phenomena, all of which are entangled and themselves being constantly reproduced. It also gives a clear demonstration of how agential realism helps us to access and conceptualise these small but important shifts, including how the material is mutually constitutive with the discursive. In the case of the university, we see the intra-action of phenomena such as bodies, resources, government policy, university policy, measurement practices, technology, research economies, which themselves are phenomena produced through intra-actions of broader phenomena such as gender and neoliberalism. A university therefore is a site in which the

utilisation of an agential realist lens may help to uncover the multiple phenomena which intra-act producing gendered differences and inequalities.

A second reason that agential realism serves as a valuable framework in which to conduct this study, is that it draws our attention to the agential power of measurement apparatuses, shifting our focus onto the 'neutral' tools and mechanisms which are proliferated through the university. This focus underlines the impact and agential power of measuring apparatuses, and crucially what is prioritised and what is left out of 'mattering'. For this reason, discussions of objectivity are always tied into issues of responsibility and accountability, and it follows therefore that 'accountability must be thought of in terms of what matters and what is excluded from mattering' (Barad, 2007:184). This is echoed not just in the methods that we use, but, to return to the wider subject of this thesis, in the measurement instruments and apparatuses that are used in the policy and practices of any organisation or institution. As has been previously outlined, the use of these measurement instruments is now an everyday norm in higher education, used to judge the standards of an institution, and to rank both universities and the academics who work within them. Given that these apparatuses are cast as 'specific material-discursive practices', these kinds of measurement practices become 'specific material configurations of the world through which determinations of boundaries, properties, and meanings are differentially enacted' (Barad, 2007:335). Thus, 'discursive practices are the material conditions for making meaning' (Barad, 2007:335) and this give us a way to conceptualise the constitutive role of tools which are presented as merely capturing and measuring an 'objective' notion of excellence.

Therefore, the adoption of agential realism in the context of the neoliberal university helps to uncover how the influx of measurement instruments (e.g., REF, TEF, KEF, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)), which are cast as 'neutral' or 'innocent' tools, play a performative role in the constitution of the organisation including the gendered inequalities found within. Agential realism casts these devices not as 'innocent tools' but as 'conceptual systems', the 'materialisations of specific concepts' (Mauthner, 2021:38). Indeed, in their collection of essays on the topic of the TEF, editors French and Carruthers Thomas, bookend the volume by citing Barad's impact in drawing our attention to the apparatus determining 'what is seen' (Barad cited in Carruthers Thomas & French, 2020:1). It is important to note here, that these essays are not conducted through a Baradian philosophical lens per se, but

use their ideas as a way into thinking conceptually about measurement and measurement tools. Thus, Baradian theory allows us to begin to uncover the performative and constitutive effects of the multitude of measurement instruments which underlie many of the processes in the modern university, providing a way to cast into sharp relief what is measured and what is not, and their potential gendered/ing effects.

The value of this theoretical frame can be seen in this emerging body of agential realist work in critical university studies, which utilises this lens to gain access to the intra-action of the phenomena which are at play in the university and was outlined in the previous chapter (Morley, 2016; Theil, 2018). These articles exemplify how agential realism allows us to think differently about the processes and practices taking place within the university, and the way they intra-act with wider material-discursive effects of neoliberal cultures such as marketization and financialization and the gendering of academic identities. This research builds on these important studies. It analyses TEF as an instrument of measurement, similar to studies that have been done on REF or the NSS. In the line of Morley (2016), it also examines how these intra-actions produce *gendered* exclusions, here focussing primarily on teaching rather than research, as new object of study for measurement through TEF.

4.4. Haraway and Feminist Critiques of Objective Knowledge-Production

4.4.1. Hierarchies of knowledge

Donna Haraway is a key source of influence in Barad's work. She is a leading feminist scholar in the histories and philosophies of science, and here I pause to elucidate some of her key thinkings which are directly relevant to this research. Haraway makes a vital contribution to the way we think about knowledge-making practices, tracing the gendered roots of supposedly 'value-neutral' scientific research and its inability to be separated from the influence of culture. Originally working in primate studies, she uncovered the ways in which scientific practices in this field naturalised unequal structures of social relations such as race, sex, and class. In tracing the history of primate studies, she shows how explanations of primate behaviour deriving from predominantly western male scientists tend to focus on sexual difference, with their narratives focussing heavily on things such as reproductive "competition" between males and the "fact" of constant female "receptivity" (Haraway,

1991:22). When turning to how primitive human societies have been studied, she notes that much scientific research and celebrated papers have focused on narratives about human development through behaviours such as cooperation in *male* hunting groups, whilst the actions of women appear non-existent. Haraway highlights these examples to demonstrate how the act of interpretation – as opposed to value-free observation – is an ever-present and inescapable part of fields such as this. Her work further shows that how we tell stories – especially about how we come to be – cements certain ‘truths’ about nature which in turn set the boundaries for ‘possible futures’ (Haraway, 1991:39). This is all the more potent when the narratives we draw are conveyed as neutral, natural, and scientific.

Once we accept that our cultural and scientific practices are inherently reciprocal, Haraway brings to our attention two ways in which failing to account for the contingency of knowledge-making practices has extraordinary impact. First, she argues that the ways in which we produce knowledge, in particular scientific knowledge – that which is seen as neutral and/or natural – can be used as a justification for maintaining inequalities, structural hierarchies, and unethical practices (Haraway, 1991). It can for example, aid the naturalising of systems of domination, citing the linkages that we have formed between the political realm, the physiological realm, and behavioural sciences, all of which have been fundamental to cementing and defending power-structures and inequality in society. She explains that once differences have been naturalised and regarded as inescapable, actions based on them are easier to justify, which has an effect on both our ethics and systems of morality (Haraway, 1991). Thus, she implores that we understand, ‘the degree to which the principle of domination is deeply embedded in our natural sciences, especially in those disciplines that seek to explain social groups and behaviour’ and this ‘must not be underestimated’ (Haraway, 1991:8). In fact, she argues that these kinds of scientific explanations can even be considered as ‘an important buttress of social control’ (Haraway, 1991:8). This can be extrapolated to the social sciences, and any other area which takes its cue from the ‘neutrality’ of the methodological practices and theorising of the natural sciences.

The second point regarding the impact of how we think about knowledge-making practices, is that these assumptions about hierarchies of knowledge also serve to re-entrench and reiterate the kinds of knowledge and knowledge-making practices which are seen as sound, reliable, important, and therefore more authoritative, necessarily at the expense of

other kinds of practice. The recognition of this assumption has had a large impact on feminist scholarship which faces a double bind of domination within the discipline, with the work being seen as comparatively value-laden (using a feminist lens as opposed to an 'objective' lens rooted in dominant masculinist discourses) and is therefore considered less authoritative, whilst feminist scholars – or lesser represented groups more broadly – are simultaneously being excluded from pathways into scientific research. The latter continuously impacts the former, as these voices (and theories, and methodologies) are sidelined and there is nobody to advocate for different kinds of knowledge, and the former impacts the latter because this research is seen as of lesser import and prestige and so the people conducting it are less likely to gain access to employment or funding. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this can also be directly reflected in the university where knowledge-making practices are taking place. As Haraway points out (1991:15), it is networks of people in powerful positions – historically white privileged men – who end up determining both who is responsible for knowledge making practices, *and* what good knowledge making practices look like. This is clearly a reciprocal process whereby normative bodies of knowledge increase and become more naturalised, whilst alternate designs are further sidelined and seen as inferior. The demographic who are more likely to create 'good' knowledge are then more highly appraised, more likely to gain powerful positions, and continue to add to the canon, and so the process continues.

4.4.2. Situated knowledges

Haraway presents us with a way of thinking about knowledge-making practices which attempts to overcome some of these issues. Importantly, to 'overcome' is not about taking narratives or cultural influences out of scientific practices, it is about an acknowledgement that they necessarily exist, and it is the attempt to render them as neutral which is the problem. Haraway elucidates that so-called 'objective' scientific research is conducted using 'the God trick' where the implication is that there is an omnipotent scientist who can see 'everything from nowhere', a universalist and disembodied notion which removes the influence or impact of researcher altogether (Haraway, 1991:189). Her counter to the idea of a neutral knowledge-making practice, is that of a situated knowledge. This challenges the idea of a universal objective knowledge and instead argues that knowledge is always situated within a specific social and historical context and produced from a particular perspective

including being shaped by factors such as race, gender and class. Insisting on a particular embodiment of knowledge 'allows us to construct a usable, but not an innocent, doctrine of objectivity' (Haraway, 1991:189). Importantly, this approach also tries to avoid homogenisation, by asserting the importance of all these various factors to portray that there is, for instance, no one universal 'female' perspective. By explicitly showing how knowledge is always situated, we can not only start to build accountability into our knowledge-making practices, but also provide a mechanism to encourage and promote other types of knowledge, especially knowledge made by those who have historically been left out of traditional scientific practices. As Haraway would put it, those who come from 'marked categories' – those who do not embody western, white, male 'norms' – categories which themselves have been 'exuberantly produced in the histories of masculinist, racist, and colonialist dominations' (Haraway, 1991:111). Instead situated knowledges are always marked knowledges, but they are 're-markings' or a 'reorienting', of the world which thus far has been constructed as a history of 'masculine capitalism and colonialism' (Haraway, 1991:111).

According to Haraway, recognising the situatedness of knowledge also requires us to embrace the idea of 'partiality' – the idea that we can only ever have partial knowledge of any given issue. Rather than striving for objectivity or completeness, we should instead focus on understanding the multiple perspectives that shape our knowledge of the world. What has been termed objectivity is in fact still an 'embodied vision', with this knowledge, it can only be a 'partial perspective [which] promises objective vision' because it is explicitly embodied, and accountable to the 'generativity' of practices (Haraway, 1991:190). A feminist objectivity then just means a situated knowledge which is both explicitly 'embodied and located' (Bell, 2007:125). Thus, these multiple perspectives are not just differences to be reconciled or overcome but are valuable in their own right. Furthermore, it is not only important to recognise that perspectives differ, but also that in some circumstances some perspectives are better positioned and should be centred, for example 'a knower occupying a social position of subjugation will provide a more accurate knowledge of oppressive social relations' (Campbell, 2004:171). By recognizing the diversity of knowledge and the epistemic import of historically 'subjugated knowledge' (Foucault, 1980) we can open up new possibilities for collaboration and resistance, producing different differences – 'differences-in-the-(re)making' (Barad, 2014:175) - and challenge dominant narratives that shape our understanding of the world.

4.4.3. Staying with the trouble

The final aspect of Haraway's work which is directly relevant to this research is her philosophy of 'staying with the trouble' (Haraway, 2016). Staying with the trouble means that we accept our place in the present and our role in the 'becoming with' the world in the here and now (Haraway, 2016:12). It is the notion that 'natures, cultures, subjects, and objects do not preexist their intertwined worldings' (Haraway, 2016:13), that they have all brought us to the point at which we now stand, and that the work that we do now will be intertwined with and in our futures. Thus, when faced with big challenges, it is a call to be comfortable with the complexities of our time, rather than looking backwards to simpler or more reductive frames of reference because they are easier to work with, with no mind to their part in the continual making of the world. However, it is also a warning not to become despondent by the extent of the challenges we face going forward. The only effect that we can have over the future is in the now, and whilst we must recognise the complexities and the restrictions of our present, we must strive to do the work we can within these limitations rather than acting with despair or inaction for fear of being unable to break from these boundaries. To get to the crux of this idea, Haraway draws on the work of another philosopher of science, Isabelle Stengers, stating that what her work offers is the understanding that 'we cannot denounce the world in the name of an ideal world' (Haraway, 2016:12). Ultimately, we must work within the constraints which we have inherited whilst recognising the impact that we have.

With this idea in mind, one of the more challenging aspects of this research is working with gender as a category which can be studied, without producing gender as a fixed category. When we think about our part in knowledge-making practices and the fact that the research in and of itself becomes entangled in how we conceptualise the world, we must be mindful as to the effect that the work may have and our responsibilities in carrying it out. Thus, we come to the somewhat political decision to focus on gender as an object of study, and the discussions around gendering and the category of 'women' itself (and in this research when we talk about women in academia, this is unfortunately, as shown in Chapter 1, usually regarding a very specific demographic, i.e., white, middle-class women). The question of studying gender without reifying it as an innate category is one which has troubled scholars working in this field for several decades. Indeed, one of the central debates between feminist academics is how we tackle an essentialist view of women, without throwing out the concept

altogether and rendering gendered inequalities invisible. Many of the discussions in the literature as well as the forthcoming chapters in this research, revolve around inequalities which derive from gendered norms, for example the link between women and care under the current paradigm. In talking about women, and discussing the ways in which women face barriers in the workplace, we are inclined to talk about concepts such as 'feminised' labour, or 'gendered' bias, this begs the question of how we talk about a process such as 'feminisation of labour', without reifying the concept of what is female, and thus playing a part in reconstituting and solidifying 'the feminine', as some fixed idea or further imbuing it with normative meaning.

Haraway's ideas may help us to work with the notion of women as a group, and gendered inequalities. The idea of 'staying with the trouble' helps us to come to terms with a way of thinking about gender whilst being mindful of avoiding reification of the category. That we must acknowledge our constraints, and be considerate of our role, whilst not abandoning difficult topics in search of a utopian idea. The idea of situated knowledges is also relevant in terms of how we navigate these tricky categories as it actively 'attempt[s] to bridge an impasse in feminist thought' between differing branches of feminist scholarship (Bell, 2007:122). To draw these pieces of Haraway's thought together to show their impact on the ethos of this research: situated knowledge draws our awareness to the fact that 'even the simplest matters in feminist analysis require contradictory moments and a wariness of their resolution, dialectically or otherwise' (Haraway, 1991:111); and 'staying with the trouble' helps us to understand how the research that we are doing is entangled with complex histories, hierarchies and structures, which cannot be wholly undone or rejected in our research alone if we are to address some of the biggest challenges of our time, be they gender relations or environmental degradation.

Both ideas, staying with the trouble and situated knowledges, help us to understand that the work we do and our conceptualisations of the world matter. Drawing on the work of Marilyn Strathern, Haraway underlines that these conceptualisations matter, that it matters what 'ideas we use to think ideas' (Strathern, quoted in Haraway, 2016:12) and expands this sentiment stating, 'it matters what stories we tell to tell other stories with...what thoughts think thoughts, what descriptions describe descriptions...' the 'doing' of these things differently is itself an intervention. Thus, Haraway (1997) tells us that research can be 'world-

making', and this is evidenced in the effects of canonised work that helped to constitute our current masculinist capitalist paradigm. Once we recognise this, we leave room for our own research to be activist in its spirit and to find the pockets of disruption that we can within the confines of the paradigms in which we live, to open up different ways of becoming, being, and doing. Some of the broader implications of this – in particular research narratives and storytelling as an intervention in itself – will be discussed in Chapter 11 of this thesis, but these ideas are worth highlighting here as a general ethos guiding this research.

4.5. Reading feminist theory through Barad

Haraway's ideas are a guiding ethos in my research, shaping its development. Thus, while I draw inspiration from Barad's metaphysical framework to conceptualise TEF as a material-discursive practice with constitutive effects, in addition I use other ideas and analyses from a breadth of feminist scholars to try to understand the complex 'entangled phenomena' that is the TEF. This approach aligns with Haraway's concept of 'staying with the trouble' and her notion of 'irony' – the tension of holding incompatible things together because both, or all, are necessary and true (Haraway, 1991:149) – as discussed in the previous chapter. While we must be aware of, and attentive to, the tensions among these feminist approaches, it is equally important to recognise the shared concerns and valuable insights that emerge when we stay open to diverse analyses and perspectives. As Haraway (2016) stresses, this need for conversation can be considered an attempt to move past potential impasses in feminist praxis. Similarly, Van Ingen et al (2020) argue that difficulties in overcoming certain issues regarding gender equality cannot only be attributed to the entrenched nature of patriarchal social structures and its resilience to feminist activism, but also to the fractured nature of feminist thought and approaches. In their view, the impact of feminist scholarship is inhibited by a set of problems deriving from persistent "internal' differences, tensions, and splits' (Van Ingen, et al, 2020:1). They raise the question of how we might move beyond this impasse, once again highlighting the potential in focusing on areas of overlap and shared goals (Van Ingen et al., 2020:2).

Following Griffiths (2016), I contend that there are valuable insights to be taken from reading diverse feminist theories through Barad despite the potential tensions that emerge from this 'diffractive reading' (Barad 2007). Thus, my research does not resolve these

tensions or move past this impasse – it would be reductive to do so – but it does make a fundamental effort to encompass important ideas and trajectories of thought from the wealth of valuable feminist studies available. My research makes ‘cuts’ which leave in as many possibilities and stories which may ‘matter’ in helping us understand the many entangled phenomena at play in the constitution of gendered inequalities in the university. Whilst it conceptualises the object of study (TEF) through an agential realist lens – as a performative instrument of measurement – which has profound consequences for understanding how the TEF has constitutive effects on the subjects that it measures, it does not assume that this framework alone can cast an all-seeing eye as to how what is made to matter (and not matter) may have explicitly gendered implications.

Indeed, to end where this chapter opened, a primary value of utilising agential realism itself, is the breadth of material Barad draws upon to construct their framework and their embrace of transdisciplinarity. In building on Barad, it is vital to understand that their work is embedded in the trajectory of multiple strands of scholarship: although the term agential realism derives from their core text, they do not stand alone (Harris & Ashcraft, 2023). Indeed, Barad themselves attests multiple times that their work is in conversation not only with philosophies of science and physics, but also ‘critical social theories such as feminist theory, critical race theory, postcolonial theory, (post-) Marxist theory and poststructuralism’ (e.g. Barad, 2007:26). As noted above, Barad not only extends post-structural and feminist analyses, but ‘*relies*’ upon them to gain an understanding of how subjects and objects become ‘thingified’ (Harris & Ashcraft, 2023:1988). This point was also underlined by Hekman (2008), discussed above, who notes that the insights which were given to us through feminist poststructuralism must still be taken into account in the recentring of materiality. In fact, scholars who have used Barad to focus only on the material, predominantly through assessing the impact of technology, have been criticised for a lack of analysis of power structures involved in the constitution of these technologies, depoliticising Barad’s work and blunting it of its feminist genealogy and feminist potential (Harris & Ashcraft, 2019; Van Amsterdam et al, 2023). Barad’s diffractive approach to method (detailed in full in the following chapter) actively encourages us to read insights from differing traditions through each other, utilising insights but with a conception of discourse and materiality as *mutually constitutive*.

As Hekman (2008) observes, it is therefore important to make clear that through Barad's framework the material is not more important than discourse, nor the natural more important than the social, instead they are entangled and mutually constitutive. There can be no separation of matter and meaning without us making this 'cut' between them. Further, this entanglement does not simply mean that the material and the discursive are intertwined, but that they lack an 'independent, self-contained existence' (Barad, 2007, ix). This is why the material is not conceptualised as a separate 'thing', but as a 'becoming'. To reiterate, the conception of materiality in agential realism is not about the material as in 'objects' or 'artefacts', but as 'materialization' i.e. the process of becoming (Mauthner, 2018:51). This draws attention to how our *practices* matter, as tools with constitute meaning. As explained by Orlikowski and Scott (2015:700), 'rather than focusing on the discursive and asking how it exists in, is related to, or shaped by the material world' an agential realist approach can turn to practices and 'treat these always and everywhere as material-discursive'. Thinking about this in the context of organisational practices, Dale and Latham (2015:197) draw our attention to the need to explore how the 'cuts' which constitute boundaries within practices and processes 'produce inclusions and exclusions, inequalities and hierarchies, subjects and objects'. Thus, in this research, it is not that the TEF documents are important because they are material objects, but because they are *material-discursive apparatuses*, which play a part in the onto-epistemological becoming of the world. Through this understanding we conceptualise the practices of the TEF, the specificity of its measurement criteria, and what is left in and out as key to understanding how it *constitutes* gender and gendered inequalities.

Whilst agential realism alerts us to the constitutive nature of measurement apparatuses, to understand how the TEF plays a role in the constitution of specifically gendered inequalities, we can also draw on the wealth of feminist literature to understand how what is left in and out of the TEF criteria and documentation are gendered phenomena. This is crucial for analysing an instrument such as the TEF, which on the surface is not explicitly concerned with or addressing gender. Thus, the analyses in my research draw on the wealth of feminist literature which has highlighted how the visage of and claim to neutrality is in fact gendered, often by dint of what is centred and what is on the periphery, or what is left in and left out. It is up to us to understand how things which are cast as neutral in organisations such as prestige and excellence (e.g. Coate & Kandiko Howson, 2016; Morley, 2013b), policy (e.g.

Ahmed, 2012; Bacchi, 2012; Morley, 2003), and indeed organisations themselves (e.g. Acker 1990; 2006), are actually gendered – resulting from gendered phenomena and further entrenching or (re)constituting gender differences through what is left in and out of TEF. Reading these feminist theories and approaches through Barad’s metaphysical framework and bringing these insights to analyse TEF helps to show how this measurement apparatus makes ‘cuts’ that are deeply gendered. This returns to a core concept of agential realism: ‘how different differences get made, what gets excluded and how these exclusions matter’ (Barad, 2007:30).

Agential realism emphasises its roots in the post-structural, as well as part of a long history of feminist thought. In doing so, it aims not to rid these distinct traditions of their nuances, but rather be as inclusive as possible in terms of what they offer us and to build upon valuable research within this paradigm, moving these conversations forwards, fostering ‘constructive engagement’ across boundaries (Barad, 2006:25). In the previous chapter identifying various aspects of feminist research on the university to date, it was shown how each perspective offered a valuable part of the picture of the complex web of gendered inequalities, their differing angles brought to light a myriad of gendered inequalities. What was missing was the extent to which the changing practices and processes in the university, and the influx of measurement apparatuses in the changing context of neoliberalisation, are playing a role in constituting gender and gendered inequalities. Barad helps us to understand this from an ontological perspective, whilst also bringing into the frame the power structures, patriarchal values, knowledge-making practices, and epistemological injustices which contribute to gender inequality and are phenomena which intra-act with constitution of ‘neutral’ measurement apparatuses. In terms of this research, Barad’s onto-epistemological approach turns our gaze towards the constitutive material-discursive apparatuses proliferated in neoliberal practices – the TEF being one example – as well as the constitutive effects of the present research. My study then draws on extensive feminist research and analysis to explore how boundaries within the TEF apparatus are constructed, particularly in relation to gender and gendered inequalities which are then embedded within this apparatus. As noted above, there are still tensions in this approach. However, I argue this is a necessary step to attempt to account for the breadth of phenomena through which gendered inequalities are constituted, and a Baradian lens helps us to understand what is made to matter (and not

matter) and how that is gendered. Drawing on a myriad of approaches allows me to take the entanglements of these gendered phenomena seriously.

4.6. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the onto-epistemological assumptions upon which this research takes place. It has shown the ways in which agential realism can be put to work in research on the university and HE, helping to show how the influx of measurement instruments, cast as 'neutral' or 'innocent' tools, intra-actively constitute organisations. It provides a way to foreground what is measured and what is not – what 'matters' and what is excluded from 'mattering', and the bringing into being of gendered inequalities through these intra-actions. Relatedly, it has highlighted how this research draws on a wealth of feminist research and how the insights that differing traditions bring to gender equality can be held together with agential realism in this study, highlighting their contributions in demonstrating how differences become gendered. It also showed the role of feminist epistemologies in revealing patriarchal knowledge-making practices, which again is crucial in understanding how this is embedded into naturalised tools of measurement. It underscores how our methods also bring into being certain outcomes and this will be discussed further in the following chapter with a discussion of diffraction taken through readings of Barad, Haraway and Mauthner which have important methodological implications.

Chapter 5. Methodology

5.1. Introduction

The previous chapter outlined how Barad's onto-epistemological lens impacts how we think about methodology, the repercussions of the tools that we use to gather and interpret data, and even how we conceptualise what our research *is* and what it *enacts*. To reiterate the implications of the inseparability of the intra-action of phenomena through an agential realist framework, I return to this quote from Barad on their extension of Bohr's assessment of the impact of our measurement apparatuses:

'We are part of the nature that we seek to understand...our ability to understand the world hinges on our taking account of the fact that our knowledge-making practices are social-material enactments that contribute to, and are a part of, the phenomena we describe' (Barad on Bohr, 2007:26).

This chapter accounts for the methodological cuts that it made in materialising the object of study. As a study of gendered inequalities in the university – this analysis is conducted through a feminist lens as part of a wider approach to research as feminist praxis. This brings into being the object of study in a particular way, through the intra-action of myself, the data, and the analytical apparatus. Further, it is not only my own intra-action with the data that is making cuts. TEF, as an excellence framework is also a measurement apparatus which makes cuts, prioritising certain phenomena over others. By utilising an agential realist framework, we conceptualise TEF's performative role as a methodological tool which intra-actively constitutes gender and gendered inequalities.

First, the chapter discusses the onto-epistemological implications of agential realism for conceptualising the study's methodological design and tools. Second, it lays out the research design of the project, outlining the object of study, the sample, the data set, and the justifications for these choices. This includes the conceptualisation of both the object of study – TEF – and the data – the TEF documentation – as material-discursive devices. Third, it unpacks the analytical tools used to assess the data, namely the concept of genealogy, and the WRP analytic framework (Bacchi, 1999). Fourth, it outlines how the research was conducted in practice. The chapter closes with a consideration of ethical issues and limitations.

5.2. Onto-epistemological Implications for Method

5.2.1. *An agential realist methodology*

The Theoretical Framework presented the key tenets of an agential realist approach. Here I expand on how this lens holds important implications for how method is conceived and applied. Firstly, the ‘material turn’ that new materialism has brought to the social sciences focusses on the agential power of both the human *and* the non-human, the intra-action of which is argued to be responsible for the (re)production of the world (Barad, 2007). Thus, matter and meaning (worlds, words, apparatuses, and things) are all ‘entangled’, with each reciprocally informing the other and in so doing, co-constituting one another (Mauthner, 2016:261). The agential power which new materialism attributes to materiality and the emphasis on materialisation as an ontological process, shifts our focus to the constitutive effects of the material *as well* as the discursive, or, the material-discursive. This approach draws attention to things other than the human subject which have a constitutive effect on the becoming of the world. New materialism aims to avoid representationalist methods, thus when conducting research which does centre the human subject – such as interviews – it is conceptualised as performative, with the researcher and interviewee intra-acting to constitute a particular account. My approach in this research is to examine the constitutive effects of measurement apparatuses: looking at this issue in this way is an underrepresented area of study, particularly when used to consider the impact on gendered outcomes and inequalities.

Further, agential realism is a non-essentialist ontology, accounting for itself through the processes which have caused it to materialise and is therefore in a state of continual becoming. This has important implications on our method. It means that the methods we use to ‘uncover reality’ have a tangible effect on constituting that reality, because the instruments we are using are not innocent tools, instead they are laden with agential power. The use of any measurement apparatus necessarily requires a ‘cut’ in which ‘certain properties become determinate, while others are explicitly excluded’ (Barad, 2007:19). Importantly, properties which become determinate are ‘not governed by the desires or will of the experimenter but rather by the specificity of the experimental apparatus’ (Barad, 2007:19). In this framework, therefore, not only are ontology and epistemology inseparable (onto-epistemology) but so

too are methods and ethics, because making a 'cut' necessarily inscribes certain commitments over others, and ethically this must be recognised and accounted for. Holding method as a metaphysical practice which helps to materialise its object of study (Mauthner, 2016), also reconfigures the nature of research from knowledge-making to world-making projects (Haraway, 1997).

5.2.2. The import of diffraction

A final note as to the import of conceptualising our practices under agential realism. Barad builds on Haraway's notion of 'diffraction' as opposed to 'reflection' or 'refraction' when it comes to thinking about our research and our method. In Haraway's account, diffraction entails 'the processing of small but consequential differences' rather than reflecting on a position that is presented as fixed and essential (Haraway, 1991:318). Barad utilises this in their discussions of entanglements to analyse how 'thinking' and 'method' are entangled with each other to form particular outcomes, specifically how boundaries are formed through 'thinkings' and 'methodological decision' (Barad, 2007:29-30). They explain that diffraction helps to avoid hierarchical binaries, as the subject and object are not fixed, and are instead conceptualised as emergent. Thus, diffraction involves reading insights through one another in ways that help to illuminate differences as they emerge: how different differences get made, what gets excluded, and how those exclusions matter' (Barad, 2007:30). Ultimately, reflection or refraction can only reflect on representations, whereas diffraction accounts for how our practices matter, it highlights difference, 'differences that our knowledge-making practices make, and the effects they have on the world' (Barad, 2007:72). For example, in this study the data and the specific theoretical and analytic frameworks are conceptualised as agencies which are diffracted through one another to produce certain phenomena.

5.3. Research Design

5.3.1. The Teaching Excellence Framework as object of study

This study undertakes a detailed analysis of TEF. TEF was chosen for four main reasons: 1) TEF both exemplifies a neoliberal measurement apparatus, and is built upon metrics derived from a range of other apparatuses, some of which have already been demonstrated

to have gendered effects; 2) TEF includes a qualitative text, whereby universities are able to produce their own account of excellence apart from the metrics, which allows for a wider conceptualisation of the constitution of excellence; 3) TEF has the potential to make visible academic labour which has been hidden in other measurement practices such as REF, and to disrupt the hierarchy between research and teaching which has been shown to exacerbate gendered inequalities; 4) the relative infancy of TEF increases the urgency at which it should be analysed and its effects assessed. These reasons are outlined in more detail below.

1) TEF as an exemplifier of neoliberal measurement instruments

In terms of the current direction of HE, TEF exemplifies a neoliberal and managerialist logic, for example through centring the ‘satisfaction’ and ‘employability’ of students. TEF was also proposed at the same time as a wider shake-up of HE, unpacked in full in the following chapter, which reshaped the sector’s funding model and shifted its primary goals (DfBIS, 2011). The use of primarily quantitative measures to define and assess a concept as vast and subjective as teaching excellence warrants critical analysis, particularly considering Shore and Wright’s (1999:567) critique of the dangers of metrification, whereby anything that is not measurable ‘does not count’. Understanding what is left in and out of the vision of teaching excellence which is embedded and enacted through TEF is vital, given the government’s explicit aim that ‘the TEF should change providers’ behaviour’, (DBIS, 2015 quoted in Gunn, 2018:139). Additionally, TEF is grounded in other practices of metrification in the university, for example, by utilising data from pre-existing tools such as the NSS as a proxy for many of its indicators. This demonstrates how ‘objective’ measurement instruments become normalised and embedded, acting as foundational underpinnings in a wider set of neoliberal material-discursive apparatuses, thereby re-entrenching their normative effects. Thus, analysis of TEF allows us to examine the entanglement of these instruments, important not least because student feedback tools such as NSS have already been shown to have a negative impact on female academics (Heffernan, 2021). Similarly, that TEF claims to provide an objective measure of excellence is cause for concern, given the critique from feminist scholars and others regarding the exclusionary effects of attempting to establish and measure an objective notion of a subjective concept such as excellence (ENQA, 2014; European Commission, 2004; Fassa, 2015; Herschberg et al, 2016; Jenkins & Keane, 2014; Lund, 2012; Rees, 2011; Śliwa and Johansson, 2014; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2011; 2012; Wolfram, 2018). This is further

amplified when the measurement instrument is then ‘objectively’ used to critique performance.

2) The effect of the qualitative aspect of TEF

Whilst the majority of TEF is based upon quantitative measures, there is also a qualitative element consisting of a fifteen-page ‘Provider Submission’. This is submitted by HEIs to provide background details such as their educational mission, and to offer additional context to their metrics, especially in areas where they may appear to ‘underachieve’. This qualitative component of the submissions provides us with the opportunity to analyse how a university presents itself and how they themselves constitute teaching excellence, in conversation with the framework. In addition, it provides information as to the extent that the TEF panel takes into account other values and achievements highlighted by universities which lie outside the purview of the quantitative metrics. This can provide us with insights into the extent that information which is not directly related to the metrics really does ‘count’.

3) A focus on teaching rather than research

An explicit aim of TEF was to address the perceived imbalance of universities’ focus on research over teaching, and in doing so was expected to shake up some of the traditional hierarchies of university rankings (Bothwell, 2017; Grove, 2017; Gunn, 2018). The aim of the shake-up from the government’s perspective was to refocus universities’ priorities on the aspects of HE that fee-paying undergraduate students are most exposed to, i.e., teaching. However, there is also evidence that the hierarchy between research and teaching has gendered consequences, due to women being overrepresented in teaching, and the labour associated with teaching being either undervalued or not captured at all (e.g., Aiston & Jung, 2015; Santos & Dang Van Phu, 2019; Subbaye & Vithal, 2017; Zulu, 2013). TEF therefore is a tool that has the potential to render some gendered labour, such as pastoral work, more visible or imbue it with more prestige.

4) The infancy of TEF as a measurement instrument

Finally, the recency of TEF’s implementation makes it important to study as it is still in a process of adjustment and amendment, leaving scope for intervention in its design and underpinning assumptions and metrics. However, Gunn (2018:134) draws parallels between the modern day TEF and early iterations of REF (The Research Assessment Exercise or RAE) in

the 1980s, arguing that in 30 years from now TEF will be just as firmly entrenched. As discussed, the new materialist lens also draws our attention to urgent matters of emergent materialisation (Coole, 2013), in this case the performative effects brought into being through the TEF apparatus and which constitute the academic subject.

5.3.2. Conceptualising documents as material-discursive practices

Mechanisms for calculating ‘performance’ or ‘effectiveness’ associated are both reflective of and reliant on a rise in specific types of documentation in the university (Shore & Wright, 1999; Strathern, 2000). These documents form a co-constitutive part of a wider neoliberal material-discursive apparatus. As Atkinson & Coffey (2011:78) argue, the social formation of modern organisations ‘is thoroughly dependent on documents’. This is true of TEF – along with REF and NSS – as a mechanism of audit and a material-discursive measurement practice. TEF is reliant both on its own documentation, but also that of other entangled measurement apparatuses, from which its metrics are derived. TEF is constituted as it is, because it is embedded in the assumptions of the policy documentation which was released in the lead-up to and release of the framework. Here, it is argued that this policy documentation had a performative effect on shaping the policy problem and therefore TEF was shaped in a specific way to be posed as the policy solution. Therefore, the documentation that constitutes TEF: the Green (2015) and White Papers (2011; 2016) which outline the perceived ‘problems’ in HE and the proposed new direction; and the guidance, research, and policy papers regarding TEF itself, can also be understood as a material-discursive apparatus, and serve as an important primary source of data. This is not just because of what the documents tell us about the content of TEF, but because of how they are performatively constituting it. The full list of policy documents which were analysed in this research are outlined in Table 1. The list of university documents analysed is outlined in Table 2.

There is debate as to the status of documents, and whether they should be viewed as a passive source of information and ‘window’ into an organisational reality (Bryman, 2012:554); or performative and ‘active agents in the production of social life’ (Prior, 2016:173; see also Atkinson & Coffey, 2011). This thesis takes up the latter approach, encouraging the turn towards recognising the agential power of non-human actors in the materialisation of phenomena. Because of the biases or assumptions that are embedded into documents, which

are then (re)produced in the materialisation of particular phenomena, they become even more important as a source of data when conceptualised as part of a material-discursive apparatus.

In conducting an analysis of documents, it must be considered not only what is 'in' a document, but also how the content has been constructed, how it is used as part of social interactions within an organisation, and the ways that it functions as an 'actor' in its own right' (Prior, 2016:173). For Atkinson and Coffey (2011:77), if we take it that documents are actively constituting the organisation they are purporting to describe, analysis must always 'focus on how organisational realities are (re)produced' through the documents. Prior (2016) provides us with an excellent example of the way in which knowledge-making mechanisms which produce classifications can constitute reality. She uses the CIS-R (Clinical Interview Schedule (Revised)), a document that produces 'facts', categorising phenomena such as 'disability', 'mental illness' and 'quality of life' based on a somewhat arbitrary numbering system (Prior, 2016:178). She explains that if we changed the cut-off point at which we decide a certain number of symptoms is akin to having a mental disorder, 'then our entire picture of the prevalence of the different disorders would change', hence the 'facts' about mental disorders are to a degree 'malleable' (Prior, 2016:179). We see similar productions taking place in the university whereby quantitative measurements often have a numerate qualifier of what constitutes 'excellence', or counter, an arbitrary cut-off mark which signifies underperformance. As Morley (2016:29) states in her work on the research economy, metrics 'imply norms', and with them we derive certain measurements as imbuing meaning or reflecting 'truths'. In the case of TEF, its metrics are presented as an objective reflection of quality and excellence.

Atkinson and Coffey (2011) also argue that to properly assess any document, it is crucial that the context they were produced and their intended readership is examined. It is notable that the universities' TEF documentation, as well as needing to fulfil particular set criteria for an assessment panel, is readily available online for parents and students to read, and potentially forms part of a university's 'brand'. This is important as it demonstrates how the documents are constituting rather than reflecting excellence, for instance, through priming future students' views about what they assume excellence in HE *is*.

Finally, it must be recognised that interpreting documents is always an active process. If we take the view that documents have a part in the constitution of reality, this inherently involves an intra-action with the reader, and so ‘reading documents and making sense of their contents, requires readers to bring their own background assumptions to bear’ (Atkinson & Coffey, 2011:85). Through a Baradian lens, the documents and the reader intra-act to bring into being the object of study. Hence the importance of accounting for our methods and measurement apparatuses as part of this intra-action. The key point is to explicitly recognise this co-constitutive role, rather than treat it as an ‘innocent’ process. However, this argument would hold no matter what methodology one is using.

5.3.3. *The data set*

This research takes the original iterations of TEF running from 2017-2019 as its object of study. From 2019 there was an interregnum in TEF, as the government waited to conduct a full review of the framework before renewing it. Following a period of consultation on the framework, the next round of TEF was implemented in 2022. The results of TEF2023 were published in the autumn of 2023, as this research was in the final stages of write-up. As such, the TEF2023 results do not form part of this research.

There are two core data sets which this research analyses. The first set, laid out in Table 1, is the wider policy documentation around TEF. This is made up of the Green (2015) and White (2011; 2016) papers on the policy direction of HE under the coalition (2010-2015) and Conservative (2015-2024) governments and were published by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (DfBIS) who were responsible for HE policy at the time. These papers are analysed to assess the wider context of the HE policy landscape and its key goals, values, and assumptions which shaped the way that TEF was designed. This data set also includes the specific policy documents outlining TEF which is comprised of two guidance papers on TEF issued by the Department for Education (DfE), *Teaching Excellence Framework: Year two specification* (2016a) and *Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework Specification* (2017a). These papers outline the purpose and scope of TEF; the aims and expectations of the framework; detailed descriptions of the metrics that are used, their data sources, and the ways in which they are quantified; advice for universities on what they should feature in their written submissions, including what will be assessed and what will be

ignored; and details of the assessment process – from choosing the TEF judgement panel to the panel’s final decision. Additional contextual data was taken from DfE Research and Analysis Papers and Policy Papers on TEF, which were published to provide further information on the metrics and how they were devised. Together, these policy documents allow for an assessment of their productive role in the constitution of HE, its aims, values, and purpose, and the context into which the provider submissions are being written. This data set consisted of a total of 582 pages and is analysed in Chapter 6.

Document Type	Document Title
Green Paper	DfBIS (2015) <i>Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice</i>
White Paper	DfBIS (2011) <i>Higher Education: Students at the heart of the system</i> DfBIS (2016) <i>Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice</i>
Guidance Paper	DfE (2016a) <i>Teaching Excellence Framework: Year two specification</i> DfE (2017a) <i>Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework Specification</i>
Research and Analysis Papers	DfE (2017b) <i>Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework: analysis of metrics flags</i> DfE (2018) <i>TEF and Informing Student Choice: Subject-level classifications, and teaching quality and student outcome factors</i>
Policy Papers	DfE (2016c) <i>Policy Paper: TEF Factsheet</i> DfE (2017c) <i>Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework: lessons learned from Year Two</i>

Table 1: Data Set 1 – TEF policy documentation

The second data set consists of the ‘provider submissions’ and the ‘statement of findings’ of the 21 Russell Group Universities who applied for a TEF award during 2017-18, listed in Table 2. This data set consisted of a total of 335 pages and is analysed in Chapters 7 to 9.

Sample justification

I chose to use the Russell Group Universities as a sample to specifically assess how research-intensive universities tackle this assessment, and how they are in turn judged through this framework. I wanted to focus my analysis on how universities which traditionally grant more prestige to research than to teaching (Baker, 2012a) market themselves through TEF, and how this effects their priorities and practices. Ahead of the first set of TEF results, there was some expectation that Russell Group may fare less well than the post-1992 universities in this framework, due to the nature of the metrics being utilised (Havergal, 2016). This was even considered to be a purposeful political step, deliberately designed to shake up hierarchies in which traditional, research-intensive universities are more successful in existing measures of excellence such as REF and league tables, at the expense of institutions that are more 'student focussed' (AMOSSHE, 2017; Gunn, 2018). I hypothesised that due to the gendered effects of the research/teaching hierarchy (e.g., Aiston & Jung, 2015; Baker, 2012a; Santos & Dang Van Phu, 2019; Subbaye & Vithal, 2017; Zulu, 2013), the Russell Group served as a site in which TEF's focus on teaching might serve to highlight gendered labour which was previously more sidelined in these institutions (Baker, 2012a).

The Russell Group as a sample, covers the range of awards – bronze, silver, and gold – so the research captures all 'levels' of TEF success. The data used in this thesis comes from TEF2 (2017) and TEF3 (2018). TEF1 used only trial metrics, with the full framework rolled out in TEF2 which is when provider submissions were included. Due to accreditations lasting for 3 years, there were no Russell Group submissions in TEF4 (2019), with all already having gained an accreditation and none reapplying.

Data Set	Institution ¹
Provider Submissions	University of Birmingham University of Bristol University of Cambridge Cardiff University Durham University University of Exeter Imperial College London (Imperial) King's College London (King's)
Statement of Findings	University of Leeds University of Liverpool The London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) University of Manchester Newcastle University University of Nottingham University of Oxford Queen Mary University of London (QMUL) University of Sheffield University of Southampton University College London (UCL) University of Warwick University of York

Table 2: Data Set 2 – Provider submissions and Statement of Findings

Format of the Provider Submissions

A provider submission is a qualitative document, no longer than fifteen A4 pages, which is submitted by the university as part of its TEF application to 'support their case for excellence' (DfE, 2017a:49). In this sample, every document met the fifteen-page limit except Oxford which was fourteen pages. The expressed purpose of the submission is to: add the context of the university, such as their educational mission or pedagogical approach; explain their performance in the metrics, especially areas where they may appear to 'underachieve';

¹ Throughout this thesis, institutions will be referred to by the term included in brackets in this list, or, where no term is listed, by the relevant city in the university's name (Birmingham, Bristol etc).

insert additional evidence which aligns with the TEF assessment criteria; and discuss the performance of specific demographic groups (DfE, 2017a). There is no specific template or form in which the submissions must be written, and no specific person or board who must be designated as the writer, though universities are encouraged to involve students in the production of the document (DfE, 2017a)

Format of the Statement of Findings

The TEF Panel make the judgement on the final award of every institution. The panel includes academics, students, employment experts, and widening participation experts (DfE, 2017a). Every university submission can be paired with the TEF panel's Statement of Findings. The Statement of Findings is a maximum of one page of data and is where the TEF panel's assessment of the level of award is noted. Following the level of award, a brief outline – no longer than four sentences – explains how the metrics supplemented by the submission indicates the level of 'excellence' universities have achieved across the indicators that TEF assesses. It then provides four to six bullet points which indicate key points from the Provider Submission which was considered by the panel in making their judgement. These assessments are displayed on the OfS website, and as such, the attributes which they highlight are produced as the key indicators of excellence which may be seen by students, parents, funding bodies, and so on.

The Provider Submissions constitute part of the production of a university's values and conception of excellence. The extent to which this aligns with or disrupts that which was seen in the TEF policy documentation is important. Assessing the submissions in conjunction with the Statement of Findings will demonstrate which narratives are given credence by the TEF panel. Analysing what is produced as a constitutive part of excellence through the submissions, as well as what is then legitimised or delegitimised through the Statement of Findings, will help to assess how a particular conception of teaching excellence is constituted. In highlighting what this constitution of excellence prioritises and sidelines we can start to ascertain how what is made to matter may have particular gendered effects.

5.4. Analytic Framework

Agential realism, though increasingly influential over the past decade, remains a relatively new theoretical lens, prompting researchers to adapt analytical tools for a shifting

understanding of materiality. This research assesses these documents through Bacchi's WPR analytical approach grounded in Foucauldian method, reading WRP through a Baradian onto-epistemological lens. This section will first outline what Bacchi's approach entails, and subsequently explain how it can be operationalised within an agential realist study.

Given the central role of neoliberalism and neoliberal regimes in this study (outlined in Chapter 2), Foucault's ideas are particularly relevant. He examined neoliberalism as a form of governance that embeds market principles across all areas of life, shaping individual behaviour, social institutions, and power dynamics by promoting self-regulation and competition. Key Foucauldian themes – such as the productive nature of power, governmentality, subjectification, and self-discipline – are central to this analysis. The work of Foucault has had a great impact on organisational theory, particularly in critical management studies, and more recently, in work on race, class, and gender in organisations (e.g. Acker, 1990; 2006; Alvesson & Kärreman, 2000; Burrell, 1988; Calás & Smircich, 1999; Knights, 2002; 2021; McKinlay & Starkey, 1998; Townley, 1993), including the university as an organisational site (e.g. Amsler & Shore, 2017; Morrissey, 2013; 2015; Shore & Wright, 1999; 2015; Varman et al, 2011). Foucauldian analysis has also been adopted in policy analysis, where the methodological tool of genealogy has been utilised and expanded on by Carol Bacchi in her work on problematisation (e.g., 1999; 2012; 2015). Further, Foucault provides a particular interrogation and critique of neoliberal regimes, the implications and expansions of which were addressed in Chapters 2 and 3 in the work of scholars such as Brown (e.g., 2005; 2020). Additionally, feminist scholars have further developed his ideas, including those central to my research, such as Barad (e.g. 2007), Butler (e.g. 1990), Brown (e.g. 2020) and Bacchi (e.g. 1999).

Barad explicitly draws on poststructuralist scholars such as Butler, specifically her development of performativity and its implications for understanding gender (e.g., Butler, 1990; 2004). Barad also builds on Foucault's interrogation of a fixed and stable subject, which he argues instead emerges through discursive power relations in a process of subjectification (1977). Through the lens of agential realism, Barad (2007) widens this conception whereby the emergent subject comes into being through material-discursive intra-actions, so that neither the subject nor the material-discursive phenomena come first, but rather they are iteratively produced.

Where the Baradian framework helps us to conceptualise phenomena, expands the analysis of what can be studied, reframes ontological and epistemological assumptions, and draws attention to the material-discursive effects of our own research tools and methods; Foucault helps us to consider the importance of concepts such as power in epistemic regimes, questioning the self-evident, self-regulation, categorisation, governmentality, and responsabilisation. This gives us the tools to interrogate naturalised processes but conceptualising them here as part of the entanglement of intra-acting *material-discursive* practices.

In this section, Foucault's methodological approach of genealogy will be outlined as a mode of research drawn upon by key feminist and post-humanist thinkers for tracing back knowledge and knowledge-making practices and norms, interrogating how they became naturalised. This 'denaturalisation' in turn allows for an opening up of alternate possibilities to think about how things 'could be' otherwise. This is followed by outlining Bacchi's *What is the Problem Represented to Be?* (WPR) – a mode of analysis founded in a feminist reading of genealogy, and the analytical framework mobilised throughout this study.

5.4.1. Genealogy

The methodological practice of genealogy underpins Bacchi's WPR framework and is useful for thinking about knowledge-making practices. In what follows, I provide a brief description of the foundations of genealogical practice; how it maintains its usefulness in an agential realist framework; and its relevance to my research. I then unpack the specific analytic framework of WPR.

The practice of genealogy was devised as the *method* to interrogate bodies of knowledge and how they came to be. Throughout his work, Foucault (e.g. 1977; 1978) aimed to draw attention to the kind of knowledge which is taken as 'given' or perceived as self-evident. The purpose of conducting genealogy is to trace back dominant rationalities and systems of thought to understand how they became justified, legitimated, and naturalised, and therefore what future possibilities they allow or foreclose. The implication of drawing attention to dominant rationalities is to understand how our present ways of being are only one amongst a plurality of possible outcomes – the result of contingent historical

developments, rather than a rational and inevitable trajectory. From a Baradian perspective, this approach helps to denaturalise what has been 'made to matter', and leaves room to see how 'different differences' have the potential to be made a part of our 'becoming' - that is, our ontological present.

As well as assessing the possibilities of truth-claims, genealogy focuses on the specific social practices and institutions that emerge within historical contexts, the power relations that shape them, and the opportunities for their disruption and contestation. Thus, a genealogical critique does not search for the origins of a phenomenon, or an 'inner truth' which has been hidden; instead, it investigates the 'political stakes' in categories that are 'the effects of institutions, practices, discourses with multiple and diffuse points of origin' (Butler, 1990:xxix). This includes an analysis of power relations which must account for the ways in which knowledge is produced, circulated, and contested within a given social context and is (re)constituted through institutions and practices. With this in mind, we can see genealogy as an approach to the analysis of knowledge *and* power in which discourses and practices are conceptualised as intertwined, iteratively shaping one another to give rise to only a particular set of outcomes, institutions, and ideas within their social and cultural contexts. Again, this underlines how that which seems natural is in fact the product of historical processes and power relations. As Barad (2007:62) explains, in conducting genealogy Foucault is examining 'the historical conditions that call forth certain kinds of subjectivity'.

Importantly, genealogy is presented by Foucault as a strategy rather than a theory (Colebrook, 2005). Using genealogy through a Baradian lens allows us to enfold the conception of material-discursive practices into our genealogies to widen the scope of phenomena which are co-constituting our normative ways of being. Indeed, Barad forwards the notion of 'entangled genealogies' to try to map and trace entangled webs of phenomena which are co-constituting each other *ad infinitum*. For example, in this research, normative reasoning about the purpose of HE (itself constituted through a multitude of material-discursive phenomena) is intra-acting with material-discursive apparatus attempting to measure 'excellence' in HE, what they are measuring, and the specificity of these measurements. Further, through the agential realist lens - and this is an ontological point - these intra-acting phenomena are materialising HE in its current ontological form, since the

tools which measure success are playing an active part in (re)constituting how success in HE is made.

Thus, using genealogy allows for a study of how TEF, the object of study, came into being in the particular way that it did, through an entangled web of phenomena. By applying this approach, we can analyse how the constitutive parts of TEF, its aims, values, assumptions and systems of measurement were made possible through its intra-action with the vast entanglement of social, cultural, and political norms and values, as well as the wider governmental practices and HE discourses in which it is embedded.

In this thesis, the university is conceptualised as a site where the practices of power that Foucault describes are put to work and constitute academic subjects. TEF, as a tool for measuring excellence, is constituted through naturalised conceptions of what HE 'should' be and then embeds and enacts these conceptions as it is rolled out through the university. In doing so, TEF is a co-constitutive part of the production of HE and academic subjects. Using genealogy to assess the policy trajectory which brought TEF into being will help answer RQ1, 'What are the assumptions embedded in TEF and how is it being presented as an objective measurement tool'.

5.4.2. Problematisations and What is the Problem Represented to Be?

Stemming from his method of genealogy, Foucault devised problematisation as an analytic tool which critically interrogates the ways in which 'problems' are produced, represented, and become self-evident. Problematisation aims to capture the process of 'how and why certain things (behavior, phenomena, processes) become a *problem*' (Foucault, 1985, quoted in Bacchi, 2012:1, emphasis added), and in turn, how this process brings them into being as legitimate objects of study (Bacchi, 2012:1). For example, in *Madness and Civilization* (1961), Foucault draws attention to how the 'problem' of mental illness comes to be constituted and came to be seen as a particular branch of scientific knowledge through a specific set of ethical and political practices (Bacchi, 2012). In *A History of Sexuality* (1998 [1978]), sexuality becomes legible through 'the laws, requirements and regulations surrounding sexual practices', but '*does not exist*' outside of these relationships (Bacchi, 2012:2, emphasis in text).

The act of problematisation not only denaturalises these phenomena but turns our attention to their emergence through relations which are also constituted through norms and assumptions. Here, 'relations replace objects' (Veyne, 1997:181). This aligns with a Baradian conception of phenomena as relational and produced through mutual intra-actions. Similarly, it alerts us to how the constitution of 'problems' becomes embedded as an intra-active phenomena in the constitution of further practices, processes, and discourses which treat them as such. Thus, uninterrogated assumptions which are built into one layer of problematisation end up existing as phenomena which (re)constitute themselves in further problematisations. Bacchi (2012) highlights Foucault's analysis in *Discipline and Punish* whereby historic systems of punishment were problematised and current solutions around punishment respond to these previous problematisations. Importantly for this study, Foucault also draws our attention to the importance of 'problematizing moments' when important shifts in practice are identified and must be examined (Bacchi, 2012:2). This is identified in the current moment given the distinct shift in practices in and around HE under neoliberalism (e.g., Fleming, 2021; Giroux, 2020; Morrish, 2020),

Thus, for Bacchi (2012:1) problematisation has the intention of 'making politics visible', that is to say, seeing the politics in that which is seen as self-evident. Through studying problematisation, it is possible to demonstrate how things or phenomena which appear fixed, are in fact historically, culturally, and socially contingent (Mort & Peters, 2005). For Bacchi 'problematizations are to be treated, not as illusions that can be unveiled by "clever philosophical investigation", but as the thinking that comes to *constitute our condition*' (Bacchi, 2012:1, emphasis in text), i.e., not something to be uncovered but something that has real world effect – embedded in the way we think and our codes of conduct. Once again, this aligns with a Baradian theoretical lens, as a way of putting agential realism into practice, accounting for the constitutive effects of policy problems, as well as ethically in terms of its attention to thinking about possibilities for other ways of being. In this research, problematisation as method presents a way to interrogate how 'problems' in the TEF documentation are underpinned by particular underlying assumptions which have become so naturalised as to allow them to be presented as neutral, and the way these may (re)produce gendered inequalities through the gendered stratification of what is valued and what remains invisible.

To conduct the analysis of my data, I use Bacchi's (1999; 2009) analytic framework 'What is the Problem Represented to Be?' (WPR), which is grounded in problematisation. Specifically, WPR is a set of guiding questions designed to interrogate policy issues, drawing our attention to the way in which 'problems' are represented within policy, and taking this as the object of critique. WPR shifts how we think about policy from a 'problem-solving' exercise to an act which is constitutive of 'problems'. Centring the analysis on how problems are represented, allows for a questioning of the underlying political, epistemological, and historical contexts which constitute the representation of the problem and allows only a distinct set of outcomes and solutions (Riemann, 2023). In a Baradian sense, it allows us to interrogate what is made to matter in the constitution of a problem, and how practices become built around posing 'solutions' to some problems and not to others. It is not a conventional form of policy evaluation, 'measuring' results to determine success. Rather, the goal is to probe the underlying premises and assumptions which shape policy, and the implications that flow from them (Bacchi, 2009). In her book on the topic, Bacchi (2009) covers issues such as unemployment, drug policy, immigration, health, and anti-discrimination policies.

WPR is also a feminist approach. Bacchi and Eveline (2010:4, emphasis in text) argue that that 'policies are *gendering* practices...and hence it is essential that fundamental precepts in policy proposals be scrutinised for their gendering effects'. For example, the direction of governmental policy toward privatised healthcare, shifts responsibilities from hospitals into the home. In the current paradigm, this burden is then shifted onto women with *gendering* effect – linking women to the realm of encumbrance (Bacchi & Eveline, 2010). We saw this in the neoliberal policy of austerity (Chapter 2) which was rolled out as 'neutral' in regards to demographic effects, but disproportionately affected women (Abed & Keller, 2022). This argument alerts us to how gender comes to be constituted through these kinds of material-discursive devices, and that their interrogation should be part of the feminist project. Bacchi and Eveline (2010:4) continue that whilst those involved in policymaking would like to believe that policy design 'is a rational process performed by disinterested actors intent on the common good', rather policy is 'meaning-creation that are the products of intense contestation'. Aligning this approach with the metaphysical framework of agential realism highlights that the ways we measure policy "success" (in this case, the TEF) are

themselves integral to shaping both the problem and our understanding of it. This understanding of policy as a process of meaning-making enables us to identify not only what policy may be producing, but also potential points of disruption and contestation.

Bacchi describes WPR as ‘a work in progress’ (2021:1). She explains that this conception fits the ‘ethos’ of the approach, that this is not a definitive claim to ‘know how to find “truth”’, but rather it is an approach that encourages building and exchange (Bacchi, 2021:2). Thus, I am adapting the set of questions put forward by Bacchi (1999) in ‘*Women, Policy, and Politics: The Construction of Policy Problems*’, that have been developed throughout her work (e.g., Bacchi, 2009; 2012), and which help guide us through the interrogation of policy problems. Figure 1 shows the original set of guiding questions.

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- 1) What is the problem of (domestic violence, abortion, etc.) represented to be either in a specific policy debate or in a specific policy proposal?*
 - 2) What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation?*
 - 3) What effects are produced by this representation? How are subjects constituted within it? What is likely to change? What is likely to stay the same? Who is likely to benefit from this representation?*
 - 4) What is left unproblematic in this representation?*
 - 5) How would ‘responses’ differ if the ‘problem’ were thought about or represented differently?*
-

Figure 1: Women and the Construction of Policy Problems. Guiding Questions (Bacchi 1999:12)

I have adapted this set of questions, shown in Figure 2, to interrogate how TEF is constituted as a solution to a particular policy problem and the gendered effects which are (re)produced through this constitution. Thinking about this through an agential realist lens, my interrogation will focus on how TEF, as a measurement tool, will necessarily have inclusionary and exclusionary constitutive effects.

-
- 1) *What is the problem represented to be? / (What is the virtue represented to be?)*
 - 2) *What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation?*
 - 3) *How is the problem being defined and measured?*
 - 4) *What effects are produced by this representation?*
 - 5) *How are subjects constituted within it?*
 - 6) *Who is likely to benefit from this representation?*
 - 7) *What is left unproblematic in this representation?*
 - 8) *How would responses differ if the 'problem' were thought about or represented differently?*
-

Figure 2: Guiding Questions for analytic framework adapted from Bacchi (1999; 2009)

Bacchi (2009:48) suggests that by finding 'solutions' which are posed in policy documentation, we can work backwards to find 'implied problems'. I extended Question 1 to explicitly draw attention to the way that 'solutions' are built on previous problematisations. This is crucial, given that part of my data - the provider submissions - are an explicit response to the 'problems' laid out in government policy and through TEF. Therefore, they pose solutions to the 'problems' raised by the TEF framework which themselves must be problematised. These were often identified as 'virtues', i.e., how a university has 'solved' a problem, through emphasising particular conduct. But they also still contain underlying assumptions to pose this as the correct 'solution', influenced by the 'solutions' posed in TEF itself. After Question 2, I added an additional question (Q3) of 'how is the problem being defined and measured?' to draw attention to the Baradian conception of measurement apparatuses and examine how the use of specific measurement tools will also intra-act to constitute policy problems in a particular way. In Bacchi's original framework, Q3 asks multiple questions, and I separated these out to form my Questions 4, 5, and 6 to make sure that each was being assessed on its own terms in the analysis. The final two questions remained the same.

My revised set of questions allows for a deep analytical assessment of how the documentation which constitutes TEF – government policy documents, the TEF institution submissions, and the TEF statement of findings – constitute excellence. Alongside, the above questions focus on the 'how': how this specific constitution produces a certain set of ideals, prioritising certain identities, behaviours, and conduct whilst marginalising others.

Specifically, Questions 1 and 2 interrogate the assumptions around how excellence is produced through the documents, to examine how these notions have become naturalised in HE, shaping wider aims and priorities. Question 3 examines the way that this conception of excellence is assumed to be measured objectively. These questions help to answer my first research question: *what are the assumptions embedded in TEF and how is it being presented as an objective measurement tool?*

Once these assumptions have been denaturalised, Question 4 helps to analyse how these assumptions have a constitutive role in the materiality of the university, and the effects of this constitution on processes, practices and subjects in the university. Thus, Questions 4, 5, and 6 provide an analysis of the effects of this constitution, what it prioritises, what it sidelines, and who this may benefit. These questions help to answer my second and third research questions: *how is TEF constituting higher education?*, and *how is this constitution being produced in gendered ways?*.

Question 7 examines the issues that occur when these effects are left unproblematised. An assessment of the unequal effects of this constitution allows for a focus on how *gendered* inequalities are produced through TEF, answering my final research question: *what is the effect of this constitution and how is it producing gendered inequalities?*

Finally, Question 8 allows for the disruption of these norms, forcing us to reimagine possible futures of how things could be, in an attempt to actively make a more equal and diverse university structure. This also maps onto the final research question, by allowing us to question the effects of different constitutions, and how alternate conceptions may be made to matter.

Table 3 sets out how my adapted versions of the Guiding Questions map on to and help answer my Research Questions:

Research Questions	Adapted Guiding Questions from Bacchi
RQ1: What are the assumptions embedded in TEF and how is it being presented as an objective measurement tool?	1) What is the problem represented to be? / (What is the virtue represented to be?) 2) What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation? 3) How is the problem being defined and measured?
RQ2: How is TEF constituting higher education? (The university, teaching excellence, the academic subject)	4) What effects are produced by this representation? 5) How are subjects constituted within it? 6) Who is likely to benefit from this representation?
RQ3: How is this constitution being produced in gendered ways?	
RQ4: What is the effect of this constitution and how is it producing gendered inequalities?	7) What is left unproblematic in this representation? 8) How would responses differ if the 'problem' were thought about or represented differently?

Table 3: Mapping the analytic framework onto my research questions

5.4.3 An abductive approach

In conducting this research, I took an abductive approach to the analysis, following other scholars who have used the WPR framework (e.g. Hardy & Woodcock, 2020; Johansson & Elander, 2022; Pham & Davies, 2024). An abductive approach means that the researcher puts equal weight on the data and extant theory moving iteratively between the two (Atkinson et, 2003; Thompson, 2022). Thus, abduction is conceptualised as an inherently cyclical process (Blaikie, 2014; Chew, 2021). It can also help us to move between concepts and data that may not at first glance seem obviously linked. Following Danermark et al (2002), Chew (2021:97), describes how abduction allows us to find the 'connections' and 'relations' between seemingly disparate entities, which may come together in a 'web of circular relations', marking it in stark difference to the linear models of induction and deduction. This approach helps us move away

from linear cause-and-effect thinking as we grapple with the endless entanglements of phenomena intra-acting in a continual becoming. Therefore, I draw on Chew (2021) who explicitly recommends the use of abductive approaches through a non-representational lens, with an emphasis on studying practices which encompass the material and the non-material, including the entanglement of researcher. A non-representationalist researcher utilising abduction shifts the focus 'from oneself as the origin of all relations and connections, [to] be more attuned to how other entities, especially nonhumanist ones, partake equally in an abductive mental leap or creative imagination' (Chew, 2021:103). Aligning with the ethos of this research, he states that the potential of abductive research to allow 'new ideas and insights to emerge', is heightened through the conceptualisation of research as entangled as part of continual becoming, 'allowing new (hopefully more equitable) realities to come into being' (Chew, 2021:104). Thus, there has been a trend in recent papers utilising agential realism to make their abductive approaches explicit (e.g. Thorndahl, 2023; Weibel et al 2023) and Barad's recommended process of cycling between observation and theorising has itself been described as abductive (Harris, 2021:24).

In this case, the use of Bacchi's framework guided me to areas where problems and solutions were being posed, which helped to narrow what was being looked for and assessed as relevant to my research topic and questions, in what was a large and rich data set. Having been immersed in the literature of gendered inequalities in HE, it also drew me toward to particular themes, such as the hierarchies between research and teaching, which have been shown to have gendered implications (e.g., Baker, 2012a; Blackmore et al, 2016; Fleming, 2021). However, an abductive approach also allowed for the emergence of unexpected themes (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012), such as the emphasis on the university as a global institution, which I could draw out and then compare to the literature to think about the constitutive effect that the centring of this theme might have, and how it might be entangled with wider webs of gendered phenomena. This approach is detailed further below.

5.5. Data Collection and Analysis

This section will outline how the data were collected and the steps I took in analysing it. To begin I shall outline how the specific documents which comprise the data set were garnered, and then move onto detailing the four-step process of data analysis.

All the documents analysed in this study are listed in Table 1 and Table 2 above. Since the research is concerned with the policy documentation of TEF, the primary source of governmental data (Table 1) were readily available on the government website. The initial corpus comprised all of the policy and guidance papers housed in the government's DfE 'TEF collection', which contains all policy papers directly relating to TEF (gov.uk, n.d.). See section 5.3.3. for the description and justification of the data set.

However, in taking a genealogical approach, I needed to understand how these documents had emerged, to understand the trajectory of HE and how TEF came into being in the particular way that it did. Therefore, I used this initial set of TEF documents to expand my search, examining each in turn to understand which networks of other policy documentation they were embedded in. In these kinds of policy documentation, this was references to chains of policy such as policy direction outlined in previous white papers.

I started with the Guidance Paper, *The Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework Specification (2017)* which is the core document outlining how TEF operates. This paper sets out how TEF works; its aims and objectives; the indicators and metrics that it uses; and what will and will not be judged in the qualitative submission. It became clear that this document had replaced a slightly older version of the same document, *Teaching Excellence Framework: Year two specification DfE (2016a)*, which I sourced from the National Archives, to be able to provide a comprehensive analysis of the slight amendments to TEF which were carried out during the period I was assessing. Both documents are important to understand the TEF mechanisms themselves and the justifications behind its measurement criteria. They are also crucial as the documents that universities are in direct conversation with when creating their provider submissions. They provide guidance to universities and explain how TEF awards will be judged, therefore shaping universities' particular responses in 'answer' to the TEF specification.

I then read and downloaded the Research and Analysis papers: *TEF and Informing Student Choice: Subject-level classifications, and teaching quality and student outcome factors* (DfE, 2018); *Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework: analysis of metrics flags* (DfE2017b); and the policy papers, *TEF Factsheet* (DfE, 2016c) and *Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework: lessons learned from Year Two* (DfE, 2017) which conveyed

further thinkings around TEF by the government after the first set of results, as well as additional detail, depth and context for TEF. Although they do not comprise the core data set, press releases for TEF were also housed in this section and these were downloaded and studied for contextual information to gain an in-depth understanding of TEF, its rationale, and intended benefits.

From conducting this grounding of the content of the key documents from the 'TEF collection', an additional three HE policy documents were identified as key to its foundation. These were the DfBIS Green Paper, *Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice* (2015) and the DfBIS White Papers, *Higher Education: Students at the heart of the system* (2011) and *Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice* (2016). The Green and White papers gave an insight into the wider context into which TEF came into being, by providing the wider policy goals and aims of the government regarding HE. These papers were all publicly available to access from the DfBIS section of the government website. Similarly, I downloaded the Russell Group provider submissions and the TEF Panel Statement of Findings documents (Table 2), from the OfS website, where they are publicly available. Every document was downloaded and saved to my hard drive to ensure the safety of these original versions.

Having collected the documents, the analysis took place in four stages: 1) Familiarisation with the data set; 2) Applying the WPR framework; 3) Development of themes; 4) Identifying aggregate conceptual categories. Table 4 summarises the activity undertaken at each stage. This is discussed in more detail below.

Stage	Activity
1) Familiarisation with the data set	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial immersion in the documentation, informed by the literature Active reading to record initial ideas, themes and points of interest Iterative readthroughs to identify trends and anomalies
2) Applying the WPR framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying signifiers of problems and solutions in the documentation Analysing these problems through WPR framework and recording preliminary analysis with relevant excerpts from documentation

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using abductive analysis to further interrogate data and develop themes, comparing documents and panel judgements and wider literature • Iteration of this process, with intra-action between the dataset and literature to support analysis and deepen understanding
3) Development of themes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Grouping patterns identified in submissions into wider problematisations • Utilising the amended WPR framework to iterate and analyse these patterns to develop central themes
4) Identifying aggregate conceptual categories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dividing themes into aggregate conceptual categories to frame analytical chapters of thesis, in accordance with research questions

Table 4: Summary of data analysis stages

1) Familiarisation with the data set

The first step in analysing the data was familiarisation with the data set. This meant immersion in the documentation, reading and re-reading every document to understand their contents, key ideas, and an initial understanding of recurrent themes (Pope et al, 2000). This was informed by my prior immersion in the literature and with an awareness of my intra-action with the data. I also partook in active-reading, scribbling on hard-copies of the documents and taking notes to keep record of ideas, casual observations, and points of interest to which I was immediately struck, particularly in regard to where provider submissions were echoing one another. On later iterations of these readthroughs, having become so familiarised with the data set, I was more easily alerted to anomalies in the submissions. These anomalies tended to take the form of things that institutions were doing differently, and in thinking with both Bacchi and Barad, were crucial glimpses into ‘how things could be’, bringing into sharp relief the extent to which the provider submissions were following a similar script. Again, these thoughts and anomalies were preliminarily noted to set a foundation for embarking on the next step of active analysis of the data using WPR.

2) Applying the WPR framework

The second stage was to interrogate the documents using Bacchi’s amended analytic framework. I composed a spreadsheet with each of the WPR questions, into which I could input the relevant selected excerpts of the raw data from the documents with space to note down preliminary thoughts and ideas according to each of the WPR questions (see Table 5 for

an example). I used a separate spreadsheet for each policy document and for each institution, combining their provider submission with their statement of findings. Using this approach, I first assessed governmental policy documents to understand the foundations of TEF and how it was constituted as a framework. Next, I assessed each provider submission in turn, to provide an analysis of what the universities themselves were prioritising in response to TEF outlined in detail below.

As described in 5.4.3, I took an abductive approach to this analysis moving between the empirical data and theory. Therefore, there were multiple areas of import that I looked for in the text to inform my analysis. The first was directly linked to the areas of concern in the WPR framework. The starting point in any WPR analysis is to search for shifts in policy: ‘any proposal for change signals what needs to change and hence what is represented and produced as problematic (as ‘the problem’)’ (Bacchi, 2023a). These shifts tell us about *how* and *why* policy is aiming to initiate change. Language which signalled proposals, restructuring, or change therefore alerted me to the ways in which the policy was aiming to have impact. The Green and White Papers for example, provided critical entry points and contained many ‘aims’ and ‘recommendations’ which again identify proposals for change. A prime example comes from the start of the White Paper which states ‘there is more to be done for our university system to fulfil its potential as an engine of social mobility, a driver of economic growth and cornerstone of our cultural landscape’ (DfBIS, 2016:7). Change was also signified by verbs such as ‘need’, ‘must’, and ‘should’ which showed that some kind of urgent action was considered to be required. Further, prepositions such as ‘before’, ‘now’ and ‘after’, indicated points of change. As outlined, Bacchi (2009:48) also suggests working backwards, finding ‘solutions’ which are posed in the policy documentation, to understand the ‘implied problem’. This was pertinent in all the documentation, and particularly in the provider submissions, which were providing their accounts of success or how they had responded to the requirements of the TEF. Thus, solutions could be identified through practices that universities emphasised had changed in accordance with TEF, or as virtues that universities were emphasising in their teaching provision, through positive language and discussions of ‘successes’, ‘achievements’, or concepts such as ‘pride’.

Through an agential realist lens, I examined these documents for what was included and excluded in defining excellence in HE to identify which aspects of university provision

were elevated and consider the impact of these choices on constituting conceptions of teaching excellence and HE more broadly. I was guided in this analytic stage by the themes I had drawn out of the extensive literature review I conducted prior to collecting and analysing the data. In other words, reading the documents for themes that have been identified in the feminist literature on organisations which are highlighted as being entangled with gender or gendered inequalities such as divisions of academic labour (Monroe et al, 2008; Morley, 1998; Watermeyer et al, 2020) or the use of metrics for judging academics' performance (e.g., Aiston & Jung, 2015; Baker, 2012a; Morley, 2003). This was a particularly important analytic step as these documents are not explicitly *about* gender. Another important theme through a Baradian lens, was not just what was being centred as excellent, but how excellence was measured, therefore, references to tools such as NSS, internal metrics, or other ways of judging performance were brought out of the text. Finally, in using an abductive approach, I could also capture themes which were central to the documents I analysed, but were surprising or unexpected, such as the emphasis on the university as global. I could then return to the extant literature, to guide my analysis of how staff might be situated in constituting the university in this way, or how it might affect assessments of their performance when judged through a global lens, again, with a view to understanding how these constitutions may be gendered.

As well as collecting data on what the submissions were elevating and including as part of their portfolio of what they regarded as “counting” toward teaching excellence, I also recorded ways that language was used – for example passive or active language regarding staff. Similarly, I captured any information regarding how the document was being produced for example, if an author was noted, or student contributions were included. This was done to capture whether the documents framed conceptions of excellence from a particular viewpoint (e.g., the student) or whether the conception was wholly disembodied. When authors were included, it also emphasises whose viewpoints “count” in the conception of excellence in HE. For example, no academics were referenced as having their perspectives taken into account.

I conducted this analysis university by university with the panel verdict alongside the submission to gain access to exactly what had been left in and out of the panel's judgement of the university's account of excellence, and any given reasoning for that. The table on the

following page (Table 5) is an example of how this approach was actioned and a full table can be found in Appendix B. In each table I grouped data that was referring to a specific attribute of discussion, e.g. references to the NSS. Using these entry points, I then interrogated the data using the WPR framework, to reflect on how these proposals and values were constituting the university in particular ways, their subjectifying effect, and what was left in and out. Once again, this was an abductive approach, whereby extant theory helped me to frame this analysis. Bacchi and Goodwin (2016) recommend that the steps of WPR should be utilised multiple times, emphasising the iterative approach, whereby bringing out themes from the texts led me to go back to the theory to understand these themes, which brought further things to light when returning to the data.

I left space below the table to note discussion points which diverted from the dominant narratives of the sample as a whole. This analysis allowed me to capture moments in the submissions when the norms were disrupted, and idiosyncrasies helped to conceptualise the effects of an alternate framing or a differing priority: exceptions in one submission signalled and helped to highlight what was absent or taken for granted in most of the other submissions, whilst also giving insight about what 'could be'. For example, one submission (QMUL) highlighted their provision of an on-site nursery, which brought into sharp relief the absence of references to provisions for staff in conceptions of excellence overall.

Questioning the Data: Carol Bacchi and Problematization or What is the Problem Represented to be (WPR)?

Teaching Excellence Framework Year Two, Statement of Findings: **The University of Leeds**

Result: **Gold Award** (upgraded from silver flags)

	What is the problem represented to be? / (What is the virtue represented to be?)	What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation?	How is it being defined and measured?	What effects are produced by this representation?	How are subjects constituted within it?	Who is likely to benefit from this representation?	What is left unproblematic in this representation?	How would responses differ if the 'problem' were thought about or represented differently?	Notes
<p>'[we] provide a programme portfolio which is responsive to the needs of employers and equips students to succeed in a competitive, global employment market' (P1)</p> <p>'The curriculum has been informed by feedback from students and our Industrial Advisory Boards' (P4)</p> <p>'Extensive</p>	<p>Excellent teaching has not catered enough to graduate prospects. Without external help the university does not have enough of a touch on professional practice.</p>	<p>That universities have not been up to date with the changing 'outside world'. There is a divide between the university and the 'world of work'.</p>	<p>Through having quantifiably higher involvement with employers from outside of the university.</p> <p>Success of these programmes shown by Success measured by NSS and TEF metrics for</p>	<p>Employer-friendly skills/enterprise as the focus of a university education. It produces a gap between the knowledge/expertise of an academic and someone in industry/non-university employers.</p> <p>It is proliferated throughout the entire university. Modules being reshaped by</p>	<p>Academics disembodied, do not seem to be part of these decisions. Paternalistic, assumption that employers come first know best. Pushed out?</p> <p>Also valuing particular skills and as working for corporations</p>	<p>Those to which this knowledge benefits, and those who excel in this particular branch of knowledge.</p>	<p>How do certain skills map together? E.g. employability and critical thinking</p> <p>How are ideals of employability and enterprise gendered/raced/classed etc. 'the lean in' approach etc.</p> <p>Drawing a line between universities as independent institutions, and instead becoming</p>	<p>What can a university education 'add' as something different. Especially without a homogeneity of universities. Creating more room for fresh thought?</p>	<p>Ordinarily day to day invisible labour of teaching staff undermined—links back to gender and teaching. Also values a particular set of skills and knowledge bases in current paradigm. Stems new knowledge, as universities at the behest of</p>

engagement with graduate employers is at the core of our approach, and inform curriculum design.’ (P7)			‘teaching on my course’.	knowledge which is deemed the most important.	with a singular goal.		tools for employers?		outside businesses?
‘This is reflected in our low non-continuation rates, excellent employment outcomes, and high NSS scores both on overall satisfaction and within the individual questions’. (P1)	Student satisfaction /feedback as central. Use of the NSS results as a virtue (refs throughout the entire application to back up many of their points)	Omnipotence of student response (especially as a comparative tool to other universities) Neutrality of student response— links to gender here in professor ratings.	NSS	Student as central. Student as omnipotent. Only that which is counted in the NSS counts.	As the student sees the academic. Again, links back to norms, biases, and the positionality between student and teacher/ academic.	Those who ‘fit’ an ideal image, and who have the most time/ perceived to give the most to students. For the institution, those who can promote the university based on student experience.	What is captured by the NSS is what counts and is important. The knowledge and neutrality of students. The emphasis put on this one tool as a marker.	Partnership, conversation, engagement, a variety of mechanisms. Using results critically	All of the gendered issues which have been documented in NSS
‘We harness our position as a civic university, in the heart of a vibrant region...programme s link disciplinary knowledge, enterprise and entrepreneurship within a regional context ’. (P6)	The University as having civic duty. Part of its geographical region/space should be leaning into this regional context.	The university should be part of a community, have an effect on the region it is in, and have knowledge about the region that it is in.	Through links with the city, e.g. entrepreneurs locally, links with partners etc.	University has a role for social good. University has a role within the community University <i>should</i> play these parts to be considered ‘excellent’.	As part of a community. As playing a civic role. As playing a part outside of just the university institution.	Those whose work may be ‘smaller’ more local. More community driven.	a way of doing things differently. Information as to the specificity of projects, and how it is weighted to get a sense of the recognition/ prestige, rather than just words.	Provides counter to ‘world-leading discourse’ shows value in a regional context.	Anomaly: Situating the university as a regional site. Plays counter to ‘world-leading’ commentary which is advantageous to flexible/ unencumbered.

Table 55: WPR Table: Leeds University

3) Categorisation of data into themes

Once I had conducted an analysis of the whole data set, completing every spreadsheet, the third stage of analysis was to conduct a categorisation of the data I had collected into key themes. It is important to underline here, that this does not follow the usual steps of a traditional 'thematic analysis'. As Bacchi (2023b) states, the analysis in the WPR framework does not follow a classic thematic analysis, because the analysis is being conducted through the guiding questions, rather than an open text in which themes emerge. The theming of the data is a necessary step which comes after the analysis in order to organise a large data set into manageable topics.

I grouped the patterns that I had observed in the submissions around the particular problematisations from the policy documentation and how these were responded to in the university documentation. For example, a core theme in the 'problematisations' related to student satisfaction. In conducting the abductive research, drawing on student satisfaction as a signifier for excellence gives greater emphasis to areas of most concern to students; it intra-acts with student presumptions over what excellence is, as well as expectations around gender roles. It also intra-acts with tools that are being used to measure the satisfaction. Thinking about these themes was often messy, as the extent of phenomena which constituted each 'part' of this entangled web was itself made up of many more phenomena.

In the policy documentation, these themes comprised of: value for money, transparency and choice, graduate outcomes, competition, and teaching standard. In the submissions these were: employability, the global, university values, research-led teaching, contact-time, student satisfaction, material resources, and tools of observation. Once again, each of these themes were subjected to further analysis using the WRP framework.

4) Identifying conceptual categories

The fourth and final step in this process was to split the themes into the three aggregate conceptual categories which make up the analytical chapters of this thesis related to the submissions (a fourth analytical chapter focuses on the underlying assumptions and values of the TEF framework, drawn from the policy documentation). In accordance with my research questions, these were centred around the way that each of these problematisations focused on a particular layer in the constitution of HE, these being: the ways in which the

submissions frame the purpose of the university, the way in which teaching excellence is constituted, and the way in which the academic is situated, each of which captured an interconnected layer of the constitution of gendered inequalities.

5.6. Research Ethics

There are few ethical concerns in terms of collecting and analysing documentary data, since the research focuses predominantly on the micro-dynamics of university documents. These documents are published online for public use. I did not collect personal data or any information or data which could cause difficulties when writing up my findings, such as sensitive information which individuals or institutions would not want to be published. This project received full ethical approval from the University which is attached as Appendix C.

Thus, the main ethical concern, in line with my onto-epistemological approach, is to recognise the impact that method may have. As Mauthner (2018:57) elucidates, it is crucial that researchers ‘make explicit – rather than take for granted – the ontological and epistemological assumptions that underpin their research’, because any implicit onto-epistemological assumptions about individuals and society which methods may rely on can be materialised when these methods are put into practice (Mauthner 2018:57). In conceptualising ethics in this way, researchers must recognise the material effects of their research and be responsible for changes that this may bring about. The idea of ‘world-making’ also gives the researcher the potential to both imagine and put into practice a more ethical inquiry which can help to bring about social good.

A Note on Positionality

I include this under the ethics section of this dissertation very deliberately. I am a heterosexual, white, able-bodied, culturally middle-class woman. This is my position as a researcher, and this combined with the method that I have outlined above, has effects on the outcomes of this research. I work within the university setting and although the method of this thesis is not ethnographic, I have had conversations with academics at different career stages who have been affected by some of the issues considered here. I am a feminist scholar committed to conducting research that, I hope, will benefit women. Finally, I recognise that

the 'world-making' nature of my research necessarily has inclusionary and exclusionary effects, bringing into being specific ideas, identities and entities at the expense of others.

Chapter 6. TEF: Underlying Assumptions and Values

6.1. Introduction

‘Through the TEF...we will ensure there are clear incentives for higher education institutions to deliver value to students and taxpayers. The TEF will, for the first time, link the funding of teaching in higher education to quality and not simply quantity – a principle that has long been established for research’ – (DfBIS, 2016:6).

This chapter uses Bacchi’s WPR framework to analyse how the HE landscape was problematised in government policy, and how TEF was framed as the solution to this problem. It assesses the following policy documents published by the Department for Innovation, Business, and Skills (DfBIS) relevant to the TEF: Green and White Papers detailing the Government’s wholesale shake up of HE *‘Higher Education: Students at the heart of the system’* (2011); *‘Fulfilling our Potential: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice’* (2015); and *‘Success as a Knowledge Economy: Teaching Excellence, Social Mobility and Student Choice’* (2016), as well as documents from the Department of Education (DfE) detailing the TEF rollout and its specification framework. Universities policy moved from DfBIS to DfE in 2016. These documents are outlined in their entirety in Table 1.

The chapter shows how the representation of the ‘problems’ TEF was designed to address (re)produce a set of assumptions about the nature and purpose of HE which are then embedded into TEF; assumptions which prioritise certain ideals at the exclusion of others, shaping and limiting possibilities for change. Taking TEF as an instrument which is constitutive of inclusionary and exclusionary effects (Barad, 2007), we see how the assumptions which underpin TEF become part of the apparatus which constitutes the University and Higher Educational Goals. This analysis addresses my first research question, ‘What are the assumptions embedded in TEF and how is it being presented as an ‘objective’ measurement tool?’, through ascertaining how TEF is presented as reflecting a singular objective notion of teaching excellence, and how this notion came to be embedded as ‘common sense’. I will argue that TEF emerged from a specific entanglement of assumptions and values, which problematised particular aspects of HE: its value for money, its lack of transparency and choice, ‘negative’ graduate outcomes in terms of employment, a lack of competition, and a lack of adequate focus on teaching. Therefore, what TEF ostensibly measures – as an

‘objective’ notion of teaching excellence – is aligned to address these problematisations, consequently embedding and enacting the assumptions and values that deemed these issues to be ‘problems’. The chapter ends with a discussion of the effects of these values and how they may help to constitute gendered inequalities.

6.2. The Conditions which Brought TEF into Being

To understand how TEF came into being as it did, it is important to understand the context in which it was proposed, and the material-discursive intra-acting practices, concepts, and norms that helped to constitute it in this particular shape and form. This analysis shows how a seemingly neutral and objective measurement tool builds on a wider and specific set of values and assumptions. Some of the context for the direction of HE in the UK was outlined in the literature review, which examined how universities interpolate many of the values of neoliberalism, and in particular mechanisms of behaviour management, through an increased burden of audit culture and metrification. Here we examine the HE reforms, and their underpinning aims and assumptions, from which TEF came into being.

TEF was introduced as part of a wider shake up not only of HE, but the entire education system under the Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government in 2010, and then furthered under the following Conservative government from 2015 onwards. As outlined in Chapter 2 these reforms were shaped with a distinct trajectory towards neoliberalism (e.g., Cannella & Koro-Ljungberg, 2017; Fraser & Taylor, 2016; Heath & Burdon, 2013; Radice, 2015; Troiani & Dutson, 2021). The biggest shift was the introduction of tuition fees in 1998 with the coalition government hiking fees to £9000, beginning in the 2012/13 academic year. This signalled the beginning of the reconstitution of HE from a ‘public’ to a ‘private’ good (Mintz, 2021:80) and changed the relationship between the student and their education, inculcating them into the market model to produce the ‘student as consumer’ (Ingleby, 2015:518; Mintz, 2021:80; Nixon et al, 2018:927). Additionally, it produced a market mechanism whereby – alongside the lifting of student caps – more students equal higher income for universities (Foskett, 2011). This market model was framed as enabling increased competition, permitting the UK to continue to compete on the world stage and reinforcing the rise of the competitive global free market (Portnoi et al, 2010; Rust & Kim, 2012; Sutherland-Smith, 2013; Zajda & Jacob, 2022). The assumptions underlying this conception reproduce neoliberal discourses of

individualisation, specifically producing students as homo economicus, ‘investors in the self’ (Budd, 2017:23) making rational decisions for their own economic maximisation and with that an assumption of primarily individual gain from a university education, delinking HE as a communal public good.

Many of the changes to shake up HE were designed to enhance competition, another assumed good. This applies to the rise in tuition fees and was a justification for deregulation of the sector, a tenet of neoliberal ideology (Harvey, 2005). As the DfBIS White Paper (2016:7) rationalises: ‘the higher education landscape has changed fundamentally since the last major legislative reforms of 1992, leaving us with a university system that needs important reform to fulfil its potential and to sustain our global standing’. After reproducing assumptions around the global competitive need for reform (and the implication that HE is not fit for purpose), the White Paper describes the need to ‘simplify the regulatory landscape’ to encourage this competition (DfBIS, 2016:9). This simplification involves reducing barriers for new HE institutions to enter the market, as well as applying a ‘risk-based approach’ to regulation (DfBIS, 2016:9). Thus, it is explicitly stated that increased competition combined with deregulation may lead to ‘some providers who do not rise to the challenge, and who therefore need or choose to close some or all of their courses, or to exit the market completely’ (DfBIS, 2016:10). This is the primary logic of the free-marketisation of HE, which is constituted here as ‘a natural part of a healthy, competitive, well-functioning market’ (DfBIS, 2016:10-11). Free-marketisation increases direct competition between institutions and produces a model of HE where providers are reliant on gaining as many customers as possible or be consigned to leave the market, with the assumption that fewer students equates to inefficiency rather than, for example, having more specialised courses.

Deregulation is also justified because of the shift from public to private funding. DfBIS (2016:63) state that ‘90 out of 130 HEFCE-funded [Higher Educational Funding Council for England] providers received 15% or less of their income as grant funding’ and conclude that the purpose and role of HEFCE has ‘become outdated’. Their argument is that since funding for HE providers has passed from the Government to the student ‘the basis for regulation has widened from the protection of the public purse to the protection of the student’ (DfBIS, 2016:62) and therefore the regulatory landscape should have ‘students at its heart’ (DfBIS,

2015:14). Thus, in January 2018, ten governmental bodies operating in HE and research were slashed to two: a single market regulator – the Office for Students (OfS), and a single research and innovation funding body – UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) (DfBIS, 2016:15). This shift in focus, and the restructuring of the sector to accommodate it, has wide ramifications in bringing into being a consumer oriented HE system. The OfS is particularly relevant here, as the wider context of its goals and objectives serve to reinforce the underlying assumptions around the direction of HE. As well as being the main regulator which has the power to shape HEIs, ensuring certain priorities and behaviours in the context of a high-risk landscape, OfS is also the primary body which controls the rollout of TEF. It is therefore crucial to understand its remit.

The documents establish that the OfS is wholly student-centred, described as having ‘a duty to promote the interests of students’ and explicitly that ‘the OfS considers issues primarily from the point of view of students, not providers’ (DfBIS, 2016:19). This key tenet is reiterated constantly throughout the policy documentation (e.g., DfBIS, 2016:63; DfBIS, 2015:62; DfBIS, 2015:16). It is worth noting that a key assumption of the OfS is that the interests they deem students to have, are aligned with the interests students actually have, a point of criticism made by the National Union of Students (NUS) at the time (Brooks, 2018). The documents also state that all decisions should take into account ‘the interests of students, employers and taxpayers’ (DfBIS, 2016:19), expanding the definition to include these latter categories. The taxpayer is mobilised to tie into the duty of the OfS to improve efficiency, with the implication that institutions are currently inefficient, with the taxpayer not getting ‘value for money’. Thus, the OfS’s responsibilities include ‘monitoring institutions’ financial sustainability and efficiency’, as well as ‘distributing teaching grant funding’ (DfBIS, 2015:16) and allowing easy entry to new providers (DfBIS, 2015:62). Additionally, it has ‘a wider range of powers to ensure compliance with the conditions of regulation’ (DfBIS, 2016:20). The OfS’s values are described as ‘competition’, ‘choice’ and ‘student interest’ (DfBIS, 2016:19; DfBIS, 2016:15) and it has an ‘explicit duty to promote these values (DfBIS, 2016:63). As these are the core principles of the primary HE regulator with both the powers and remit for promoting and shaping universities behaviour, it produces a HE sector at the behest of these neoliberal goals.

The OfS also has a remit to ensure streamlining between academic and technical education, working ‘closely with the new Institute for Apprenticeships and other regulatory bodies to ensure...a joined-up approach on quality’ (DfBIS, 2016:63). This links to a wider trajectory across all levels of education, whereby learning is refocussed toward specific employment targets or skills, and is consistent with the broader critique of current HE policy agendas, which are ‘openly and explicitly demanding that universities develop specific capacities in the next generation of workers, such as entrepreneurialism and a competitive spirit’ (Maisuria & Cole, 2017:605). We see this replicated in secondary education with the introduction of institutions such as University Technical Colleges (UTCs): schools set up to focus specifically on STEM skills which are seen to be missing in the marketplace (UTC, n.d.); similarly, the introduction of T-Levels, vocational courses intended to ‘gain the skills employers need’ (HM Government, n.d.). It has been argued that the majority of neoliberal education reforms globally tend to focus on meeting the needs of the market, namely: ‘technical education..., job training, and revenue generation’ (Zajda & Jacob, 2022:2; see also Saunders, 2010). Indeed, it is reiterated in the White Paper that the education system is being ‘strengthened’ in order to ‘address the gap in skills at technical and higher technical levels that affects the nation’s productivity’ and that these reforms are part of doing this at a tertiary level (DfBIS, 2016:10).

As an addendum, it is also worth noting that although the majority of these policy documents have a deliberate emphasis on teaching, in the singular, very small discussion on the import of university research, its value is recognised through its role in private sector growth. DfBIS state that ‘for every £1 spent by the Government on research and development, private sector productivity rises by 20p annually, in perpetuity’ (DfBIS, 2016:16). This indicates a particular underlying ideological assumption about the kind of value which research brings i.e., as an economic contribution. This demonstrates and reproduces the shifting HE landscape in which these reforms are taking place, whereby universities are valued for their economic rather than social contribution.

6.3. The ‘Problems’ TEF Sought to Address

The government’s 2016 White Paper outlining the shakeup of HE sets out multiple ‘problems’ that must be rectified. Some of these are highlighted explicitly, and others are

implicit in language that assumes action must be taken. These ‘problems’ can be broadly grouped into five key categories: a lack of value for money (for both the student and taxpayer) exacerbated by a lack of transparency and choice in courses; a lack of adequate skills for the current job market; a lack of competition within the HE sector; a lack of emphasis on teaching especially comparative to research; and as an outcome of all of these things, a lack of social mobility. All these ‘problems’ are produced as overlapping and entangled, with TEF posed as a solution to all of them. The original Green and White Papers lay a clear foundation for the constitution of these issues as ‘problems’, laying the groundwork for TEF to be mobilised as a solution. Below is a prime example of the way these issues are embedded, repeated, and entrenched throughout the policy papers:

‘There is more to be done for our university system to fulfil its potential as an engine of social mobility, a driver of economic growth and cornerstone of our cultural landscape. Access remains uneven, with young people from the most disadvantaged backgrounds 2.4 times less likely to go into higher education than the most advantaged. Courses are inflexible, based on the traditional three-year undergraduate model, with insufficient innovation and provision of two-year degrees and degree apprenticeships. Many students are dissatisfied with the provision they receive, with over 60% of students feeling that all or some elements of their course are worse than expected and a third of these attributing this to concerns with teaching quality. Employers are suffering skills shortages, especially in high skilled STEM areas; at the same time around 20% of employed graduates are in non-professional roles three and a half years after graduating...recent research suggests there is large variation in graduate outcomes across both providers and subjects, and even for those that studied the same subject within the same provider’ (DfBIS, 2016:7-8).

The specification frameworks of TEF (2016; 2017) combine some of these issues under three broad umbrella terms to pose it as a solution to the ‘problems’. Specifically, that TEF should better inform students’ choices; that it should raise esteem and focus on teaching; and that it would help universities to ‘meet the needs of employers, business, industry, and the professions’ (DfE, 2016a:5). These aims remain the core reported purpose of TEF in both iterations of the specification framework (DfE, 2016a:5; DfE, 2017a:7). The theme of competition is implicitly tackled by the formulation of the TEF ranking system and is an underlying assumption that this competition will provide an ‘incentive’ to raise teaching standards. Interestingly, social mobility is no longer cited as a core attribute but constantly referred to as a beneficial outcome of ‘fixing’ the other issues, and is wrapped most explicitly in the theme of ‘value for money’. In other words, social mobility is a problem referred to but seen as an adjacent outcome.

The broad framing of these ‘problems’, and the responsibilities of the Government and universities, remain consistent through the Green and White Papers and into the TEF specifications and publicity, with all emphasising a particular focus on value for money for both the student and the taxpayer (e.g., DfBIS, 2015:8; DfBIS, 2016:5). The following section outlines these ‘problems’ in more detail.

6.3.1. Value for money

Whilst the TEF specification documents often enfold transparency and choice with value for money, I separate them here, as their inputs and outputs have nuanced differences in their underlying assumptions. The ‘problem’ of a lack of value for money, is cited repeatedly through all of the documents, and stems from the shifts in university funding streams with the influx of large student fees. The focus on monetary value constitutes universities' purpose as primarily economic, it assesses value both in terms of the money that graduates have the potential to make and whether their investment has a cost-benefit upon graduation. Additionally, whether it was ‘good value’ in terms of university experience which assumed to be reflected in levels of student satisfaction. On this point, the same research is mobilised multiple times, which states that a third of English graduates believe ‘their course represents very poor or poor value for money’ (DfBIS, 2015:12; DfBIS, 2015:19; DfBIS, 2016:11), as well as another finding that ‘three in ten students think that the academic experience of higher education is poor value’ (DfBIS, 2016:11; DfBIS, 2016:42). They specify that issues raised in this research included ‘the amount, and quality, of teaching [students] received, and the extent to which they are academically challenged’ (DfBIS, 2016:42).

Whilst these may all be legitimate concerns it is worth considering perceptions here, and whether students are the best placed group to determine what constitutes ‘good’ value for money. Most students pay in excess of £27,000 (often taken out as debt) and for the vast majority this will be the largest expense of their life thus far, put towards something which they have accessed for free throughout primary and secondary education, all in the knowledge that they are one of the first generations to experience the shift in expenses. By definition, undergraduates also do not have much experience of higher education to provide a comparative frame of reference. It is questionable what would seem ‘good’ value for money

in these circumstances. Furthermore, it is never the expense itself which is framed as a problem – this is unquestionable - but the university outputs in response to these fees.

Poor-value, defined by lower recuperative earnings, is constituted as an issue throughout the documents. It is stated, for example, that ‘the graduate earnings premium is less evident for many and non-existent for some’ (DfBIS, 2015:19), and that there are variable earnings ‘depending on choice of subject and institution’ (DfBIS, 2016:42). This variability is worth noting as a hierarchy of courses is already being produced, with earnings positioned as their sole metric for quality. More broadly, this ‘problem’ frames a higher income in later life as the primary gain derived from a university education. In terms of the beneficiary of higher education, this also situates higher education as an individual enterprise – constituting the individual students as the recipient of the good, rather than society at large benefitting from an educated populus. This further reinforces the individualised student-based funding system, which is reproduced in these pages in phrases such as ‘the majority of funding for tuition now comes from those who benefit the most from it’ (DfBIS, 2016:7).

Whilst the student is individualised, it does not go unmentioned that there are other stakeholders who deserve value for money. It is constantly restated that TEF should ‘prove a good deal for employers and the taxpayer’ (DfBIS, 2015:21). The assumptions guiding this logic is that TEF will help improve teaching (specifically by catering it toward the needs of employers) and that this will ‘increase [students’] productivity’, ‘help them secure better jobs and careers’, as well as helping ‘employers to make more informed choices about the graduates they recruit’ (DfBIS, 2015:21). This in turn increases value for the taxpayer, as higher income for graduates means increased loan repayments thus ‘reducing the amount that needs to be subsidised by the taxpayer in the longer term’ (DfBIS, 2015:21). Whilst the taxpayer is brought in here, it is to do only with their economic burden rather than any social benefits they may see from educated graduates.

6.3.2. Transparency and choice

All the documents link the problem of value for money to a ‘lack of transparency’ from universities. They argue that the lack of information regarding university courses means that students are ill-informed about their potential investments. This, they claim, creates a

disconnect between expectation and reality for students embarking in HE, which is reflected in poor student satisfaction rates. As the Green Paper puts it, the government has a responsibility to make sure that student choices are 'well-informed' so that their time and money is 'well spent' (DfBIS, 2015:8). They cite further research which states that '75% of students think they 'probably' or definitely 'did not' have enough information on how tuition fees are spent', which they claim has led to 'calls for greater transparency about teaching quality, course structure and how providers spend fee income' (DfBIS, 2015:12). The White Paper cites another survey which found 'a substantial minority of students continue to find the information they were given before they started their course vague (21%) or even misleading (10%). One in three (34%) say that with hindsight they would have chosen a different course' (DfBIS, 2016:42).

The problem they espouse, is that there is currently no mechanism for comparable information about the quality of teaching. Instead, information that students need 'can be hard to find, inconsistent and inadequate, making it hard to form a coherent picture of where excellence can be found' (DfBIS, 2016:43). Interestingly, they cite here specific information about the priorities of students while at university which include: 'having more hours of teaching', 'reducing the size of teaching groups', and 'better training for lecturers', but state that 'there is little information for prospective students on this in advance' (DfBIS, 2016:44). As can be seen in Table 6, none of these indicators are accounted for in the TEF measurement apparatus.

Additionally, the White Paper claims a 'lack of transparency' conceals 'the variation in quality and *outcomes* experienced by some students' (DfBIS, 2016:5, emphasis added). Under the heading 'The Transparency Challenge' - arguably implying deliberate concealment - DfBIS (2016) argue for increased information regarding the content of undergraduate courses, which they state 'is critical if the higher education market is to perform properly' (DfBIS, 2016:11). In the White Paper (2016) they argue that without adequate information, students are unable to make informed decisions about enrolling in a university. In the Green Paper (2015) they also argue that transparency is 'vital to UK productivity' claiming that a lack of information about course quality and content 'makes it difficult for employers to identify and

recruit graduates with the right level of skill' (DfBIS, 2015:19), embedding these problems in the discourse of employment, productivity, and growth.

Furthermore, the DfBIS attribute this lack of information to the lack of 'pressure' on universities to provide points of comparison to differentiate themselves from each other (DfBIS, 2016:11). This situates the government as having an important role in HE intervention, due to a lack of motivation from universities themselves. Having laid out this problem, it provides a justification to reorient the market 'with an explicit primary focus on the needs of students' (DfBIS, 2016:11), but, crucially, by creating spaces of comparability between diverse institutions, rather than other means. This could be, for example, broadening opportunities for sixth form students to try a wider range of differing subjects, increasing linkages between secondary and tertiary education, and increasing knowledge about the wider remit of universities, more flexibility for students to change courses or location once at university, and a wide array of opportunities, courses, and reasons to go to university for students to choose from.

6.3.3. Graduate outcomes and skills shortages

Intertwined with the preceding 'problems' of value for money and transparency, is the perceived problem of student outcomes. This was interpolated as one of the issues with students' 'value for money', but it is also mobilised to problematise universities' inefficiency in producing 'adequate' employability skills for the current market. This is noted with an emphasis on the problems faced by employers regarding the skillsets of graduates. The Green Paper terms this wider problem as 'The Productivity Challenge' (DfBIS, 2015:10), and it is revisited multiple times throughout the documents. The DfBIS (2015:10) situates universities as having 'a vital role to play' in increasing productivity - which they attest is one of the country's key economic challenges - stating that 'increasing productivity will be the main driver of economic growth in years to come, and improving skills are an essential component of this' (DfBIS, 2015:10). They cite a dual problem of skills shortages in some parts of the labour market, and other areas where graduates find themselves overqualified (DfBIS, 2016:11-12).

In terms of the responsibility placed on the university by the Government, DfBIS (2016:42) cite the importance of students having ‘access to a wide array of work experience opportunities’ at university, that HEIs should be working with employers on curriculum design, and that students should be provided with the ‘soft skills’ needed for the workplace. This is a (re)constitution of the universities’ role and responsibilities, as priming students explicitly for specific employment gaps, rather than developing other areas of person growth. Additionally, it problematises a university education as being ill-equipped to prepare students for life after graduation, producing a gap between the kinds of knowledge that students accumulate in the university, and ‘useful’ knowledge outside of it. The groundwork for the embedding the hierarchy in valuation of subjects and disciplines is also laid here, as they centre feedback from employers who ‘found considerable variation in employment outcomes and employability amongst subjects and across institutions’ (DfBIS, 2016:42).

In terms of recommendations for action, *Higher Education: Students at the heart of the system*, the 2011 White Paper, outlining the initial plans for a shake-up of HE, states that ‘graduates are more likely to be equipped with the skills that employers want if there is genuine collaboration between institutions and employers in the design and delivery of courses’ (DfBIS, 2011:39). Linking once again to the question of ‘value’, the DfBIS (2015:11) also remarked that providing a degree with ‘lasting value’ would mean ‘providers being open to involving employers...in curriculum design’, as well as ‘teaching students the transferrable work readiness skills that businesses need’. These solutions are again produced through an economic argument that these processes will enable graduates to ‘contribute more effectively to our efforts to boost the productivity of the UK economy’ (DfBIS, 2015:11). Again, it starts to become clear how this policy is reconstituting the role of the university, and the role of the academic, who is situated here, as being responsible for catering to employability indicators through their modules, as well as being ill-equipped to do so without external help. Indeed, the issue of employability is something which becomes a key point of focus in the provider submissions to TEF.

6.3.4. Competition

The discussion of poor quality and variation in quality between institutions is framed as a problem caused primarily by a lack of competition in the sector. Many of the HE reforms,

especially those regarding deregulation, are set out explicitly to create a market which 'help[s] competition to flourish' (DfBIS, 2016:7). This is posed as the solution to help 'raise standards'. Their explanation of how this works is thus: 'Competition between providers in any market incentivises them to raise their game, offering consumers a greater choice of more innovative and better-quality products and services at lower cost. Higher education is no exception' (DfBIS, 2016:8). Therefore, competition is assumed to 'drive up teaching standards overall' (DfBIS, 2016:9). There are multiple assumptions in these two sentences, but there are five key points to draw out in terms of how it helps to bring TEF into being in its particular form. First, the assumption that teaching standards are currently sub-par; second, that university running costs could be lower; and third that universities need a drive from without (i.e., financial risk and reward) in order to 'fix' these two issues. Fourth, that teaching can be treated like a product in any other market, rather than something that is produced through the effort and relations between teacher and student. Fifth, the overriding assumption of the entire TEF apparatus, that the quality of teaching can be defined and measured at all.

In terms of the assumptions embedded in the solution it obviously emphasises competition at the expense of collaboration; it espouses that competition equates to more choice, but under this model that is only true if quality is akin to quantity. If a course is only able to run if it is worthwhile economically, this sidelines specialisms with less mass appeal. In arguing that HE is the same as any other marketable product (DfBIS, 2016), the university is situated in the economic realm rather than as a public good, which should be run for the benefit of society not the economic logic of the free market. In thinking about the contributions that universities make to knowledge, the most socially valuable research is not necessarily that which will garner the highest funding. As Chakraborty (2014, n.p.) notes, focussing on an economic model in HE favours 'well-funded research briefs from Nando's on the benefits of grilled chicken', whilst ill-paid research on 'schizophrenia in the prison system on half that amount would be for the chop'.

One problem seen to result from a lack of competition is a sense of complacency from historic institutions. The government argue that these institutions have an unfair advantage at the expense of 'high quality and credible new institutions' which face 'disproportionate challenges to establishing themselves in the sector' (DfBIS, 2016:8). The implicit premise is

that these historic institutions rely on embedded assumptions of prestige which may no longer be warranted. Promoting new institutions ties into the discourse around ‘improving choice’, as the latter are presumed to have different structures and foci to traditional HE institutions (e.g., emphasis on 2-year degrees, and vocational courses). The growth in new institutions is also directly linked in these documents to their benefits for their economy. They link the impact of a growth in universities to a rise in ‘future [Gross Domestic Product] GDP’, as well as rise in Gross National Income (GNI), through an increase in places for international students (DfBIS, 2016). The HE reforms, fronted by TEF, supposedly increase credibility for newer institutions, as well as ‘expose’ implied inefficient or lesser historic institutions which currently benefit from ‘unfair advantage’ (DfBIS, 2016:6). TEF produces both reputational and financial incentives, with intra-action of the two against a backdrop of deregulation, putting HEIs in a zero-sum competition with each other for the maximum number of students.

6.3.5. Teaching standards and links to research

Under the heading ‘Driving up Teaching Standards’ (DfBIS, 2015:12) – once again implying that there is a problem to be broached - the Green and White Papers use NSS data ostensibly presenting objective evidence that ‘teaching quality is variable’, exemplified by over 50% of universities performing ‘significantly below expected levels in at least one element of the NSS’ (DfBIS, 2015:12). This produces ‘student satisfaction’ as a natural proxy for ‘teaching excellence’. They also create suspicion as to the quality of degrees, with comparisons made regarding varied contact time and required independent study between institutions, even though the majority of students still receive 1sts or 2:1s (DfBIS, 2016). The implication of grade inflation is continued (therefore making student grades a redundant measure of teaching quality and meaning there is a gap to be plugged) when they identify a risk ‘that the combination of financial and cultural factors in the HE teaching system result in our higher education provision becoming less demanding’ (DfBIS, 2016:12). These unspecified ‘cultural factors’ are not expanded upon but have now been produced as a problem.

A slightly bizarre quote taken from another study, the only quotation taken from secondary research and uncritically mobilized, continues to embed a vision of a culture which does not care about student learning. It describes a “‘crafty mutually convenient disengagement contract among distracted academics and instrumentalist students” that has

emerged in part in the American higher education system’ (Palfreyman & Tapper, cited in DfBIS, 2016:12), and proclaims the risk of this taking hold in the UK, which it ‘undoubtedly already [does] in part’ (DfBIS, 2016:12). Again, DfBIS does not give evidence for academics being disengaged, or why this might be so, but it does constitute them as part of ‘the problem’. This claim is certainly not evidenced with any data about the outlook of either students or teachers, the situation in the USA, or evidence which is ‘undoubtable’ in the UK. It can be made uncritically as this ‘common-sense’ reasoning has already been produced through discourses of out-of-touch, slow-moving academics in ivory towers (Wheaton, 2020; Woodward, 2022). The remaining evidence for the need to improve teaching falls under the discussion of graduate outcomes, which, as shown above, is used to signify a substandard or at least varied quality of teaching throughout HE.

Interestingly, the primary reason given for this perceived inadequacy in teaching standards, repeatedly cited throughout the documents, is the lack of prestige and focus awarded to teaching comparative to research. A typical example being clear statements that ‘currently, not all universities assign teaching the same significance that they give research’ (DfBIS, 2015:12), though on some occasions expressed in more negative terms to underline the problem e.g. ‘For too long, teaching has been the poor cousin of research. Skewed incentives have led to a progressive decline in the relative status of teaching as an activity’ (DfBIS, 2016:12; c.f. DfBIS, 2016:43; DfBIS, 2015:8; DfBIS, 2015:20). It is then made explicit that TEF ‘for the first time [will] place teaching quality on a par with research at our universities’ (DfE, 2016b:NP) and that ‘for the first time we will be linking the funding of teaching in higher education to quality, not simply quantity’ (DfBIS, 2016:32). DfBIS assert that this is primarily due to the lack of incentives primed toward teaching and the student experience, compared to strong financial incentives for research. They point to the impact produced by instruments for measuring research, citing the impact of REF which allocates over £1.5bn in funding (DfBIS, 2015:19), as well as significant prestige (DfBIS, 2015:12). Similarly, they remark that research is considered in ‘standings in prestigious international league tables’, in a way that teaching is not (DfBIS, 2015:20). Conversely, they say, there is ‘no mechanism in place to reward teaching, resulting in a lack of focus on providing a high-quality student experience’ thus ‘some rebalancing of the pull between teaching and research is undoubtedly required’ (DfBIS, 2015:12). This is one area where the original White Paper

(2011) included the opinion of university staff, some of whom ‘believe that good teaching is not sufficiently considered in promotion selection processes’ which are focussed primarily on research (DfBIS, 2011:27). DfBIS argue that this should be a benefit of TEF and their reforms more broadly, in that it aims to ‘establish parity for academics who build a career in teaching as well as in research or a combination of both’ (DfBIS, 2016:75). That the solution to rebalance teaching and research is posited to be an additional instrument to measure teaching excellence, rather than fewer instruments which put pressure to perform research excellence, indicates the naturalisation of these tools.

6.4. How is TEF Constituting Teaching Excellence?

6.4.1. The factors which constitute teaching

Despite the assertion that TEF would be the first time teaching quality had been assessed, there have in fact been many attempts to monitor teaching in HE. The Teaching Quality Assessment (1993-1995) assessed teaching in institutions; this was replaced by the Subject Review (1995–2001) which focused on departments and was an observational exercise (Canning, 2019:319). Since 2001, metrics have been used predominantly for quality assurance and enhancement through the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), the NSS, and funding streams such as the Fund for the Development of Teaching and Learning (FDTL), the Learning and Teaching Support Network (LTSN) and the Higher Education Academy (HEA) (Canning, 2019:320).

That TEF itself has been framed as a ‘first’ conjures the image of a fresh new solution to the ‘problem’. However, the context in which TEF was brought into being in its particular form also leads it to focus on specific areas and measurements to determine a particular definition of ‘excellence’. There is longstanding debate as to the extent to which the notion of excellence in any arena can truly be defined, and this is no less the case in HE (e.g., Elton, 1998; ENQA, 2014; Gunn & Fisk, 2013; Skelton, 2005). Objective notions of excellence have issued particular critique from feminist scholars and, again, especially in the context of HE (e.g., Fassa, 2015; Jenkins & Keane, 2014; Lund, 2012). The Green Paper (2015) outlining the shake-up of HE even nods to the difficulties of a definition of excellence. It states that teaching excellence in practice ‘has many interpretations and there are likely to be different ways of

measuring it', and whilst they point out that they do not wish to 'stifle institutions', they claim that with regard to excellence in this area, 'there is a need to provide greater clarity about what we are looking for' (DfBIS, 2015:21). The core principles of excellence put forward are as follows:

- excellence must incorporate and reflect the diversity of the sector, disciplines and missions – not all students will achieve their best within the same model of teaching;*
- excellence is the sum of many factors – focussing on metrics gives an overview, but not the whole picture;*
- perceptions of excellence vary between students, institutions and employers;*
- excellence is not something achieved easily or without focus, time, challenge and change'* (DfBIS, 2015:21)

Despite emphasising the ways excellence may differ depending on person and context, and is too multifaceted to measure adequately with metrics, TEF then does exactly this. It takes a limited view of what constitutes teaching excellence, taking proxy metrics to measure these aspects, and produces a homogenised comparative space. Furthermore, there is a question not only over the word 'excellence' in this framework, but also the word 'teaching', which is constituted here as 'teaching mission' (Gunn, 2018:135) i.e., the wider aspects of teaching beyond the classroom, such as curriculum, availability of resources, and support structures, as well as focussing on student outcomes. This is an aspect which has been critiqued and debated in the academic literature (e.g., Canning, 2019; O'Leary et al, 2019; Sanders et al, 2020), with particular criticism of these aspects eclipsing the role of the teacher, the act of learning and teaching, or reflection on pedagogical practices (Canning, 2019). This critique forced a change in later policy documents surrounding TEF, that it is not only a measure of 'teaching' in its broadest sense, but also a measure of student outcomes as a way to assess the extent to which teaching could be deemed 'successful'. This led to a renaming of TEF in future iterations as 'The Teaching Excellence and Student Outcomes Framework' (DfE, 2017a), although the shorthand of TEF still remains and is the frame of reference parents and students have when universities advertise their award.

It is notable that the DfE's own research on the possibility of rolling out TEF at a subject level evidenced differing wants and needs from a university education (and therefore definitions of what would constitute an excellent education) for students between subject groups. For example, Business and Management students and those studying Computing

reported that the most important attribute of a university education was ‘exposure to industry’, for those applying to law, languages, linguistics, and classics it was ‘inspiring and engaging staff’ (DfE, 2018:12). There was also a difference between students studying Economics and Business and Management and students studying all other subjects – particularly Creative Arts and Design, Architecture, Building and Planning, Law, and the Sciences - regarding the importance placed on securing graduate level jobs (DfE, 2018:12). The same research also showed that there was a significant difference between the factors students considered important in the *quality* of their degree and those significant to their university *experience* (DfE, 2018:12). Perceptions of degree quality tended to be connected to long-term impacts e.g., student outcomes; and student experience connected through short-term impacts e.g., university support. Significantly, some factors were deemed as unimportant to student satisfaction, including ‘class size’ and ‘whether staff had teaching qualifications or were on permanent contracts’ (DfE, 2018:12-3). This shows that if teaching excellence is measured via student satisfaction, the position of staff becomes sidelined.

To delve deeper into how the final definition of teaching excellence in TEF is determined, its specification outlines that, ‘teaching quality is best considered in the context of students’ learning’ (DfE, 2016a:19). It continues that student outcomes can then be best determined by three factors: ‘the quality of teaching they experience, the additional support for learning that is available and what the students themselves put into their studies, supported and facilitated by the provider’ (DfE, 2016a:19). These three aspects are grouped as three core umbrellas in the framework, named: ‘Teaching Quality, Learning Environment, and Student Outcomes and Learning Gain’ (DfE, 2016a:19), the three aspects that now come to constitute what teaching *is*, and which will attempt to be measured. *Teaching Quality* is focussed on staff; structured learning such as lectures, seminars, and supervisions; and attributes such as course design, materials, and content including challenge, stretch, and student engagement. The extent to which providers encourage and reward teaching excellence is also covered in this aspect (DfE, 2016a:19). *Learning Environment* is focused on the resources of an institution, covering everything from the material such as libraries and IT equipment to extra-curricular experiences. The aim of assessing these attributes is that they are deemed to provide a ‘personalised academic experience which maximises retention, progression and attainment’ (DfE, 2016a:19). Finally, positive *Student Outcomes* are defined

as the acquisition of lifelong skills, which specifically allow a graduate ‘to make a strong contribution to society, economy and the environment’, as well as progression toward either further study, or a graduate level job (DfE, 2016a:19). As part of *Student Outcomes*, the range of backgrounds of students is also considered, with ‘distance travelled’ by students from induction to graduation, defined as ‘learning gain’, also included (DfE, 2016a:19).

6.4.2. Signifiers of quality

Having established what TEF intends to prioritise and measure under the banner of teaching excellence, we now move on to how these attributes are judged under the signifiers of gold, silver, and bronze. The framework outlines what an institution must do to fall under each band. The differences in these levels are determined through adjectives, in themselves subjective. For example, the difference between a gold provider and silver provider in terms of outcomes is that the former achieves ‘consistently outstanding outcomes’ (DfE, 2016a:46) and the latter ‘excellent outcomes’ (DfE, 2016a:47). In the case of bronze, this is reworded to ‘most students achieve good outcomes’ (DfE, 2016a:47). Similarly, the differences in levels of contact time are described as ‘optimum levels’, (DfE, 2016a:46), ‘appropriate levels’, and ‘sufficient levels’ between the three bands respectively (DfE, 2016a:47). In discussing the provision of skill sets for the world of work, the levels are divided between providing skills which are ‘most highly valued by employers’ (DfE, 2016a:46), ‘highly valued by employers’, and ‘valued by employers’ (DfE, 2016a:47). This wording appears not only subjective, but also constitutes excellence as relative, so that – by definition – to have winners, there must also be losers, embedding competition between institutions.

In the original iteration of this framework, each definition started with an additional sentence which explicitly constituted the awards as relative, with the expectation that a gold standard would equate to ‘the highest quality found in the UK Higher Education sector’ (DfE, 2016a:46), and silver that the ‘provision is of high quality, and significantly and consistently exceeds the baseline quality threshold expected of UK Higher Education’ (DfE, 2016a:47). Whilst the rest of the definitions remain unchanged in the slightly amended framework guidance published the following year (DfE, 2017a), these lines were stripped. The equivalent change in the bronze award was slightly different, with the original guidance stating that the ‘provision is of satisfactory quality’ (DfE, 2016a:47), and was amended to ‘the provider

achieves good outcomes for most of its students’ (DfE, 2017a:68). This, it seems in a later review, could be down to the way that the word ‘satisfactory’ is perceived, especially amongst international audiences, as a pejorative rather than a baseline (DfE, 2017c:54), which demonstrates the extent to which these definitions are based around particular audience understandings.

On the point of whether the awards are relative, the specification states that there is an expected distribution of awards. This is constant in the amended framework. The DfE outline that they would expect ‘a likely distribution based on performance against the core metrics where approximately 20% of participating providers would receive the lowest rating, approximately 20-30% would receive the highest rating and the remaining 50-60% would receive the intermediate rating’ (DfE, 2016a:48). Although they are explicit that this is not a quota but an expectation, they continue that the ‘HEFCE will use the indicative distribution as a guide in assessor training to calibrate individual standards of assessment’ (DfE, 2016a:48). In a framework which, as outlined, was mobilised to help aid student choice, combined with these recommendations, it seems inevitable that these awards are relative to each other, thus constituting universities as direct competitors in a zero-sum game.

6.5. Measuring a Definition of Excellence

Having established a definition of teaching excellence, the documents then seek to measure this definition. Of course, a definition and a measurement are often iterative, whereby any definition of excellence must be quantifiable in order to be audited (Shore & Wright, 1999). In the famous quote often attributed to Einstein, ‘not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted’ (Toye, 2015:7). Here, it seems that this wisdom is inverted. The difficulty is broached in the policy documents, however there is ultimately no uncertainty that metrics can capture enough about teaching excellence to make this a worthwhile and robust project: ‘Measuring teaching quality is difficult. But it is not impossible’ (DfBIS, 2016:46). They argue that because of the breadth of their definition of teaching, depicted in the three umbrellas in section 6.3. above, aspects of these factors can be measured through, for example, student satisfaction, retention rates (‘a good proxy for student engagement’), contact hours, and employment rates (DfBIS, 2016:46). They admit that ‘some of these metrics are of course proxies’ but this statement is undercut

in the argument that they still ‘directly measure some of the most important outcomes that students and taxpayers expect excellent teaching to deliver’ (DfBIS, 2016:46).

The language around why particular metrics are used also contributes to solidifying TEF as a solution to specific ‘problems’. For example, the White Paper when discussing the metric of retention states that:

‘For too long we have been overly tolerant of the fact that some providers have significantly and materially higher drop-out rates than others...Such variability is not simply a statistic, nor even simply a squandering of taxpayers’ money. It is worse: it represents thousands of life opportunities wasted, of young dreams unfulfilled, all because of teaching that was not as good as it should have been, or because students were recruited who were not capable of benefiting from higher education’ (DfBIS, 2016:46).

The way in which this is discussed brings clearly into view the extent to which universities are positioned as being answerable to the taxpayer, the term ‘squandering’ adding sharply to the discourse of public institutions being inefficient and lazy with the public’s hard-earned money. It also draws a direct line between students leaving their course and teaching in the university, without considering other factors for this outcome.

Table 6, below, outlines the metrics that were chosen to make up TEF (and therefore constitute what teaching excellence “is”), which criterion of teaching excellence it is aiming to assess, and the data source used for its measurement.

Criterion	TEF Core Metric	Measurement
Teaching Quality	Teaching on my Course	NSS
Teaching Quality	Assessment and Feedback	NSS
Learning Environment	Academic Support	NSS
Learning Environment	Continuation	HESA
Student Outcomes and Learning Gain	Employment/Further Study	Destination of Leavers Survey (DLHE) (declared 6-months after qualification)
Student Outcomes and Learning Gain	Highly Skilled Employment/Further Study	DLHE (declared 6-months after qualification)
Criterion	TEF Supplementary Metric (introduced in 2017)	Measurement
Teaching Quality	Grade Inflation	Provider declaration
Student Outcomes and Learning Gain	Sustained Employment or Further Study	Longitudinal Education Outcomes (LEO) (3-years after qualification)
Student Outcomes and Learning Gain	Above Median Earnings Threshold or further study	LEO (3-years after qualification)

Table 66: TEF Metrics

(Table data taken from DfE, 2016a:26, supplementary metrics DfE, 2017a:31)

There are some interesting clarifications as to why certain metrics and data points have been chosen. In discussing median salary as a reasonable baseline to assess the quality of student outcomes, for example, DfE (2017a:34-5) state their justification as ‘the median salary for 25-29 year olds is currently £21,000...This figure is below the starting salary for most modestly paying but socially valuable graduate jobs such as nursing, teaching or midwifery

and the metric therefore records such outcomes as being equally valuable as higher paying professions such as banking or law'. Although this provides an appreciation for values outside of remuneration, it still does not extend the *measurement* of employment to anything outside of economic gain. Others offer far vaguer explanations. For instance, for 'learning gain' specifically, it is noted that a measurement is under development, and so for providers to refer to their own approaches in identifying and assessing students' learning gain in their submissions: 'this aspect is not prescriptive about what those measures might be' (DfE, 2016a:20). It is also noted that the majority of data is deliberately taken from pre-existing sources, so as to reduce the bureaucratic burden on universities. However, this is at complete odds to the reasoning set out in the Green and White papers, which mentioned specifically that TEF needed to exist precisely because there was no reliable pre-existing mechanism. Instead, these metrics are already subsumed in pre-existing assumptions, which are then embedded and reproduced through this framework.

Furthermore, in an analysis of the metrics conducted by an independent body for the DfE, it showed a significant relationship between the results of the core metrics and a provider's final award, indicating that these hold much more weight than the submission (DfE, 2017b:6). Within this, it was also found that the results from the NSS, which measures student satisfaction, had the strongest correlation to the final award (DfE, 2017b:6) and therefore was the largest factor producing the definition of "teaching excellence". The weightings of the three NSS metrics were reduced in the updated 2017 specification, as it was deemed that 'in practice each NSS metric is not giving substantially new information compared to the other two NSS metrics' (DfE, 2017b:7) i.e., if a student was positive about one part of their experience they would be likely to give similar responses to other questions, thus depleting the need for multiple angles. This serves to highlight the ways in which these types of metric can have significant flaws and require constant monitoring. Overall, TEF offers a purely desk-based approach to assessing teaching excellence. Rather than through observation, the TEF panel in charge of deciding the awards, comprised of academics, students, and OfS staff, have in front of them the above metrics and the provider submission from which to make a decision. This process of assessment goes as follows: a review of the core metrics followed by a review of the split metrics and an initial hypothesis based on these results. This is then taken in conjunction with the provider submission, and it is determined whether the university

account has caused them to take ‘a different view of their initial rating’ (DfE, 2016a:41). The panel then looks at their judgement and compares this with the descriptors of each band to make a final decision on the level of award. From this we see that the qualitative submission can have an impact, but it is not the primer for an overall decision.

Detail on the Provider Submissions

Here, we pause to go into more detail on the purpose and uses of the ‘Provider submissions’ - qualitative accounts of a university context which are presented alongside their metrics as part of a university TEF application - as these form the core part of the data for this research. According to the DfBIS (2016:46) White Paper, the submissions are necessary because ‘we recognise that metrics alone cannot tell the whole story; they must be benchmarked and contextualised, and considered alongside the additional narrative that can establish a provider’s case for excellence’. In the Framework Specification, the DfE (2016a:35) expand that the four main purposes of the submission are to allow the provider to ‘add additional context...such as details of its mission’; to ‘support or explain its performance against the core and split metrics, particularly where performance is not strong’; to ‘put forward evidence against the assessment criteria which will be used alongside performance against the core and split metrics’; and to ‘further explore performance for specific student groups based on split metrics’ (DfE, 2016a:37). There is also a large emphasis on student engagement within the submission to recognise the ‘additional insight that direct information from students can provide’ and they recommend a variety of forms that this could take, including ‘use of surveys, representative structures, focus groups, student membership of relevant committees, consultation events, online discussion fora, or facilitating the Student Union or other representative body to draft a section of the provider submission’ (DfE, 2016a:37). This focus on student engagement centres the student, and specifically situates the student voice at the heart of the universities’ mission.

As touched upon above, the extent to which the submissions actually *matter* is difficult to determine. The TEF specification states that: ‘for additional evidence to alter the initial hypothesis, assessors should expect to see clear, significant and well supported evidence of performance above the baseline, directly relevant to the criteria’ (DfE, 2016a:44). They also give examples of situations when submissions would play a particularly important role,

including when there is a mixture of positive and negative flags, when there are fewer than three years' worth of core metrics, or when a provider is very small, meaning that significance in the metrics is more difficult to attain (DfE, 2016a:45). Ultimately, evidence from the written submissions is predominantly considered where the metrics are less likely to be reliable, rather than as additional evidence in and of itself. Crucially, they also state that 'assessors should give no weight to evidence that is not relevant to the criteria' (DfE, 2016a:44). Gillard (2018) conducted a quantitative analysis comparing the award universities should have received based on their metrics alone and their final award. He found that the provider submissions did have significant impact on the final award given.

As an addendum, the DfE (2017c:23) review of TEF showed that there was a divide in the extent to which providers felt that they had adequate time to complete the submission, with 43% disagreeing that the time was sufficient, this percentage rising to 51% when taking only respondents from universities (as opposed to colleges or alternate providers) (DfE, 2017c:23). The report states that it did not see fit to change the time frame given this information.

6.6. Effects Produced by the Measures

As has been shown during this chapter, the way in which the 'problem' of substandard teaching is represented, how it is defined, and how it is measured, materialises particular effects. As Morley (2016:29) states, 'metrics imply norms', and the TEF metrics are no different: solidifying norms, shaping behaviour, and excluding possibilities for alternative ways of being. We see this produced in the way that the TEF metrics constitute a 'common-sense', 'objective' solution to the problems which are constituted throughout the policy papers. In constructing these very particular HE 'problems', the framework is then able to provide solutions which reconstitute the aims, objectives, and measures of an excellent university education in a very particular way, centring student outcomes in the job market and productivity in the economy. Questions regarding tuition fees in themselves, or other ways of looking at success, are marginalised in favour of measures of student satisfaction. HE is seen as a way to gain economic growth, productivity and GDP, rather than a place to broaden horizons or education for education's sake, or to facilitate research and discoveries that could benefit society at large. In the current context of digital media, skills such as critical

thinking and independence of thought could be argued to be more important than ever, but students' skillsets are being measured only by what gaps they can fill in the labour market. What we see being constituted through the TEF framework aligns with Canning's argument that: 'the needs of students are constructed to the requirements of the society in which they live and not to their intrinsic human needs' (Canning, 2019:326). Within this dynamic, students are situated as consumers, and the universities the product, with excellent teaching defined as catering to the perceived needs not only of the student, but of the economy, aligning the university with the values of the competitive free market. Thus, students are also being shaped to think of an education as that which makes them a valuable commodity for productivity and growth, with the cycle being constantly iteratively formed.

Despite the ideals of the free market, such as deregulation, competition, and choice, emphasised throughout the government policy documents, what is actually produced is a waning of independence and potential homogenisation of HE institutions, pushed in particular ways and driven to certain behaviours, not only by the government, but also by employers and the laws of the market. We see this through the documents even more clearly, in the wider context of forcing behavioural change through precarity by deregulation, and the change of funding model; the way TEF works, through forcing competition between universities; as well as the metrics themselves, which require institutions to amend their priorities in order to be legible as 'excellent' institutions; not to mention the financial imperatives produced by all three of these factors. The government explicitly cite their intentions to change behaviour for these particular ideological aims throughout all their literature: ('The TEF should change providers' behaviour'), and even anticipate 'some lower quality providers withdrawing from the sector, leaving space for new entrants, and raising quality overall' (DfBIS, 2015:19). We already see these behaviour changes taking place. For example, after TEF2017, the Universities Minister, Jo Johnson (2017), declared that '81% [of providers] have undertaken additional investment in teaching, with almost half saying the TEF had influenced their decision to do so'. The way in which excellence is defined, through neoliberal market ideas and measuring teaching through metrics and a desk-based design, are features which have shaped TEF in particular ways. Norms and value-systems around HE which have been shaped over the last 30 years of governmental policy and discourses, are baked into the mechanism. These norms and assumptions are powerful in and of themselves

in terms of shaping behaviour, with those universities which divert from the norm unable to situate themselves as 'excellent'.

In examining how these effects intra-act with gender and gendered inequalities, here we see a stereotypically masculine rationality on what knowledge is valuable and what 'value added' in terms of education should look like (Steinþórsdóttir et al, 2019; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2011) as well as a machismo ideal of corporate competition and winners and losers (Bartram, 2020; Phipps & Young, 2014). The economic argument accentuates individualism and sidelines social goods such as care, community and collaboration, as well as overlooking the fact that employment and remuneration itself is subject to gendering processes, meaning that work which has been 'feminised' becomes worth less value economically (Monroe et al, 2008; Hochschild, 2012b [1989]). As discussed in the literature review, the process of neoliberalisation does not come from 'neutral' bases of knowledge, and instead is entangled with what has been considered valuable by those who have historically been in more powerful positions: economically privileged, white, and male. As Haraway (1991) tells us, these systems can embed power structures and justify inequalities based on the 'natural order'. Having these values centred at the expense of marginalised bodies of knowledge decentres women whose gendering gives the impression that they may not possess the requisite qualities, as well as men who do not display normative models of masculinity.

In turning attention to teaching, we know that women are disproportionately situated in teaching roles (AdvanceHE, 2021), and that the act of teaching itself is a feminised role (Kandiko Howson, 2018; Morley, 1998). This has been put forward as one of the reasons that women are also disproportionately situated at the lower end of the university echelons (Baker, 2012a; Brommesson et al, 2022; Morris et al, 2022). Although we see that TEF already seems to be turning universities' attention toward investment in teaching, the TEF metrics themselves do nothing to render the labour of teaching more visible. It still does not bring it into being as 'mattering'. Furthermore, in focussing primarily on a specific set of student outcomes (well-paid employment, and satisfaction) it serves to sideline this labour even further by disguising the work which produces these outcomes. Research shows that the act of teaching, particularly as a service role as it is constituted in TEF, intra-acts with gendered perceptions of women, putting more pressure on women to perform warmth, engagement, and availability (Hochschild, 2012b [1989]; Morris et al 2022). This is not to mention that 50%

of the metrics are derived from the NSS, a tool which itself is shown to embed gendered inequalities, through students' expectations of female academics (Heffernan, 2021). This gendered distribution of workload is left hidden in this arrangement, but ultimately women are becoming the primary subject of the vagaries of these metrics which do not capture the labour they are actually performing. These themes will be explored further in the following three chapters, as we turn to examine the 'provider submissions', and assess the extent these gendered inequalities are being embedded and (re)produced through the universities' responses to TEF.

6.7. Conclusion

This chapter has outlined how TEF came into being and the way it was shaped through its particular context and wider societal values and governmental aims. In answer to RQ1, 'what are the assumptions embedded in TEF and how it is being presented as objective?', this chapter showed that TEF embeds the assumptions and values that serve to draw out particular problems in HE, such as the problematisation of value for money for the student as opposed to a problematisation of the HE funding model, and uses these to formulate its measurement practices. Thus, this chapter has demonstrated how the priorities of TEF as well as what it portrays as 'objective' measures of excellence, are instead products of the context which produced it. TEF, as a productive framework then embeds and enacts these values as it is rolled out through the universities and becomes a key signifier of excellence in teaching, whilst the reasoning behind what constitutes excellence is obscured behind simple signifiers of gold, silver, and bronze.

The following three chapters look to the responses from the universities in the form of their qualitative submissions, where they have more room to account for themselves and offer alternate or broader accounts of their activity as HEIs. Chapter 7 examines how the institution submissions constitute the purpose of the university and its wider aims, and the extent to which this aligns with the constitution of HE through the policy papers outlined in this chapter, and wider discourses of the neoliberal university. Chapter 8 assesses how excellent teaching is constituted through the university submissions and argues that the Russell Group maintain their focus on research in the context of teaching, though there is evidence of new academic subjectivities arising. Chapter 9 turns its focus towards the specific

ways that academic staff are produced in the submissions, through the way they are discussed as academic subjects and the extent their work is embodied. All three chapters look to ascertain the extent to which the activity and behaviours of the university are aligned to the specific constitution of excellence produced by TEF metrics outlined here. The chapters also continue the analysis to assess the material effects of the shape and form of TEF, and show how the framework produces particular gendered effects, no longer as abstract concepts, but rolled out in institutions and intra-acting with all the other mechanisms at play.

Chapter 7. TEF and the Constitution of the University

7.1. Introduction

The previous chapter demonstrated how TEF was constituted through HE policy concerns and wider governmental aims, values, and assumptions. These aims and underpinning assumptions are entangled with processes such as the neoliberalisation of normative values and discourses around meritocracy, competition, globalisation, financialization, and profit maximisation, as well as wider material-discursive practices which produce gender and gendered norms. This chapter assesses how the TEF provider submissions, as material-discursive practices, also (re)constitute HE through the production of specific aims, goals, priorities, and values to help answer RQ2: 'How is TEF constituting Higher Education?'. Drawing on Bacchi's WPR framework, the analysis will highlight how the provider submissions reproduce certain practices and knowledge systems which are valued by TEF and the wider society that produced it, and inhibits other ways of being, doing, and knowing. It shows how TEF constitutes what our universities 'are' and, crucially, who they are perceived to be for. It also raises questions as to the potential that the qualitative submissions have to produce a counter or broader narrative about HE than that produced by the TEF metrics alone, highlighting points of tension, departure, and potential disruption in the assumptions surrounding the role and purpose of a university.

This chapter explores three key themes which emerged from the submissions regarding the role of the university. The first is the centring of employment and employability as the university's *raison d'être*. This is the most prominent theme throughout the submissions, produced through the language around employability, the centrality of the theme in the submissions, and the way in which it is demonstrated to have proliferated through the core workings of the university. The analysis will demonstrate the way that 'excellence' in this area is measured – through tools such as league tables and the quantitative economic value of employment – and how this produces a particular ideal of employment itself, as well as a specific conception of 'success' in this area, with gendered implication about the kinds of labour and subject-knowledge which is valued. The second theme is universities' discussion of place, situating themselves as primarily a global institution, though with additional nods to their local role. The constitutive effects of this positioning as well as how it

is evidenced, measured, and judged will be discussed with regard to how this intra-acts with processes of gendered inequalities and neoliberalism. The third theme which emerged, pertains to the wider function of universities' contribution to society, including additional skills with which it equips its students. In particular, this function covers attributes which have been excluded by both the quantitative TEF metrics and the wider discourses in which TEF is positioned, such as public engagement. Table 7 below provides an outline of these themes and how their success is measured in the submissions.

The chapter assesses the effects of centrality of these themes in the constitution of the university with particular mind to what is being marginalised or excluded, and how these effects are entangled with the production of gender and gendered inequalities, for example through who and what is being valued. This analysis helps to answer RQ3: 'How is the constitution of HE being produced in gendered ways', and RQ4: 'what is the effect of this constitution and how is it producing gendered inequalities'.

Core Theme: The Purpose of the University	Evidence of success
As a mechanism for employment	<p>The amendment of courses to focus on employability</p> <p>The involvement of employers in module design and teaching</p> <p>Investment in facilities such as Careers Service</p> <p>Student employment outcomes</p> <p>League tables and awards</p>
As a global entity	<p>International league tables</p> <p>Global research excellence</p>
As a civic entity	<p>Work conducted in the local region</p> <p>Discussion of social impact and 'mission'</p>

Table 77: The Purpose of the University

7.2. The University as a Mechanism for Employment

As stated, the most prominent theme throughout the submissions is the university as a utility for gaining skills deemed as enhancing employability. Employability in and of itself is not a pejorative, and gaining skills which are critical in the world of work - such as critical thinking, presentation, organisation, and communication skills - have historically always been associated with a university education. What is notable here, and what was also seen in the way TEF was designed, is the repositioning of employability as the central, if not only, purpose of HE, and that this framing is uncritically upheld as commonsensical. Also significant is how 'good' employment itself is constituted, through an economic lens rather than through qualities such as passion or fulfilment. As seen in the previous chapter, the TEF metrics are designed to equate graduate 'success' in the job market with the excellence of an institution. The university submissions, in the main, follow this framework and its logic, by centring employability and employers at the heart of what they do and how their students therefore benefit from attending their institution. Rather than presenting a university education as something which provides knowledge, skills, and independent thought as goals in their own right, it shifts the entire focus of the university to one which exists to train future employees.

This produces gendered inequalities in three key ways. First, the success of teaching is being measured by outcomes (employment) rather than inputs (teaching). It is the inputs which are delivered by teaching staff, in relational labour between staff-member and student which is often feminised (Kandiko Howson, 2018). Measuring outputs therefore de-emphasises and devalues the labour of women. This work is central, and yet sidelined in this production. Second, the centring of (high-value) employment intra-acts with gendered notions of value in paid work and what is worthy of higher remuneration. This produces a hierarchy of disciplines in the university, between those that are seen as directly providing a line between university to employment, and those that do not. The hierarchy is a gendered divide as the disciplines which become devalued, such as the arts and humanities, is where a disproportionate amount of female academics are situated (AdvanceHE, 2022b). Third, the overwhelming proliferation of employment and employability throughout the submissions effects how the university is constituted and becomes a primary node in the wider conception of excellence. It narrows the purpose of the university to one of economics, rather than, for example, an educated population or a valuing of knowledge for knowledge's sake. This limited

conception affects both female and male academics, but particularly women, due to the intra-action of gendered perceptions of women being unable to embody increasingly managerial roles (Van den Brink et al, 2016).

7.2.1. Centring employment as a core goal of HE

Centring employment through its coverage in the documents

The primary way in which employability is constituted as the key goal of HE is the amount of coverage it gains throughout the twenty-one submissions. In every submission it is the topic which is given the most space; each submission has both a dedicated passage which discusses solely employability – usually around three pages, or a fifth of the submission – with the majority of submissions also continuing this discussion in other areas of the text as resources, staff, modules, and extra-curriculars are all enfolded into an all-encompassing discourse of employment as the measure of success. Nottingham, Imperial, and Cardiff are examples of institutions which dedicate a full three pages solely to employment and employability, and York dedicate over four - almost a third of the total document. All of these institutions also discuss the topic throughout the rest of their submission as a way of judging the effectiveness of other areas such as resources. It is also the primary topic with which institutions open their submissions. A typical example comes from the first paragraph of Warwick's (P1) submission: 'The excellence of Warwick's education provision and support for the great talents of its students are demonstrated by the metrics for progression into highly skilled employment and further study'. Not only is this the metric chosen to represent the institution more broadly, but it is unquestionably shown as a metric which specifically conveys the excellence of their education. It is worth noting that this specific TEF metric also includes 'further study' but, as will be addressed in section 7.4.1, this is not something that is disaggregated in any of the submissions. Additionally, most submissions link all aspects of their work back to employability outcomes as evidence of success. Measuring success through employment outcomes in this way, erases the import of the inputs: the pedagogical work required of the teacher in and outside of the classroom, labour which is already feminised and lacking in prestige (Kandiko Howson, 2018; Monroe et al, 2008; Watermeyer et al, 2020; Weeks, 2011). It is a clear example of the cut (Barad, 2007) of the apparatus, bringing into being employment outcomes as a key indicator with a lack of specificity in measuring the

labour involved in producing these outcomes. In this framework, the feminised labour of getting students to graduation is not produced as 'mattering'.

There are many examples of the extent to which universities are prioritising and embedding this focus on employability. An example of how employability as an aim is materially reshaping HE comes from York (P12), who state: 'the achievement of excellent graduate outcomes requires more than excellent teaching and opportunities for learning: it also needs direct support for employability', and later in the submission, continue that it is their aim to 'optimise the ability of every individual student...to prepare for successful employment' (York, P15). They discuss the involvement of alumni networks which 'demonstrate that the whole York community is committed to ensuring that York students have the best possible chance to compete in a globally competitive job market' (York, P15), materialising entire cyclical networks dedicated to employment enhancement. Newcastle (P3) among others emphasise their 'institutional commitment to enhancing the employability of our students'. Birmingham (P2) also describe their 'institutional focus' as being on 'highly skilled employability' and have made material changes within the university to help embed this, including 'major strategic investment to integrate employability into teaching programmes'. These examples indicate an entrenchment of employability and the targets surrounding it as wholly proliferated throughout entire institutions, with areas of the university being reshaped to the extent that employability is literally institutionalised.

The institutionalisation of employability produces academics as providing a role to service this end. Firstly, the discussion of students requiring additional support outside of the classroom, emphasises the duty of academics to fulfil a wider service and pastoral role, whilst at the same time, failing to *value* the labour in conducting this. This re-entrenches the delineation of gendered roles in the university through the phenomena that was outlined in Chapter 2, whereby service and pastoral labour is feminised both because it is women who are performing more of this kind of labour (Monroe et al, 2008; Watermeyer et al, 2020; Weeks, 2011) and because it is perceived as being in the domain of women, and therefore more expected of them (Hochschild, 2012b [1989]). The expectation to perform this workload is furthered under this arrangement – it heightens the expectations on academics' role of service, which reaches outside of the classroom. However, this intra-acts with pre-existing perceptions regarding who is expected to provide this kind of support, alongside a lack of

evidence that the university is tangibly recognising or supporting this additional labour. Secondly, the proliferation of employment as a core goal limits the agency that academics have over their own subject areas, as module designs are shaped to service employment as their overriding remit. This once again affects the academic identities of both male and female academics, as they become increasingly tethered to external goals, but – as will be explored further in section 7.2.3 below – the ease of certain subject areas to be primed towards employment are to an extent delineated by gender.

Extra-curricular activities framed as employment enhancing opportunities

The submissions also produce employability outcomes as the lens through which all other attributes of a university education are framed, with the situating of broad skills – such as learning a language – posed as primarily for the purposes of employability. York (P14), for example, state that students who show an interest in working, volunteering, or studying abroad have access to language courses and that these are open to all students ‘to prepare for global employment’. Similarly, Cambridge (P13) advertise that they offer additional language classes ‘to assist students in gaining skills employers value’. Regarding study abroad opportunities, Leeds (P7) explain that the benefit of ‘international experience’ is that it ‘further enhances employability for those students who participate’. Whilst it is implied that there are other benefits, this is the only one which is made explicit. That these additional courses are only framed through their benefit in employability is telling, sidelining all other reasons why languages are valuable. It sets a precedent on what language is for and lays the foundation for this being a measure of these courses’ success. This in turn potentially puts in place a hierarchy of subjects, where if something cannot be justified on account of employability it is inherently less valuable. It situates knowledge as useful in terms of monetisation and entrenches this neoliberal remit, excluding other reasons why additional languages or travel abroad are a valuable resource, for culture, community, and learning.

There is only one example which demonstrates how this could be thought about differently. When discussing their ‘Languages for All’ programme, Sheffield (P8), whilst recognising their aim to cater to students who are now entering a global market, also state that: ‘these programmes build confidence, raise awareness of different cultures, and enhance our graduates’ capital in the job market – as well as just being a great thing to do’. This is one

of the only examples of an apparent valuation of doing something for the sheer pleasure of it, and serves to further highlight this absence elsewhere.

Many universities have also devised awards or programmes so that extra-curricular activities can be captured and measured to serve as CV enhancement. Manchester (P5) discuss their 'Leadership Award' and Newcastle (P12) their 'NCL+ Award', both of which track extra-curricular engagement, and at Cardiff (P13) volunteering is linked to 'a Certificate in Professional Development in Leadership', creating tangible accreditations which can be used to enhance a CV. The language and branding around these schemes is notable and is echoed in the sentiment from Nottingham (P13) that extracurriculars and volunteering 'encourage students not only to think about the skills they are gaining through their involvement, but also how to develop their "personal brand" as a Nottingham graduate'. This indicates that anything extra-curricular can and should be quantified and used as a tool for self-maximisation. Such branding arguably provides recognition for both students and the university for aspects of provision that might not be gained through core modules, especially volunteering and social good. Nonetheless, these attributes are still framed and justified through the lens of employment.

On the part of the universities, this sense of marketisation and economic rationale is furthered in the way in which many of these submissions are written, with managerial and business-like language. The term 'value-added', which is not new but has been interpolated through metrics used in instruments such as 'The Guardian University Rankings' (e.g. The Guardian, 2023a) - meaning the difference between grades coming into and leaving the university - is used by many of the submissions. Whilst not an inconsequential measure, the language used is embedded in an economic rationale. Newcastle have branded their education, mentioning both 'The Newcastle Offer' (P2) and the 'ncl+ brand' (P15), which serves to emphasise a corporate or businesslike approach to education. Similarly, Leeds (P3) and Cardiff (P6) both discuss their 'brand' and 'core business' with both universities linking this specifically to their student experience.

This corporate and business-like language helps constitute the university through this framing. In turn, it constitutes those inside the university as businesspeople or members of corporations working towards this neoliberal goal, reconstituting how the ideal academic is

produced. This constitution furthers the stratification between managers and teachers in the university, as managers set the goals, targets and aims for modules, cast here as important work, and teachers carry out the labour of acting on it, which is sidelined. Some have argued that this breach serves to further ‘feminise’ dimensions of every-day academic labour such as teaching as service work, at the same time as promoting masculinised entrepreneurial and managerial roles (Poggio, 2018; Thornton, 2013a; 2013b). Further, once this framing is established of the university as a private business in which students invest, it potentially serves to delink it from its remit as a public good. This set of goals are also underpinned by a specific form of neoliberal rationality which centres the economic at the expense of all other values. Whilst this is not inherently gendered, it intra-acts with the undervaluing of feminised spheres which are sidelined under this economic model, such as care and collaboration (Lund & Tienari, 2019; Poggio, 2018), and the privileging of a specific kind of instrumentalist, competitive, and economic machismo (Bartram, 2020). Once again, it also serves to marginalise those who cannot justify their work on the basis of what is considered valuable employment in the current paradigm.

Centring employment through investment in facilities

In addition to the breadth of discussion surrounding employability, also detailed are the material changes that have gone into the university to align with these goals. For example, a widening in the remits of Careers Services, the creation of new enterprise bodies, additional funding pots to assist with enterprise schemes or work experience opportunities, and technological changes to streamline these processes. Some of these facilities are discussed in depth in the submissions, but they are still kept relatively separate in the discussions to the academic side of the university. For example, Cambridge (P12) note that their Careers Service ‘supports students in securing highly-skilled employment through many initiatives and activities aimed at improving graduates’ employability...’ which is then followed by three paragraphs detailing the Career Service’s role. The majority of the submissions go further, and demonstrate not only the development of these facilities, but also how they have become more central to all aspects of university life. An example comes from Newcastle (P14): ‘In addition to its business start-up work, our enterprise team has a wider aim to enhance student employability through the development of enterprise skills. Each academic unit is assigned an Enterprise Adviser who works with [them] to deliver bespoke sessions to

students, organise enterprise challenges and raise awareness of support available'. Not only does this show the extent of the work being done on employability from bodies with this as their prime mandate, but it also shows how these bodies are seeping into the academic side of the institution. An underlying implication of this is that there is a gap in academic modules which needed to be filled as they were not relevant enough to enterprise and employability. Once again, this entrenches the shift in the core values of a university education and undermines the agency and value of academic labour.

Centring employment in courses and module design

There is a significant amount of evidence that there is not only increased emphasis on facilitators such as the careers service, careers fairs, or representatives within departments, but that this focus is also penetrating the academic work of the university. There are myriad examples of universities embedding 'skills employers want' into the courses themselves, enshrining these attributes into every module. There is an important distinction in approaches between universities here. Whilst the entire sample discuss the provision of skills that will serve graduates in employment, there is divide between universities that see these employability skills as inherent in a university education, and those highlighting changes made to their courses to embed employability, often taking active feedback from employers to cater specifically to employers' needs. Some examples of the latter and larger category include Leeds's (P7) statement that 'employability is embedded in all undergraduate programmes'; Birmingham's (P2) evidence that 'major strategic investment to integrate employability into teaching programmes has resulted in increases to employability and graduate employability'; Newcastle (P2), who state they achieve positive outcomes for students through 'embedding employability and enterprise in our undergraduate curricula'; Southampton (P4) where 'employability is also considered from the early stages of programme development'; and QMUL (P5) who are instilling practices to 'understand key skills and strengths valued by employers'.

Many go a step further, describing employers actively engaging in shaping and delivering the curriculum. Both Newcastle and Birmingham discuss embedding employer input into their programmes as a primary mechanism for ensuring employability upon graduation. Bristol (P7) highlight the 'involvement of externals' such as employers and

industry partners which ensure that their modules align with ‘employer needs’. Sheffield (P13) describe their ‘outward facing curriculum [which] enables us to engage employers in curriculum design’, and Leeds (P7) describe ‘extensive engagement with graduate employers’ as the ‘core’ of their approach. Newcastle (P12) discuss their ‘Graduate Skills Framework’, composed ‘with employers’ to identify ‘the critical skills and attributes [they] are seeking from graduates’ and which every undergraduate module must adhere to. Similarly, QMUL (P5) note their ‘Graduate Attributes Framework’ which performs the same role, informing their undergraduate curriculum. In addition to engagement with module design, many of the submissions also refer to employers teaching in the university. For instance, Imperial (P8) explain that ‘there are many examples of industrial partners providing direct teaching input’; Cardiff (P10), that ‘our undergraduate provision benefits significantly from industrial, professional and practitioner partnership and co-teaching; Liverpool (P8) that ‘our programmes involve experts from a wide range of employers who work alongside academics to place students’ learning in the context of future employment and global challenges’; and Leeds (P7) that employers are ‘actively involved in the delivery of curricula’. Interestingly, Leeds (P7) cite the success of these measures as being shown by the positive NSS and TEF metrics for ‘teaching on my course’ rather than in student outcomes, emphasising the blurring of lines between what constitutes excellent teaching and what constitutes excellent outcomes. There is also evidence of a growing number of modules designed specifically as ‘employability modules’: Newcastle (P12) describe how these are ‘embedded in many of our undergraduate programmes...These modules address “readiness to work” and “employability skills” in a focussed way’. Whilst this is an area of the submissions which does focus on inputs, it is the input of the employer that is privileged at the expense of the labour of the academic. Expert knowledge of the academic is also sidelined to forefront new modules which focus solely on employability skills.

A focus on employability is not innately negative, and is of particular relevance for certain departments or courses with a specific vocational aspect, but these kinds of nuances are rarely discussed. Mention of Industrial Advisory Boards or professional bodies to inform the development of relevant curricula (Leeds, P4; Imperial, P7) could indeed be highly necessary, but specifics are left out. Only three submissions show nuance and detail in their discussion of this theme. One is Cambridge (P10), who explain that ‘there are also subjects in

which the learning environment is enhanced by professional engagement, as well as scholarship’ and specifically cite chemical engineering as one of these, showing the specific role that professional bodies are taking, and why they are relevant, rather than presenting employers implicitly as in an overall hierarchy with academic scholarship. Cardiff (P10), further to discussing employer partnerships, explicitly state, ‘in addition to extensive formal placement learning and internship opportunities we ensure *relevant* direct practitioner input to teaching across our provision’ (Cardiff, P10 emphasis added). Finally, York (P3) state that ‘programme teams bring together tutors, students, employers, and (where relevant) professional bodies, who work to design outcomes that capture the distinctive characteristics of the programme’. In this quote from York, not only is the relevancy of the role of employers noted, but so too is the way in which these different actors (tutors, students, employers and so on) are brought together, highlighting the import of a co-operative approach, where elsewhere the input and expertise of the academic is at best taken for granted and at worst undermined.

As well as adhering to the frameworks above, there are also examples of the responsibilisation of the academic when it comes to promoting employment and employability, as well as mechanisms for adjudicating whether they are performing this function adequately. Evidence of this kind of labour can be seen at Leeds (P8) where ‘Staff source new opportunities and promote established schemes through our employability network’, and Warwick (P14) which ‘has a particular focus on developing students’ entrepreneurial skills with dedicated staff support’, among others. Although only present in a minority of submissions, there is also evidence of mechanisms for assessing modules for employability, as is the case at Cambridge (P12): ‘The Careers Service provides data on graduate employment and careers engagement for the university’s periodic reviews of Faculties and Departments, to help assess how effective courses are in providing students with skills for life and employment’; as well as Leeds (P7): ‘The University’s Employability Strategy Group is responsible for an institutional Employability Strategy and oversees Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) for institutional and faculty performance’. Therefore, we begin to see how this objective comes to intra-act with the role, behaviours and expectations placed upon academic subjects who teach.

7.2.2. How are success and excellence being measured?

Through earnings

The Russell Group submissions not only centre employment, but also produce ‘high-value’ employment as a primary measure of success. In part, this is because earnings are seen unquestionably as valuable in and of themselves in the current paradigm, but also because earnings can provide a tangible quantitative measure by which to judge success, sidelining other aspects of fulfilling work that are less easily measurable. Indeed, as discussed in the previous chapter, outside of the figure of employed graduates, level of earnings is the only measure of employment outcomes in the TEF metrics. Examples of universities which highlight their performance in high-value employment are York (P12) and Nottingham (P1), who both cite a report from the Institute for Fiscal Studies ranking median graduate earnings; and Warwick (P13) who cite their position as 4th in the sector for graduate salaries according to The Times. Bristol cite their uplift in graduate earnings, and both they (P12) and Nottingham (P1) flag earnings derived from particular departments (in this case both in law). Imperial (P13) boast of their students’ higher-than-average salaries upon graduating, and Southampton (P15) across their entire careers. What is valued as success here, intra-acts with that which are easily quantified, i.e. employment itself and earnings, the actual work and labour of teaching of *employability* in the classroom is not captured, and as such is left hidden in these submissions. That the submissions centre additional inputs, such as employers and careers services to evidence that institutional focus is angled toward employability, marks these attributes as the drivers of student outcomes, rather than the pedagogy of teachers.

The focus on earnings is a clear example of an aspect of life which comes to have unquestioned value under neoliberal capitalism, where profit maximisation and individual efficiency (*homo economicus*) are prioritised and centred (Brown, 2005). The fact that the ‘value’ in ‘high-value employment’ is uncritically referring to economic value shows the extent to which this has become a common-sense priority. However, it is also something which can be clearly and easily measured. Thus, we see how the two intra-act, whereby earnings can be measured as an easily quantifiable way to define excellence and success, which in turn becomes the way that success in employment is constituted, as other values become increasingly sidelined. Here the value of remuneration has trickled not only into the measurement apparatus for successful employment, but also as a proxy for an excellent university education. Furthermore, as well as sidelining other ways successful employment

might be constituted, such as fulfilment or social good, a focus on high (economic) value favours specific demographics over others e.g. those whose priority is a high-earning job, those who choose disciplines which are highly valued (and therefore remunerated) in this paradigm, and those who have other mechanisms of support to be able to move swiftly into high-value work upon graduation and are then deemed as 'successful'.

The focus on earnings also serves to embed gendered inequalities, since remuneration intra-acts with gendered notions of worth in the marketplace and the consequent gender pay-gap. As was discussed in Chapter 2, one of the facets of the gender pay gap in the wider marketplace is the value attributed to masculinised skills, and an undervaluing of feminised skills (Leythienne & Perez-Julian, 2021). Given this phenomenon, the utilising of earnings as a point of prestige embeds gendered inequalities, through the emphasis on success criteria that are already informed by gender. Subjects which are more favoured by male students are more likely to have 'excellent' outcomes by this definition. Indeed, HESA data analysed by Smith (2023) showed that 67% of humanities graduates are women, and 64% of graduates in the arts are women, disciplines which have the lowest earnings, whereas women make up only a quarter of STEM graduates which has much higher earning potential. Under a model where earnings equate to excellence, these 'feminised' courses become devalued and by proxy the quality of teaching called into question. This helps to constitute a hierarchy of subjects in the university, the material effects of which are already being seen in comments from the current Government regarding cutting 'low-value' courses (DfE, 2023). These courses are in the realm of arts and humanities, where the majority of female academics tend to be situated (AdvanceHE, 2022b). The production of a hierarchy of disciplines will be discussed further in the following section, but it is worth drawing out these linkages here, due to its wider ramifications on the academic, as gendered value systems become interpolated into what kinds of knowledge and subjects are elevated and valued, or marginalised, within HE.

Manchester (P14) are the only institution which provide qualitative justification for why some of their students may actively not want to pursue higher-earning roles, citing the example of aspirations of disabled students who 'were more likely to have taken up non-highly skilled work roles, such as those based in childcare, teaching assistants and nursing assistants (all coded as non-graduate level)'. However, there are occasional nods to other aspects and attributes of employment in addition to earnings. Bristol (P4) explicitly mention

that the value of their degrees ‘cannot be captured in earnings alone’, highlighting other attributes which graduates gain from their education that employers value, such as being ‘adaptable and resilient’, being ‘active citizens’, and ‘contributing to knowledge’. Imperial (P1) note that they ‘aim to deliver an education which prepares our graduates to have a positive impact on the world through their working lives’. Cambridge (P12) describe how their careers service focuses on supporting students towards employment ‘they will find meaningful and fulfilling’, which includes details on material schemes to deliver these outcomes such as funding processes for non-profit organisations to attend recruitment fairs and bursaries for students to take up low or unpaid placements in the arts or non-profit sectors. This point also highlights the particular areas of employment which would otherwise be neglected, based only on an economic model.

Elsewhere, Oxford (P12) argue that the ‘employment and further study’ metric is below the baseline because their students take time out after graduation to find a highly-skilled job, rather than accepting a ‘lower skilled job’ immediately, a hypothesis which LSE (P11) also put forward. Indeed, in an LSE careers service survey, of their graduates who reported as unemployed the two core reasons cited were that ‘graduates were either awaiting the ‘right’ job’ or that they had taken some time to travel between graduation and employment (LSE, P12). Both of these examples indicate the ways in which the metrics limit our understanding of the phenomenon it is aiming to measure. Whilst these examples help to disrupt the singular signifier of excellence as produced through the TEF metrics alone (graduation to employment within 6 months), employment – and high-value employment specifically – is still produced as the core goal of a university education.

Through League Tables and Awards

Other than earnings, and number of students in employment, the other way that universities measure and discuss their prowess in the realm of employability is through league tables and awards which also reward and produce a specific version of excellence. These awards tend to be the headline of submissions, nearly always present in the first couple of paragraphs and then reiterated or expanded upon in the fuller section on employability. Examples of this include Birmingham (P1), who reference their being the ‘Times University of the Year for Graduate Employment’; LSE (P12) who were named ‘University of the Year for

Graduate Employment’ in The Times and The Sunday Times Good University Guide 2015; Manchester (P1) who boast their 24th place ranking in the ‘THE Global University Employability Ranking’ and are also ‘one of the most targeted universities by the UK’s leading graduate employers’; and Leeds (P7), who discuss the significance of their awards in enterprise such as ‘The Times Higher Award for Entrepreneurial University of the Year’ and ‘The Duke of York National Business Award for University Enterprise’. This is just a small example of these kinds of sentiments; Oxford, Warwick, Bristol, Birmingham, Cardiff, Sheffield, Nottingham, Imperial, Cambridge, and Newcastle all reference their placements in these kinds of league tables as measurements of their success not only nationally, but globally.

We also see how academic behaviour is guided internally to cement employability as a primary goal within the university. Birmingham (P12) and Nottingham (P1) both mention their recent internal rewards schemes, rewarding staff members through ‘Employability Awards’. These awards and rankings clearly signify prestige, and again - given the context of the submission - are inherently linked to teaching excellence and help to constitute what excellence is. This prowess is measured using both quantitative pre-existing and competitive rankings, as well as a rise in internal awards to shape behaviour, entrenching employability as a key focus of the university and a particular kind of employment as the most valuable. This also potentially serves institutions that excel in existing measurements practices, preserving a traditional hierarchy rather than opening up how we might think about HE and its function, an aim of TEF that was outlined in Chapter 6. The priority of placement of this material also sets up its inherent import and the meaning that the TEF judgement panel should take from these rankings.

7.2.3. Effects of the focus on employment and employability

There are multiple effects of the focus on employment and employability and the way in which success in this area is measured. The first, which has been touched on, is how it constitutes a specific, narrow and rigid purpose of the university. This affects the values around which a university is constituted and in particular what and who is valued within it. The speed at which one enters the workforce, and the quantitative remuneration of employment, are constituted as the most crucial outcome of a university education and the

key signifier of its success. This is at the expense of other facets and benefits of HE which are at best sidelined, and at worst rendered completely invisible. That there are no additional TEF metrics for employability or even life outside of the workplace, for instance happiness or social good, and a lack discussion of this point within the submissions shows the interpolation of the wider processes of neoliberalisation with the aims and goals of HE. Instead, HE is concerned with economic productivity as a wider aim, and of profit-maximisation and efficiency, bound up in the ideas of homo-economicus, as an individual aim. We see the materialisation of a hierarchy of employment based on pay, with income being a mutually enforcing value as well as a tool of measurement.

To draw together the themes addressed above, there are three core ways in which constitution of employment as the primary aim of the university, and the way it is measured can be viewed as a gendered process, producing gendered inequalities. First, the success of teaching is measured by outcomes (employment) rather than inputs (teaching), which sidelines and makes passive the feminised labour involved in delivering these outcomes. In addition, the inputs that are discursively centred are the use of employers and non-academic parties in module design and teaching. Centring employers marginalises the work of academic staff as their labour is decentred to the point of invisibility. Further, posing employer involvement implicitly situates academics as lacking the requisite skills or experience to satisfy this constitution of excellence, devaluing their academic knowledge.

Mechanisms and metrics which monitor employability outcomes, in addition to the input of employers, reconstitutes the position of the academic teacher, situating them as facilitator between the student and the employer, rather than as subject experts. It produces a divide between the university and the 'world of work', implicitly leaning once again on the pejorative image of the 'ivory tower': out of touch academics out of step with professional practice. This shift reduces academics' agency over their role, as well as sidelining and usurping the other roles that academics provide outside of serving employers and employability targets, for example fostering critical thinking, mentoring and development, and pastoral care. This, again, is a sidelining of distinctly gendered labour (Henderson-Brooks, 2021; Kandiko Howson et al, 2018; Misra et al 2012; Tuck, 2018).

Second, the centring of (high-value) employment intra-acts with gendered notions of value in paid work and what is worthy of higher remuneration. This shift in priorities shapes what content is deemed as holding value within the university; to be considered excellent, knowledge must also be considered as ‘valuable’ to employers. Manchester (P12) even note subject differentials when discussing student outcomes: ‘students studying humanities degrees typically have lower levels of HSE or further study’. This devalues certain types of knowledge leading to a hierarchy of disciplines which – affected by the gendering of value in the marketplace – tends to run down gendered lines (Steinþórsdóttir et al, 2019). This is furthered in various comments made by senior MPs, including Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, where the value in a university education has become a battleground in which the economic argument is becoming steadfastly the common-sense reasoning for a university education, explicitly played off against vocational routes such as apprenticeships (Omer, 2023; Morgan, 2023).

This hierarchy of courses has material effects in the entrenching of discourses around ‘mickey mouse subjects’ and is now reflected in policy decisions, for example the government’s plan to ‘crackdown’ on so-called ‘rip-off degrees’ – predominantly in arts and humanities – through limiting student numbers and therefore income, as a means to change behaviours (DfE, 2023; Gawthorpe, 2023; Omer, 2023). Thus, the focus on employability not only minimises the prestige of certain subjects in ‘feminised’ fields which tend to occupy more women such as the arts (Steinþórsdóttir et al, 2019) but is also leading to cuts at institutions such as UEA (The Guardian, 2023b), Birkbeck (Weale, 2022), and Brighton (Blunt, 2023), all predominantly in the arts and humanities. The latter cites cuts specifically in subjects such as art, literature, education and nursing, and recent stats from AdvanceHE (2022b) show these disciplines to be 53.6%, 57.5%, 69.7% and 74.3% female staff – with over a quarter of total women in non-STEM disciplines occupying the former three subjects. This has a tangible impact on women’s lived experiences on the ground, fighting for their subjects and potentially even their jobs, as well as, crucially, stemming the pipeline where knowledge is made.

The intra-action of feminised fields and an increasingly casualised workforce, with a growing number of insecure or temporary contracts in HE (HESA, 2023a), also puts women more at risk since – as outlined in Chapter 2 – there is a disparity in women further down the ladder or on insecure contracts, with a larger percentage of women on both part-time and

fixed term (and part-time fixed term) contracts (AdvanceHE, 2022a:202), or even zero hours contracts (HESA, 2023a), who are disproportionately affected by these kinds of cuts.

Third, the overwhelming proliferation of employment and employability throughout the submissions effects how the university is constituted and becomes a primary node in the wider conception of excellence. It narrows the purpose of the university to one of economics, rather than, for example, creating an educated population or a valuing of knowledge for knowledge's sake. The centring of employability produces it as a core signifier of excellence. Having universities, key centres of knowledge production, take ideas from employers and cement them at the heart of education serves to provide a continuous reconstitution of these values at the heart of knowledge production and types of knowledge that are deemed important. This limited conception narrows the field of who 'fits' in the university, which has an effect on both female and male academics as their role shifts to serving employers rather than knowledge, and university practices become increasingly managerial in a business-like model. Overall, however, women may be further sidelined, due to the intra-action of gendered perceptions of women being unable to embody increasingly managerial roles (Baker, 2012a; Broadridge & Simpson, 2011; Ely & Meyerson, 2010; Van den Brink & Benschop, 2012; Van den Brink et al, 2016).

7.2.4. An alternative narrative: the university before the employer

Whilst still taking employability as a central focus, there are occasions within the submissions where universities make a point of showing how employability and transferable skills are an inherent feature of being university-educated, rather than something which must become a focus in and of itself. Sheffield (P13) describe how 'employability is inherent' within their programmes and that their graduates are 'intrinsically employable'. Likewise, Cambridge (P1) explicitly note that the intellectual material of their courses helps their graduates to gain 'knowledge, skills, and understanding that are highly valued by employers', and reiterate this toward the end of the submission, stating 'Cambridge undergraduates are highly sought after by employers' (Cambridge, P12). This sentiment is echoed at Manchester (P1), Warwick (P8) and Oxford (P12), who all state that graduates' qualities are 'highly valued by employers'. UCL (P2) discuss how the skills they provide will let graduates 'excel in the workplace' and Bristol (P3) insinuate that their graduates' employability are the inherent effects of a good university

education, rather than employers having an active hand in shaping students. These examples show that whilst employability remains centred – and thus is still the key aim of a university – it is discussed in regard to the ethos and skills that an undergraduate education would provide students anyway. However, these examples still do nothing to centre the labour of the teacher: instead, their labour is naturalised as part of the operations of the university.

In the most anomalous example, Oxford (P12) explicitly shirk the extrapolation of ‘employability’ as an additional element that needs to be added into their education. They state specifically that studying at the university provides students with the ‘intellectual stamina and critical skills required to achieve a demanding standard in a rigorous academic discipline, which the University believes is one of the best means of preparing students for the requirements of working life’. They continue: ‘the emphasis is on enabling students to develop transferable skills, alongside detailed subject knowledge, rather than through the use of provision labelled as ‘employability-related’ within the curriculum’ (Oxford, P12). Within this context, the penultimate sentence of the entire submission states that: ‘The University seeks to develop the employability of its students through its pedagogy, enhanced by the Careers Service working with others to provide further opportunities and initiatives’ (Oxford, P14). This undeniably puts confidence in the university education more broadly as well as its own academic practices, which provides a contrast to the vast majority of submissions. That this disruption comes from Oxford could also perhaps indicate the uneven power distributions by which universities are able to resist the dominant narratives when their reputations are at stake.

7.3. Global Excellence versus Regional Contribution

Another prominent focus throughout the submissions is universities situating themselves as global institutions and, with this, producing a competitive need to be ‘world-leading’ or ensure ‘global reach’. This spans from emphasising their world-leading research, University facilities, and the international make-up of the student and staff body. Every single submission refers in some form to their global excellence or outlook, with 17 of the 21 submissions describing facets of their provision as ‘world-leading’ or highlighting their placement in international league tables. This is compared to seven submissions which discuss their regional role. The language of ‘world-leading’ is very prominent in the grading system in

REF – and due to the funding discrepancy between 4* ‘world-leading’ and 3* ‘internationally excellent’, ‘world-leading’ research has been argued to now be the only kind of research that matters in the UK (Torrance, 2020). Although the language of ‘world-leading’ or ‘global’ is not an explicit part of TEF rankings, the ripples of ‘world-leading’ language are entangled as a signifier of prestige throughout these university submissions and is reproduced through its inculcation into discussions of the wider context of the university and the assumed effect on teaching excellence.

This focus on the global constitutes a particular image of the remit of the university, and a vision of an unencumbered and flexible academic. Lynch (2010:54) describes the ideal academic in this model as ‘care-less’, most often male, always available, working without limit, and without care responsibilities. The gendering of encumberment and the ideal academic intra-acts with a HE sector whose turn towards the global is produced as increasingly necessary (Ivancheva, 2015; McKenzie, 2022). This turn towards the global has been criticised by post-colonial scholars as a new form of cultural imperialism (e.g., Lo, 2011; Shahjahan & Morgan, 2017; Zajda & Jacob, 2022), spreading a western hegemony of knowledge, academic elitism and deepening the global free market, rather than emphasising global collaboration and cooperation (Morley, 2016; Rust & Kim, 2015; Shahjahan & Morgan, 2017). Hence, the focus on being ‘world-leading’ constitutes not only a change in values but embeds that power of global competition to shape the agendas of HEI in a quest for recognition.

7.3.1. The university as a global institution

Some of the emphasis on the global in the submissions is focussed predominantly on internationalism; for example, in the makeup of the staff and student body, Imperial (P2), Sheffield (P1), LSE (P1), and Warwick (P5) all cite the number of students who come from the EU and beyond. It is worth mentioning the financial imperative of international students against the backdrop of reduced government funding, with recent data from HESA (2023b), analysed by García et al (2023) for The Guardian, showing that one-fifth of university income was derived from overseas student fees. Within the submissions, there are specific references to ‘Global Strategies’ (Nottingham, P15) and discussions of internationalism because of the skills that it gives to students which, recollecting the previous theme, is usually in terms of

recognising the import of catering to ‘global employers’ (e.g., York, P14; Warwick P4-6). The emphasis on the global is also very frequently used as evidence of the ability to turn students into ‘global citizens’ (Liverpool, P3; Southampton, P12; Bristol, P4; UCL, P1) or helping them to focus on ‘global challenges’ (e.g., Liverpool, P3; Sheffield, P14; Warwick, P4). Primarily though, the image of global prowess is produced through discussion of either facilities or research. Unsurprisingly, both Oxford and Cambridge discuss their global reach, discussing their resources as ‘world-leading’ (Cambridge, P6; Oxford, P1) as well as the pair having a ‘worldwide’ (Cambridge, P9) or ‘international’ (Oxford, P1) research profile. Others that discuss their research impact as global are Manchester (P1) who discuss students being ‘taught by staff whose research has a global impact’, UCL (P6) who ‘use our world-leading research to inform excellent curricula’ and Newcastle (P1) for whom it is crucial that students ‘benefit from studying at a university that is internationally recognised for its research excellence’.

As with employability, such claims are commonly backed up through references to international league tables and tend to be very near the opening of the submission, indicating their perceived import. Bristol (P1) highlight almost immediately their ‘consistently high ranking among the top 100 universities in the world in all major global league tables’, and even include a table in the submission which outlines their positions in the global QS, Times Higher Education, and Academic Ranking of World Universities league tables. York (P1) highlight their ranking in the Times Higher Education 2017 league table of ‘the most international universities’, as do QMUL (P1), explicitly centring themselves as a ‘global university’ for this reason. Newcastle (P1) and Sheffield (P1) also reference their placement in world rankings on the very first page of their submissions. Global league tables, now a lynchpin in this evidence, only came into being in 2003 (Zajda & Jacob, 2022), showing the rapidity with which they have become a dominant instrument of measurement as well as the turn towards global competition in recent years.

Ultimately, the consequence of the centring of the global is that it produces what are deemed as ‘world-leading’ attributes as an unquestionable good. This perhaps sounds obvious, but the uncritical extent of focus on global reach is significant, especially when measured by global league tables, as is done here. As well as the broader critique of these league tables, they can be seen as another means to stratify and narrow knowledge which is

seen as valuable or impactful (Morley, 2016), intra-acting with globally valued knowledges, pre-existing instruments of measurement such as research frameworks, and the financial imperatives which comes from excelling in global standings in the current funding system. Shahjahan and Morgan (2017:93) describe league tables as ‘global spaces of equivalence’, where indicators are uniformly measured regardless of context, legitimising ‘universalized, delocalized, and depoliticized’ comparisons. Notably, as the values which are measured through league tables become globally homogenised, the countries outside of Europe rising most rapidly in the league tables are some of those with the fewest female leaders and researchers, such as Japan and Hong Kong (Morley, 2016). The corollary is that countries with the highest proportion of female researchers, Philippines and Thailand, are also the countries with the lowest R&D expenditure, making it more difficult for them to have ‘impact’ on the global stage (Morley, 2016). In examining the type of work that puts an institution in the top of a world ranking, activities which are more difficult to measure such as ‘education and service to society’, are sidelined in the quest for global prestige (Huisman, 2008:2). Stack (2020) explicitly argues that universities striving towards gains in global league tables are working counter to EDI commitments, precisely because these league table rankings are entirely aligned with whiteness and maleness. We also know that this kind of competition is a zero-sum game, producing academic ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ (Morley, 2016) and contributing to increasing homogeneity within the sector with gendered effects as to whose work no longer counts as valuable.

On an individual level, a focus on the global also creates a particular image of unencumbered and flexible academics. Those who are able to be competitive, perform well in research frameworks (e.g., REF), have fewer responsibilities outside of the workplace and are therefore more flexible, unencumbered, and able to travel. It also gives incentives to universities to attract “‘star” academics’, to project the best image possible to a global audience (Zajda & Jacob, 2022:11). This is a phenomenon which has been criticised, as these academics tend to be recruited based on hyper-driven records of precuring research grants, citations and publications (Smyth, 2017) – which we also know to intra-act with a ‘highly gendered and exclusionary research economy’ (Morley, 2018:15). Additionally, it serves to produce and entrench stratified hierarchical structures; disparities in money, time and prestige, are increased between marketable academics and those who are preoccupied with

academic housekeeping or so-called ‘low-value’ research, as their research time and funding shrinks (Smyth, 2017; Fleming, 2021; Moran, 1998). It is also significant that in these documents monitoring teaching excellence, universities remain preoccupied with situating themselves as a global presence, reproducing gendered notions of prestige into their constitution of teaching – particularly as discussions of the global or being ‘world-class’ are predominantly linked back to achievements in research rather than teaching, blurring the line in excellence between the two. In terms of staff, the direct implication is that ‘world-class’ researchers make the best teachers, embedding the gendered effects of the research/teaching hierarchy (Aiston & Jung, 2015; Santos & Dang Van Phu, 2019; Subbaye & Vithal, 2017; Zulu 2013). Thus, we see that the exclusionary gendered research economy is still highly interwoven with the positionality of teaching, even in documents which are ostensibly attempting to centre teaching in its own right.

7.3.2. The university as a regional institution

The TEF submissions also evidence tensions between striving for global recognition while maintaining focus on the local. Hazelcorn (2014:23) asks whether the HEI pursuit of world-class status leads institutions to be concerned only ‘with their individual global position and less engaged or committed to their nations or regions?’. Whilst every submission positions themselves as global, and are clearly concerned with global rankings, there is still an – albeit smaller – focus on regional work. This is evident in seven of the submissions: York, Cardiff, Leeds, Bristol, Manchester, QMUL, and Liverpool. Focussing on the regional emphasises the university’s potential as part of a community and, as a large regional institution, its contribution to local cultural, economic and community development (Uyarra, 2010). In some submissions these references are framed as broad value statements, for example having a need to ‘contribute to the well-being of the region’ (Manchester, P1); or to be in ‘service of our local communities’ (QMUL, P1); or making clear the ‘longstanding relationship with the local area’ (Liverpool, P3). Others reference specific actions through links with the city, such as volunteering, environmental projects, or training opportunities and partnerships for students with local groups or businesses. Often, submissions underline that this regional focus is part of the university’s role as a civic institution, that it has a role within the community and is contributing to social good – through research, the local economy, or specific outreach or local partnership work. The fact that universities cite examples of this in

their qualitative submissions suggests that they see this role as vital in the consideration of 'excellence', especially given the lack of space devoted to regional contributions in the TEF metrics.

It is notable that this local work is sometimes justified via improving employability skills. York (P12) explicitly link student partnership with the local community, to 'extensive opportunities for students to develop their employability skills through engagement with local and regional communities'. Likewise, Leeds's (P6) role as 'a civic university, in the heart of a vibrant city and region' is immediately linked to their enterprise degree programmes which 'link disciplinary knowledge, enterprise and entrepreneurship within a regional context'. Although employability remains a leading objective and primary point of justification, these examples do at least widen the definition of employability, connecting it to skills that can be learned in or from the community, those whose work may be 'smaller', more localised, or more community driven, rather than a focus only on specific types of prestigious high-value or global employment. It also indicates that these institutions have not fully transitioned *only* to the discourses of the global. However, in comparing this theme to what was made visible in the TEF panel's 'statement of findings', none of these attributes were mentioned as contributing to their award. Instead, these themes were rendered absent, sidelined by the awarding powers.

7.4. Producing a Wider Spectrum of Values and Aims

Continuing the theme of an alternative, or at least a more diverse, range of values and objectives, the qualitative submissions uphold some of the more 'traditional' or 'Humboldtian' aspects of the value of HE, situating themselves as having a multiplicity of aims. This is evident in how they frame the skills which students learn in a university environment, and the kinds of transferable skills and knowledge which they will gain from a university education, even providing moments of contestation in actively attempting to decentre the import of employment.

7.4.1. Offering a wider set of skills and knowledge for students

Although it is undeniably centred in all documents, employment is not the *only* attribute which is given recognition throughout the sample of TEF submissions. Often the

stated aims of education include acquiring skills for whatever a student might want to pursue, with common phrases such as providing skills to ‘achieve their ambitions’, ‘look to the future’ (York, P3), ‘prepar[e]...for the world beyond the university’ (Sheffield, P3), or ‘be highly valued contributors across all walks of life’ (UCL, P2). LSE (P15) are the most unequivocal in having a wider remit than just employability enhancement, citing an internal survey which had shown that ‘students expect our education to act as more than a conduit for gainful employment, but also as a means through which to develop intellectually’, highlighting the value of knowledge for its own sake. There are other occasional references to instilling a love of learning, or research, situating the university as a place where this kind of passion can be ignited. York (P8) include reference to a commitment that teaching should ‘engage students in the joy of discovery and invention and expose them to research’, and Leeds (P4) that the value in a final-year research project lies in making students ‘active contributors to knowledge’. This approach gives value to a wider remit of education and array of knowledges to be normalised as part of HE. In turn, it caters to the wider range of wants and desires of the student body, as well as a wider diversity of projects, aims, and attributes relevant for staff.

In terms of specific wider skills students should acquire, stated desired outcomes of syllabi include enhancing reflective practice (York, P9), communication (York, P9), intellectual flexibility (Manchester, P1; Warwick, P1; Leeds, P5), critical thinking (Leeds, P3), decision making (Leeds, P4), and social and cultural capital (Manchester, P1; QMUL, P2). Others place emphasis on the kinds of skills graduates need in the modern world. Nottingham (P15), for example, emphasise that students are now ‘entering a world of remarkable economic, social and technological change’ and continue that ‘equipping them to succeed in such an environment is our responsibility’. Again, there is an emphasis on the global here, in helping students succeed globally, becoming ‘global citizens’ (Liverpool, P1), or having a ‘global outlook’ (Southampton, P1). There are still tensions, it could be framed as a centring of the social good or a more collaborative paradigm – UCL’s (P10) promotion of their ‘Global Citizenship Programme’, for example, emphasises a range of research and extra-curricular interdisciplinary projects which focus on ‘how research and researchers can contribute to the resolution of the world’s problems through collaboration’. However, this always includes a caveat, for instance in this very same submission, that ‘we are ambitious for our students, and

aim to develop them in the round, as global citizens, so that they secure highly skilled employment on graduation' (UCL, P1), the 'global citizens' very directly only relating to employability here. Similar critiques could also be levelled in terms of the potential cultural imperialism here as in the 'world-leading' discourse.

As well as skills, there are wider core *values* which universities think students should be exposed to. Liverpool (P1) cite their key goals as being to 'educate well-rounded, enquiring global citizens' whose skills include 'research, civic engagement and inter-cultural understanding'. Cardiff (P4) similarly highlight their 'community engagement, cultural economy, socio-economic development and public value projects', and Manchester (P1) describe an education which is 'enriched by our commitment to research excellence and social responsibility', with all three institutions linking these to students thinking about real-world problems and disrupting the narrow skill set aimed toward 'employability'. Likewise, Warwick (P1) discuss their educational ethos as being 'outward looking in nature', which underpins the contributions their 'graduates make to society and economy'. It is interesting that they take a similar tack here, with a nod towards civil society but also include in that their economic contribution. Finally, at Leeds (P4), as well as explicit 'employability', threads embedded into their undergraduate courses include 'ethics and responsibility' and 'global and cultural insight'. However, perhaps because of the restraints of the TEF metrics, the success of all these programmes is once again confined to being measured through employability. For example, these programmes are shown to be successful due to the 'TEF metrics for "teaching on my course"', and 'a positive performance on the "highly skilled employment or further study" indicator' (Leeds, P5). This exemplifies the limitations of the metrics, and the value in the qualitative submission in that universities are able to discuss wider values and aims, though they are constrained by having to justify these wider values through how they can be shaped to "fit" the metrics. Additionally, though, this framing presents the University as innately useful to employers, precisely because of its benefits as a multifaceted institution and the range of opportunities available to students which instil transferable skills.

Surprisingly, what is lacking from all the submissions is any explicit discussion or statistics surrounding undergraduates who are inspired to go on to postgraduate courses. It is occasionally referenced as part of the 'employment or further study' TEF metric, but predominantly the actual discussion is couched in terms of employment, and the statistics

between employment and further study are never disaggregated. Once again, Sheffield's submission is the one exception to this rule. They highlight the success of a research programme, 'SURE', which has had the effect of 60% of its attendees in an average year going on to pursue further study (Sheffield, P10), but this example provides stark contrast to submissions elsewhere. This is a glaring omission which sidelines the values and aims of HEIs to facilitate a passion for knowledge and research which would cause students to continue in further education.

The centring of these alternate goals and values demonstrates that universities have not been fully captured by neoliberal aims and objectives, and that, even within the limitations of the TEF metrics, the Russell Group are able to produce wider conceptions of their purpose and aims. In widening the purpose of the university, it produces a space in which a wider set of skills and knowledges can be valued. However, even within the discussion of this work, the labour of the academic in working to meet these goals is hidden. Furthermore, the values themselves are not captured by the TEF panel's statement of findings. Of all of the universities, only Leeds is explicitly commended for their wider facets of education inspired by 'discovery, global and cultural insights, ethics and responsibility, and employability', an anomaly amongst the statement of findings.

7.4.2. Offering a wider set of institutional aims, objectives and values

In discussions of the role of the university institution itself and its stated values, outside of their direct responsibilities to students, a broader picture also emerges. This could be termed their 'value background', coined by Barnett (2011), and is posed as a key element in a university's being and becoming. Firstly, there is discussion throughout the documents reiterating a university's role for social good. Although some focus this solely on their students, such as Southampton's (P1) statement that they are 'here to change the world for the better', it is later specified that this is achieved predominantly through 'providing a transformative and overwhelmingly positive experience for our students' (Southampton, P15). Social and civic responsibility is discussed by a number of institutions. Cardiff are particularly keen to emphasise their wider role as one of the larger institutions of Wales, and the only Welsh Russell Group University. Their brief is very wide, with a mission 'to create and share knowledge, and to educate for the benefit of all' through their education and research

based in 'creativity and curiosity', and linking back to place, this is in order to fulfil 'our social, cultural and economic obligations to Cardiff, Wales and the world' (Cardiff, P1). Bristol (P10) highlight their focus on social challenges which run across disciplines, for example: 'health; the environment and sustainability; living well in an uncertain world; and data'. This highlights the extent to which universities are still keen to project the image of social good and be seen to maintain their wider values.

There are also specific examples given of social impact. For example, Manchester (P5), use their submission to promote their 'UoM School Governor Initiative' in which their staff and alumni provide support to state schools across the country, and discuss how their wider programme of 'Social Responsibility' has been recognised as 'an exemplar of public service and social impact' (Manchester, P6). This principle even helps to close Manchester's (P15) submission, by linking their teaching, learning, and research to 'a commitment to social responsibility that is unparalleled in UK higher education'. Using this to tie up their entire narrative centres this value, ensuring it is shown to be intertwined with all the work of the institution and elevating its import, and destabilising the hold of employability. Similarly, QMUL (P1) underline their priority of outreach and engagement, shining a light on their 'Centre for Public Engagement' which covers a wide variety of activities, including workshops with schools and the wider public, research projects, partnerships, and outreach which 'supports our academic work and, importantly, provides benefit to the wider community'. Crucially, they also recognise the labour of those within the institution who contribute to these wider aims and values, stating 'we are proud to recognise these outstanding achievements...[and] outstanding contributions made by staff and students involving those outside the university with their work in order to share, apply and enhance teaching and research' (QMUL, P14). This recognition does, however, stand out by dint of its uniqueness.

The value of knowledge-production in terms of social good is also discussed in a small minority of submissions. For example, Newcastle (P1) state that, 'alongside this commitment to linking our research and teaching sits our belief that as well as being valued for its own sake, knowledge must be of wider value to both the individual and civil society'. Besides the contradiction in terms here – can knowledge be valued for its own sake if it 'must' be of value elsewhere? – this phrase does indicate the import of knowledge (rather than skills) which is a word that is used infrequently throughout the submissions given their subject matter, as well

its usefulness not just on an individual level but also for civil society. Interestingly, Cardiff (P1) are the only institution to mention the quantitative contribution that the institution makes to the economy: 'we are responsible for 85% of all intellectual property income generated by Welsh universities and contribute £2.9bn to the UK economy'. The effects of the wider remit are interesting as they provide disruption and even contestation of the common-sense neoliberal narrative as to the purpose of HEIs: whilst taking up a small minority of the text, the majority of the submissions maintain links to the service of a wider communal good. Once again, however, these alternate roles and values are neglected in the TEF panel's final judgement, with none of the statement of findings highlighting these facets of the university as relevant to teaching excellence and thus sidelining them from the constitution of excellence in the overall TEF framework.

7.5 Conclusion

To conclude, the primary themes centred throughout the submissions which constitute the aims, values, and purpose of the university – the focus on employability and global excellence – clearly (re)produce some of the neoliberal trajectories discussed in the wider literature and the assumptions embedded into the TEF metrics regarding the purpose of the university. The primary focus on employability, and relatively uncritiqued value judgements about what 'good' employment looks like, centres a specific conception of the aims of a university as an institution geared towards increasing the employability of students.

The centring of employment produces gendered inequalities in three ways: by devaluing the labour of the teaching staff in the classroom; by devaluing feminised skills and subject areas, producing a hierarchy of subjects stratified by gender; and by narrowing the purview of what constitutes excellence, limiting the range of academic identities which are imbued with value. The centring of the global also serves to homogenise the university by producing spaces of global equivalence. Once again, this narrowing of aims, objectives, values, and wider priorities of the university is shaped by what is measured in these spaces, through international league tables. The narrower this purview, the narrower a definition of excellence, and those who are permitted inclusion. This narrowing intra-acts with exclusionary gendered practices in HE and the wider knowledge economy as it sidelines and devalues knowledge and attributes associated more with women, producing gendered effects

that affect both women and men. The focus on the global also embeds the ideal academic as an unencumbered and flexible figure which has disproportionately negative effects on women.

However, whilst these were the most overriding themes, the analysis also showed that there were a variety of smaller themes, which divert from the TEF metrics: universities' role as regional institutions and the work they conduct as civic institutions. Although the labour of the academic was still not captured in these discussions, they produce a conception of universities as in a period of transition, maintaining a broader set of values which potentially includes a wider array of legitimised academic work and identities.

Chapter 8. TEF and the Constitution of Teaching Excellence

8.1. Introduction

Having discussed how the broader university is constituted through TEF, this chapter addresses how the Russell Group qualitative TEF submissions constitute teaching excellence, and how the signifiers of excellence are gendered. The constitution of teaching excellence is produced both explicitly, through the ways universities define their own teaching as excellent, and implicitly, through the topics they centre and prioritise for the attention of the TEF panel and the wider audience. All the content in the submissions is produced through the context of a wider conversation with the TEF metrics, as the qualitative elements of the submissions are a direct response to what is being measured and provide either contextualisation of specific benchmarks or additional material which universities see as relevant to their teaching portfolio that is not captured through the TEF metrics.

This chapter uses WPR alongside Barad's conception of the inclusionary and exclusionary effects of measurement practices to study what these effects make visible as a constitutive part of teaching excellence. The chapter argues that what is produced as holding value through the submissions makes it disproportionately easier for men to be embodied as 'excellent teachers' than women. It assesses what type of work is captured and how it is captured and uses this to discuss how the labour which is valued is masculinised, as well as how this reifies some behaviours, such as catering to the 'student experience', at the expense of others. Further, as in the TEF policy documentation, a large proportion of what constitutes teaching excellence in the university submissions has less to do with 'teachers' or even lectures, seminars, or tutorials, but is more often around the broader set of factors included in 'teaching mission' and 'student outcomes'. Table 8 shows the five broad themes which emerged from the submissions which constitute teaching excellence, along with the key aspects that were covered within them.

Ways Teaching Excellence is Constituted	Ways in Which Success is 'Evidenced'
Research-led teaching	Research acumen of teachers Standing in REF
Contact time	Availability of personal tutors Availability of pastoral support
Student satisfaction	NSS/internal student surveys Acting on student voice/feedback
Material resources	Quantitative spend on resources
League table standings	Demonstration of prestige through rankings

Table 88: Signifiers of Teaching Excellence

8.2. Research-led Teaching as Teaching Excellence

The primary way teaching excellence is constituted through the submissions is as an extension of research excellence. In the context of using the Russell Group as a sample, this is perhaps unsurprising. However, one of the reasons for choosing this group was to determine how TEF's specific remit to 'shake-up' HE and disrupt the research/teaching hierarchy would shift the focus of this research-intensive group of universities. This section begins by demonstrating the universities' discussion of research-led teaching as unquestionably the most excellent form of pedagogy, and the evidence that is put forward to 'represent' their prowess in conducting it. It then offers a critique of these representations in terms of the unequal emphasis which is put on research prestige more broadly at the expense of teaching, and within the focus on research the unequal emphasis it imbues on 'masculinised' types of research such as STEM subjects, whilst research which is feminised is not present. It also critiques the embedding of measurement apparatuses such as REF to uncritically demonstrate research prestige when REF is a tool which has been shown to entrench gendered inequalities.

8.2.1. *Research-led teaching*

All the submissions emphasise the import of research-led (or research-based) teaching as a pedagogical approach. However, rather than centring discussions of research-led *teaching*, in the main it is research *prowess* which is centred. This prowess is presented uncritically as a proxy for the superiority of institutions' research-led teaching, which itself is assumed to naturally exemplify teaching excellence. Thus, the commitment from all Russell Group institutions to research-led teaching leads them to centre 'excellent' researchers whose research labour is given far more comprehensive and in-depth discussion than the additional labour required to move research acumen effectively into a classroom setting. The submissions centre research-led teaching through its introduction as the lynchpin of students' learning, and through the extent to which it is discussed throughout the submissions. Research-led teaching is positioned as central to the mission of the universities, consistently introduced on the first page, and usually in the opening paragraph. This placement centres its import in contextualising the rest of the submission through the lens of research-led teaching as a primary indicator of teaching excellence. Examples include UCL (P1), who 'offer our undergraduate students a 'research-based' education'; Leeds (P1), who are 'committed to providing an outstanding research-led education'; and Birmingham (P1) who explain that they are 'a research-intensive institution with a strong belief in a research-led education to underpin the development of independent learners and outstanding graduates'.

Research-led teaching is then referenced throughout the submissions as all the universities demonstrate that it is embedded as part of a wider research-intensive environment, for example: 'Fundamental to our concept of research-led education is the principle that our students should benefit from our research rich context at the very start of their studies' (Southampton, P4); 'students are consistently and frequently engaged with developments from the forefront of research and scholarship' (Cambridge, P1); 'Student engagement with research is embedded in programme design from the outset' (York, P8); 'our many PBRs reports routinely point to the academically rigorous and research-rich environment in which our students study' (Bristol, P5). Further, the submissions co-constitute this vision of teaching-excellence-through-research with the production of the research-active scholar, for example, 'the College is a research-rich environment...Students are taught predominantly by practicing scientists, engineering and medics' (Imperial, P11); 'Our students

are taught by outstanding researchers' (Durham, P10); '[students are] taught by academics who are active researchers or scholars' (QMUL, P11); 'as a research led institution, with 3,374 academic staff and a research portfolio of £150m, the opportunities for students to develop are immense' (Sheffield, P7). This is echoed across all the Russell Group submissions, and forefronts the researcher as the academics' primary identity.

In terms of pedagogy, just under half of the institutions give an explanation as to *why* a research-led approach is inherently the best, with the remainder presenting it as an assumed best practice. Birmingham (P9) and Nottingham (P11) both argue that it ensures that learning is grounded in the most 'up-to-date' research. LSE (P1) link it explicitly to the research identities of academics, that students are best placed to learn 'from the very experts who have carried out this research'. Liverpool (P6) and York (P2) both echo this argument, and York (P8) additionally include student feedback as evidence, which states that 'It's a great feeling to know you're being taught by academics who are at the cutting edge of research'. Birmingham (P10) highlight the tangible outcomes that can be derived from this practice, 'with numerous examples of the best [undergraduate] work being published in top-rated academic journals'. Entangled with the themes in the previous chapter, Durham (P10) frame their emphasis on research as derived from conversations with employers, saying that: 'we took the strategic decision, following consultation with employers on those attributes considered most valuable in our graduates, to make research-led education core to all programmes', and similarly Exeter (P9) state that it gives students skills to excel in the 'knowledge-based economies of the twenty-first century'.

This unquestioned arrangement produces excellent teachers as synonymous with excellent researchers. In a framework that is intended to elevate teaching, it is research which is elevated and then used as a proxy for excellent teaching, with a limited discussion as to why, and an uncritical view as to the labour which is sidelined in this account. The literature regarding gendered academic labour and the academic prestige economy shows that it is teaching-based work which both places a larger burden on women and has historically been undervalued or sidelined (e.g., Kandiko Howson et al, 2018; Morley, 2003), such as pastoral care (Morley, 1998) or mentoring (Misra et al, 2012), and the focus on study skills (Tuck, 2018). Henderson-Brooks (2021) notes the understudied emotional labour of marking and feedback. These kinds of labour are still not adequately captured or recognised through these

documents. The only additional labour which emerges through discussions of research-led teaching is that of the opportunities given to students to work alongside scholars on their research, which has not traditionally been captured through quantitative measurement systems.

Nearly all the submissions mention the dual role of their staff as researchers and teachers, usually as a contractual requirement (e.g., Cambridge, P9; Nottingham, P2; Liverpool, P6; York, P2). Whilst many submissions do make explicit reference to the attempt to embed equality of prestige between research and teaching, this is not consistently enacted in the documents themselves. For instance, both Imperial (P4) and Newcastle (P4) reference a parity of esteem between teaching and research. However, both submissions consistently situate their teaching staff through their prowess as researchers. For example, Imperial (P11), introduce the topic of teachers by stating that ‘students are predominantly taught by practicing scientists, engineer[s] and medics’ and ‘88% of staff in the College who are employed to teach are on teaching and research contracts, and 92% of teaching and research staff were returned to the 2014 REF’. Newcastle (P1) does not give an account of pedagogical practices and labour that happen in the classroom, but instead refer to students as benefitting from ‘staff working at the cutting edge of their disciplines’, and are clear to underline in all discussions of teaching that it is ‘research-led’ or ‘informed by research’ (Newcastle, P7).

These tensions are also produced in the paradox – discussed in greater depth in the following chapter – of teaching-only promotion routes, which the majority of submissions discuss to evidence their shift in focus toward valuing teaching. However, this is in the context of a document which produces excellent teaching as being equated to excellent research, that teaching is excellent precisely *because* students are being taught by leading researchers, and that it is the duty of all research staff to teach, with very little explanation as to how those adopting the ‘teaching route’ are pedagogically additive. Thus overall, the promotion of research-led teaching reinforces the production of the researcher/teacher hierarchy and the devaluation of feminised labour throughout the documents. In addition, the focus on research as well as teaching adds strain on academics who are working towards ambiguous and sometimes competing university ideals and expectations (Clegg, 2008).

Sheffield is an anomaly in providing a more nuanced understanding of what could constitute a research-led approach to education, and specifically how this approach may look different depending on the discipline and wider context of the course. They state that: 'We understand that the relationship between teaching and research differs by subject...Our programmes weave in research-based learning opportunities for students to engage in and support original research and to spend time in laboratories and/or in practice' (Sheffield, P10). Whilst still discussing the benefits and opportunities given to students through research-led teaching, Sheffield present a more three-dimensional approach to teaching and need. That they are the only university to acknowledge this potential discrepancy highlights the singular vision of research-led teaching produced elsewhere. This disruption is particularly important because where evidence of research-led teaching is discussed in the rest of the submissions, it is in the context of specific and narrow research environments such as labs. This produces a vision of excellent research-led teaching as far more associated with STEM subjects or very occasionally business and marketing. None of the submissions depict specific research in the arts or humanities, where women are disproportionately represented (AdvanceHE, 2022b). This framing produces teaching excellence as being grounded in research excellence, but where only a particular type of research is made legible. Therefore, excellent teaching (as research-led teaching) can only be envisioned in a particular set of disciplines, affecting the constitution of what an ideal research-led education is. This framing is also entangled with wider gendered notions of what constitutes excellent research in the wider research economy, humanities and social sciences being cast as 'research losers' in the neoliberal paradigm (Morley, 2016). Therefore, it is critical to interrogate the skills and research types which are foregrounded and sidelined even within a research-led model, and how this intra-acts with the gendering of value in research and knowledge, and therefore in these submissions, teaching.

A thought-provoking aspect of the Newcastle submission is that they are cognisant of students' awareness of the tension between academics' identities as researchers versus teachers. In their own student survey, they ask students whether they 'felt staff valued research or teaching more strongly' (Newcastle, P8). The results were that '48% of undergraduate respondents indicated that they felt academic staff valued research and teaching equally while a further 24% felt that academic staff valued teaching more strongly

than research' (Newcastle, P8). There is no explicit reading of what the 'correct' answer is here, and Newcastle offer no analysis of these results, but the implication – given they felt it important to submit as evidence of teaching excellence – is that students should always believe that their tutors are more focused on their teaching than their research. Newcastle's reference to the student perspective on this tension is unique among the submissions, but gives an interesting insight into the way academics must perform to their students, producing a particular impression of themselves as guided by their teaching, whilst being shaped by the university to inhabit the role of excellent researcher. This highlights not only the tensions within the academic identity between the roles of researcher and teacher, but also the additional labour of performing these identities in the 'correct' way. Ball (2003:221) notes the personal 'costs' of this on teachers, whereby commitment and authenticity within practice 'are sacrificed for impression and performance'. These performances intra-act with performances which are already gendered (Morley, 2003). It also indicates that excellent researcher and excellent teacher are not a natural proxy for each other given that students delineate between these roles in the classroom.

Another effect of the focus on research-led teaching is its intra-action with value-laden judgements concerning what constitutes 'excellent' research. The disparity between research in STEM compared to the arts and humanities is one example of this. Another key example is the numerous submissions identifying their 'world-leading' research as a signifier of prestige in teaching. For instance, Liverpool (P5) state that 'we design our curricula to ensure all programmes and modules are based on our world-leading research', and Bristol (P2) highlight their 'research-rich education' where 'we provide a world-leading research-rich education in which maximising the benefits of our research strengths for our students' learning experience is an institutional priority'. Further, Birmingham (P4) emphasise that students are engaged with 'highly cited academics', with citations acting as another indicator of research excellence. This demonstrates how assumptions from different layers of the university apparatus intra-act to embed these signifiers of research excellence, (re)producing the same assumptions elsewhere: in this case, highly problematised notions of the gendered research economy (Coate & Kandiko Howson, 2016; Fletcher et al, 2007; Kandiko Howson et al, 2018; Morley, 2016; 2018).

Indeed, this effect is further embedded through the TEF panel's statement of findings. Whilst research excellence, or research-led teaching is not captured in the TEF metrics, it is an aspect of teaching excellence which the TEF panel's Statement of Findings foreground as a facet of teaching excellence, despite the arguments that were outlined in Chapter 6 regarding TEF's aim to shift focus from research to teaching. Moreover, where the panel credit universities' research-excellence, it is tied to the discourse of the global. For example, the statement of findings for Cambridge (P1) credits the opportunities for students to publish with 'world-leading academics', and Oxford's (P1) likewise references opportunities for students to 'undertake research projects alongside world-leading academics'. LSE's statement of findings credits their 'research-led curriculum taught by world-renowned experts'. This data conveys how the TEF panel's judgements and final results continue to shape what counts and what does not within the universities' own accounts.

8.2.2. Mobilizing the Research Excellence Framework (REF)

Every single submission mentions their REF results to demonstrate their research prowess and to 'prove' their credentials for research-led teaching. Within TEF, REF is interpolated as an objective measurement tool which serves both as evidence of prestige and measurement of it, a tautological instrument used as shorthand to convey the research contexts of the universities and as a general signifier of excellence, despite its flaws and embedding of gendered inequalities which are well-recorded in the literature (e.g., Broadbent, 2010; Brooks et al, 2014; Davies et al, 2015; Herschberg et al, 2016; McManus et al, 2017; Rees, 2004; Yarrow, 2018). These will be discussed after the presentation of this data.

REF is often mobilised in conjunction with league tables to directly compare performance against other HEIs. It is also another mechanism which is centred on the very first page of the submission, if not in the introduction, which highlights its import in the hierarchy of information. Birmingham, Newcastle, Cardiff, Warwick, QMUL, and Sheffield discuss REF on page one of the submission, with Liverpool, York and LSE all following with it on page two. Examples of introductory statements include Birmingham (P1) 'In REF 2014, 81% of our research was rated as internationally excellent or world leading', and Newcastle (P1) 'In the 2014 Research Excellence Framework the university was ranked 26th for both overall

performance, and research impact’. That REF is centred in so many of the submissions despite the framework being focused on teaching, indicates an entrenching rather than shake up of the institutional hierarchy. Given that the Russell Group was chosen as a sample in part to ascertain how these HEIs would deal with the claims that they centred research at the expense of teaching, the fact that they are recycling research-based metrics as an innate claim to teaching prowess shows how embedded these frameworks are within the university infrastructure, and the extent that they are an immediate signifier of prestige.

There are some explanations put forward in the submissions as to why discussing REF is relevant to evidencing teaching excellence. Examples include York (P2), who state that their results in REF are ‘testament to the diversity and strength of our social, policy, cultural and scientific influences’; Sheffield (P1) that ‘[REF], and the investment in research infrastructure, means that students are immersed in an intensive research environment and learn at the edge of knowledge creation and discovery’; and Exeter (P3) that REF shows ‘our students are challenged by learning in a research-intensive environment’. Six of the submissions also cite the number of staff submitted to REF – Bristol (P2, P10) even mention this number twice in separate areas of the submission – once again centring the labour of research over the labour of the teacher. Interestingly, King’s (P5) caveat their ‘lower’ level of academics submitted to REF compared to other research-intensive institutions precisely because of their teaching commitments. They state that ‘King’s is committed to research-led teaching, and all academic staff, including those on research contracts and in senior leadership positions are required to teach ... [lower REF submissions] reflects the fact that a significant proportion of our academic staff are principally engaged in education albeit within a research-intensive environment’ (King’s, P5). This statement once again highlights the tension between dedication to research versus teaching and the additional workload which is required of teaching.

REF is also deeply intertwined with the language of global prestige, such as ‘international’ and ‘world-leading’ which was discussed in the previous chapter, emphasising the mutual entanglements of these apparatuses, frameworks, and discourses. Liverpool (P2) for instance, point out their specific grading: ‘in REF2014 81% of our research was rated internationally excellent or world-leading’, with York (P2), Durham (P10), Leeds (P3), Bristol (P10), Sheffield (P1), Exeter (P3), and Oxford (P3) all following suit. The import of rank is emphasised, as these statistics are also often merged with rankings comparative to other

institutions, as in this quote from Oxford (P3): 'In the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF), the University was shown to have the largest volume of world-leading research in the country', and similarly, 'In the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF), LSE came first in the UK for the share of outputs classed as 'world leading', with 20 of 23 departments rated in the top ten' (LSE, P2). Warwick (P1, P11) mention twice in their submission that they come 8th in the REF rankings, stating that this is 'inextricably linked to teaching and student experience' (Warwick, P11). York (P2), QMUL (P1), Nottingham (P2), Bristol (P10), and King's (P10) also promote their REF ranking compared to other institutions. King's (P10) also make sure to include that they were 'deemed the 'biggest winner' in REF2014 by the Times Higher Education', embedding the discourse of academic 'winners' and 'losers'. There is also competition specifically between the Russell Group universities, with Cardiff (P1) and Sheffield (P1) comparing their world standings specifically to other universities in the Group.

There are two core issues with the centring of REF as part of the evidence-base of TEF. First, is the uncritical use of REF as a material-discursive measurement apparatus with gendered inclusionary and exclusionary constitutive effects. REF is not a neutral instrument, but it is embedded as such into another instrument of measurement which then reproduces its assumptions and further constitutes them as norms. It has been well established in the literature that the assumptions which go into research excellence frameworks have gendered effects (e.g., Broadbent, 2010; Brooks et al, 2014; Davies et al, 2015; Herschberg et al, 2016; McManus et al, 2017; Rees, 2004; Yarrow, 2018). In REF specifically, disparities are argued to be caused by the intra-action of a multitude of issues including a lack of accounting for maternity leave and the wider uneven burdens of care (Davies et al, 2015; UCU, 2013; Yarrow, 2018), informal male networks (Kellard & Śliwa, 2016; Yarrow, 2018), unconscious bias (ECU, 2013; Yarrow, 2018), the demographics of gatekeepers e.g., editorial boards or REF panel (Yarrow, 2018), the undervaluation of collaborative working (Davies et al, 2015; McManus et al, 2017) and that notions of excellence themselves are constituted through cultural gendered value systems (Van den Brink & Benschop, 2011; Yarrow, 2018). Ironically in this context, another reason REF produces gendered inequalities is because of the unequal burden of academic labour, with men able to spend more time on research which is valued, and women more time on teaching and academic 'housework' which is not captured through this mechanism (Davies et al, 2015; UCU, 2013).

Second, the use of REF as a proxy fails to separate the different or additional skills needed between teaching and research, with predominantly feminised labour omitted. Using REF as evidence of teaching excellence, and the emphasis placed on researchers more generally, entrenches the research/teaching hierarchy and the assumption that staff can put research first and their teaching will naturally follow. This serves to actively undervalue specific pedagogical skills and relegates excellent teaching to a byproduct of excellent research. Whilst there is overlap in the skills and expertise required for both, there are specific skills which are erased in these accounts. For example, marking and feedback, lesson planning and teaching strategy, using digital technology (Sarode, 2018) as well as the set of interpersonal skills required for adequate pastoral support, and communication skills to engage students at the appropriate level. Many of these are problems which have been cited as undervalued in the academic literature with a particular detriment to female academics, particularly that regarding their place in the prestige economy which is centred around research (e.g., Blackmore et al, 2016; Blackmore, 2018; Melguizo & Strober, 2007; Parker, 2008; Stocum, 2013), is crucial for progression (Baker 2012a; Brommesson et al, 2022) and the ability to embody the image of an excellent academic (Coate & Kandiko Howson, 2016). The effect of this idealised production of the excellent researcher as teacher further undervalues these attributes and marginalises those who conduct these activities. Similarly, the language of research in terms of the ‘world-leading’ and ‘citations’ further adds to the gendered effects of encumberment, and competition, exacerbated by their intra-action with gendered productions of what constitutes excellent research.

As with the discussion of the use of league tables as evidence of global standing, the use of REF a pre-existing, quantitative metric benefits institutions that are already perceived as excellent through existing measurement apparatuses. There is no disruption or interrogation of the effectiveness of current systems of measurement and ranking and they are put forward as objective measures of a ‘real’ calculable phenomenon. REF is also not used alongside alternate modes of capturing activity to gain a broader picture but is centred as a god’s-eye reflection of university operations.

8.3. Contact Time as Teaching Excellence

Levels of contact time are another key element in the constitution of teaching excellence through the submissions. Contact time is represented predominantly as individual contact with personal tutors or academic advisers. There is a small amount of discussion on seminars and classroom teaching, which will be discussed here in part to demonstrate its minimal representation comparative to the adviser role or to the prior discussion of researchers, which is pertinent given the possibilities of TEF to capture a wider range of academic work.

8.3.1. Teaching structures

Most of the discussion around teaching focuses on teaching structures or ‘mission’ rather than the act of teaching itself. Following from the discussion of the centrality of ‘the researcher’ in the previous section, the presentation of contact time in terms of teaching in the classroom conflates the work of teachers and researchers as synonymous, centring *who* is conducting the teaching, rather than aspects such as course content or structure. Examples of this linkage are demonstrated in the following selection of quotations: ‘leading research faculty from the senior professoriate teach undergraduates at all programme stages, including compulsory first-year courses’ (LSE, P4); ‘teaching is undertaken primarily by senior members of academic staff (appointed on the basis of their expertise in both teaching and research)’ (Oxford, P1); ‘the University is clearly committed to delivering an excellent student learning experience which is underpinned by the expectation that all staff that teach and support learning will be active members of the research and teaching community’ (Exeter, P4, quoting an external examiner). Here, the discussion of teaching is outlined primarily through the structures in place that designate who is teaching and is umbilically linked to the centring of academics as researchers first, the gendered implications of which have been discussed above.

There is a small amount of discussion of the import of contact time more generally. York (P3) underline that ‘both contact time and independent study are designed across modules’, and Nottingham (P6) make clear that they have implemented ‘directives concerning minimum scheduled teaching and learning hours’ and have also adjusted their provision ‘to ensure students receive the optimum teaching hours and face-to-face contact with staff’. What happens during this contact time or how teaching is delivered is not

considered, rather it is the university structural provisions which are centred. The extent of discussion of contact time is a description of the 'types' of learning, e.g., 'small-group teaching to facilitate engagement' (Nottingham, P6), and 'Contact time ranges from lectures to individual tutorials to small group teaching and student-led learning' (Birmingham, P5). Once again, the labour of the academic is rendered invisible.

Oxford, Imperial and Bristol are the only submissions to go into any detail at all on the topic. Oxford (P3) explain that 'students are frequently taught, in very small groups, by senior staff, many of whom are research-active and holders of joint appointments', once again demonstrating how research identities are entangled in this production. Later in the submission, they continue that the tutorial takes the 'form of very small group teaching (usually one member of academic staff meeting weekly with two or three students)', and finally, they make a small reference to the relationship between student and teaching that is built in this process: 'tutorials are demanding both for students and tutors, representing an intellectually challenging conversation between teacher and student' (Oxford, P5). This is one of only two clear examples throughout the data set where the active classroom labour of the teacher is acknowledged. Imperial – the other – is the most comparable in their approach. They also explain the structure of teaching, and similarly go into a little more detail about the content of these classes, including the expectations on the student: 'Students prepare in advance of the class by working through a set of problems set by the lecturer, which are then worked through together in class' (Imperial, P3).

Finally, Bristol (P4) explicitly criticise the TEF metrics for not having a mechanism that captures the teacher/student engagement, arguing that 'existing TEF metrics do not adequately capture the reasons behind [students'] high performance. Our students react very positively to teaching in part because their learning experience is one of intense engagement, much of it through small classes and one to one interaction with academic staff in office hours'. This highlights the kinds of qualities and skills on the part of the academic that are not captured through the TEF metrics and the import of the relationships which are built between students and teachers, and which are scarcely referenced throughout the submissions. Even in these examples, the classes themselves are referenced, and occasionally the import of relationship-building, but all of the labour involved in teaching such as lesson planning,

targeting research to students' ability, devising examinations, marking, the uploading of relevant materials and resources, and classroom conduct, is rendered completely invisible.

8.3.2. Personal tutors

The aspect of contact time most commonly referenced in the submissions is the role of personal tutors or advisers. This is a key role which intra-acts with the gendering of academic work in the university, as this kind of labour is often distributed in a gendered way (Bagilhole & Goode, 1998), and the extent of it has been argued to be a reason behind 'career cul-de-sacs' for women (Barrett & Barrett, 2011; O'Connor, 2020:212) because of its time-consuming nature, the lack of support for the role, and its lack of value in terms of portfolio building and promotable work.

Every submission at least mentions – with the majority discussing in detail – the role of, or structures in place surrounding, personal supervision from a tutor or adviser. (The terms 'tutor' and 'adviser' are predominantly used interchangeably across submissions, although at Manchester and Imperial these terms refer to two different positions within the institution, but here they will be used interchangeably as they are so in the quotes, unless stated otherwise). Some examples of references to personal tutors/advisers include Leeds (P1) who describe 'a particularly strong focus on...support from personal tutors'; Manchester (P11), that 'all our students are assigned both a personal and an academic adviser'; and Oxford (P6) that 'students meet their college subject tutors at least termly to discuss their progress'. Nottingham, King's, Oxford and LSE also describe a senior member of each department who coordinate the advisers as well as being available to meet with students themselves.

Some submissions go into great detail regarding the function of the adviser role. The role is often reliant on the academic's knowledge of wider university opportunities, structures and administration, as well as their ability to perform a pastoral function. Examples of their 'academic' function include providing information, advice or feedback on: academic performance (Manchester, P11; Bristol, P11; Liverpool, P12), module choices (Manchester, P11; Oxford, P4; Durham, P12; LSE, P10) wider opportunities within the university (Oxford, P4), career guidance or opportunities to enhance employability (LSE, P10; Liverpool, P12; Manchester, P11; Imperial, P3), and as a dedicated point of academic contact (Durham, P11;

Liverpool, P12). In terms of advisers' pastoral role, academics can be the point of contact to bridge between students and support services (Liverpool, P12; Imperial, P12); but more often the caring aspect of the role is posited through a general expression that advisers are *responsible* for 'personal development' (Bristol, P11), 'welfare' (Imperial, P3), and 'pastoral support' (Cambridge, P2). At Cardiff (P2) advisers also 'play a key role in identifying students whose levels of engagement give cause for concern'. There is also a focus on the requirement of the adviser to build a positive relationship with the student to fulfil this role, as seen in this quote from Oxford (P4): 'with tailored guidance from college tutors who know them well, students are supported in selecting their own pathway through their degree'. Bristol (P11) echo this sentiment, explaining advisers play 'a particularly important role in [students'] transition to university' because they 'get to know the individual'. Imperial and Manchester – who have both academic and personal tutors – discuss the role of each in depth, whereby the personal tutor's pastoral role is emphasised further and the breadth of care required is demonstrated, e.g.:

'The support provided by Personal Tutors includes pastoral and welfare support...Personal Tutors are a key mechanism whereby the College is able to identify students who are experiencing difficulties, and in particular of providing support to those with specific needs arising from either personal and social circumstances, health (including mental health), or educational experience. Personal Tutors are equipped both to provide support directly, and to signpost students to more specialist forms of support (within the College and externally) where appropriate' (Imperial, P12).

Overall, the submissions emphasise the function of the adviser as highly important. For example, Leeds (P6) describe them as playing 'a pivotal role' and Bristol (P11) as a 'crucial support'. Manchester (P11) measure the impact of this role through its positive effect 'in student satisfaction', and similarly, LSE (P10) highlight their impact through student feedback, citing direct quotes from their NSS open feedback such as: "The academic adviser system has worked well for me as I have had the same adviser throughout my time so he/she has got to know me. He's/She's helped me in both second and third year with my option choices and also recently with my MSc application to the LSE". Once again, this quote shows the level of pastoral work that is required of this role, imbues it as fulfilling an important function, and highlights the pastoral and relational function, as well as indicating that this aspect of work cannot be captured through quantitative means.

Given the extent to which this role is centred as valuable and as a crucial part of the constitution of teaching excellence, the extent of support shown to be given to the staff conducting it is mixed. Manchester (P10) elicit the most detail, stating, 'we have an established policy on academic advising and have developed a portal for staff...and a training programme to support its implementation...The collaborative approach between students, PSS and academic staff ensures responsibility for the student experience is shared through MLE'. They follow with even more information on the impact of the technology, whereby their student portal 'enable[s] advisers to, at a glance, view the academic progression of students under their care', it also 'has the capacity to 'flag up' students who may be at risk of non-continuation' (Manchester, P11). Nottingham and Exeter have also both mobilised additional technology to help support personal tutors. Nottingham (P11) created online 'mini-modules' designed to help students' transition to university which advisers can direct students to, and Exeter (P11) a 'decision-support' tool for advisers which helps them to 'target extra support to those who need it most'. Other mentions of support for tutors include training (Liverpool, P12; King's, P11; Southampton, P9, Nottingham, P11) including specific mental health training at King's; resources such as good practice guides (King's, P11; Imperial, P12; Southampton, P9); and good practice forums or networks (Southampton, P9; Nottingham, P11). As with the Manchester example above, whilst this support is available, it is usually framed to show how this will enable staff to carry out the work consistently for the benefit of the students rather than to cater to the needs of the adviser. Whilst it does indicate that the mobilising of resources for this role is a responsibility that the institution could or should be taking on, discussion of support still comes from a minority of universities. It is particularly noticeable that none of the submissions discuss workload related support. This both minimises the extent of labour which must be conducted to perform this role, and intra-acts with already large academic workloads and the gendered divisions of labour outside the home (Sümer & Eslen-Ziya, 2023; Wolfinger et al, 2008)

This is accentuated when the language that is used indicates the availability of staff to meet students' needs, often linked with the unconditional support given to student satisfaction, whereby the labour is done by the academic but co-opted by the university systems. Cambridge (P11) describe how 'additional supervisions can be offered to students who require additional support or are struggling with particular topics', which highlights the

university structures and 'offer', but does not account for the facilitation of, or the labour behind these supervisions. The emphasis on additional supervisions is echoed by Birmingham (P4) who explain that 'due to a student voice survey joint honours students were able to nominate a tutor in their second department as well as their home department' who could provide both academic and pastoral support. Again, whilst this is by no means a negative provision, there is no mention by the university as to how it is facilitated, the extra support that will be given to the staff member to accommodate 'being nominated', or even a particular reference to the value of that staff member. Ironically, if a staff member can be nominated it seems as though those who dedicate more time to the role are more likely to be chosen. As Gómez (2012:59, cited in Heijstra et al, 2017:767) puts it 'I had gotten the unfortunate reputation of being a good lecturer', in an academic model where this type of labour is undervalued and detracts from the ability to spend time on more 'prestigious' and therefore promotable work (Heijstra et al, 2017).

This section demonstrated how the submissions produce excellent teaching as identifiable through the availability of one-to-one contact time with personal advisers. Within this conception the importance of the pastoral function of academics is highlighted, an aspect of 'excellence' which is not captured directly through the TEF metrics, somewhat broadening this constitution and opening up the possibilities of new academic spaces. Focussing on the pastoral centres labour that academics perform that is often less frequently recognised, valued, or rewarded, such as support and relationship-building, as well as the link that individual academics provide between the student and the wider university apparatus.

That the value of this kind of 'everyday labour' emerged through the submissions is an important expansion of the constitution of excellent teaching. In particular the recognition that is given to the role relationship-building between students and advisers as a crucial facet of teaching excellence. However, whilst the function of the role is presented as important, the way it is framed often obscures the labour behind it and the responsibilities of the university itself in terms of facilitating manageable workloads. The skill of the labour is also undermined both through this obscuring of workload, and through the practical terms in which advisers are spoken about. For instance, there are no comparable terms used to discuss the 'brilliance' of advisers compared to the brilliance of 'world-leading' researchers discussed

at the start of this chapter. Further, on occasion, the framing of the adviser role also produces the academic as an ever-available figure, a flexible, present, supportive, and steady presence.

8.4. Student Satisfaction as Teaching Excellence

The emphasis on student satisfaction as a signifier of teaching excellence in the submissions ties closely into the assumptions which were outlined in Chapter 6, regarding the TEF framework as a whole with three of its metrics derived from the NSS. This is echoed throughout the submissions with data taken from the NSS and other student voice mechanisms used to discuss evidence not only of the *prioritisation* and elevation of student satisfaction and student feedback itself, but also as *evidence* of the success of other measures. It is the key overarching indicator of excellence in teaching and the overriding way in which excellent teaching is framed and measured. It feeds into the centring of student feedback as the key mechanism for the improvement of teaching and the influence of student voice in areas which would have historically been left to the academic. This shift in the positioning of the student and the academic also has an effect on the constitution of their role and academic identity.

8.4.1. The proliferation and predominance of Student Satisfaction

Student satisfaction and student experience are cited constantly throughout all the documents as both a key signifier of teaching excellence as well as a way other aspects of teaching excellence can be measured, leading to a somewhat tautological materialisation, whereby the success of all elements of teaching excellence are shaped and defined by this measure. The extent to which student satisfaction and experience are central to the conception of teaching excellence is demonstrated in this statement from Cardiff (P6), that ‘we regard the student experience as part of our core business’, which not only underlines this as a key focus, but also explicitly links it back to the business model of student as consumer as highlighted in chapter 6.

This ethos is echoed throughout every submission, and in the majority of cases it is a theme which is returned to repeatedly. To give a sense of this proliferation, Birmingham make references to the NSS or other mechanisms to gauge student satisfaction or opinion on eight of the fifteen pages of their submissions using it to measure the success of every theme that

is covered. York make fifteen references to NSS throughout their submission, and UCL reference the NSS or student feedback on all but the final two pages of their fifteen-page document. On the opening page of this submission, they explicitly promote how measurements of student satisfaction are shaping the trajectory of teaching in the university, stating that: 'Our Education Strategy 2016-21 confirms how seriously we have taken our student satisfaction metrics' (UCL, P1). The student voice is also centred as a key input in producing student satisfaction and is mobilised in many facets of university life. Thus, in addition to the NSS, Birmingham (P4) cite mechanisms such as, 'The Annual Student Voice Report' which is reiterated to be just one of many such tools where 'students have multiple opportunities to express their views and this includes views on the detail of programme provision' (Birmingham, P5).

8.4.2. Measuring student satisfaction

Typical references to the NSS to evidence excellence, include: measuring the success of the content of courses (Cambridge, P2; UCL, P5; York, P7; Bristol, P2), the adequacy of assessment and feedback (Cambridge, P6; UCL, P6), the 'experience' of courses (UCL, P10; York, P7), teaching on the course (York, P1; Bristol, P4; Manchester, P2; Warwick P3), academic support (York, P1), supervisions (Cambridge, P2) the organisation of modules (UCL, P10), rigour and stretch (York, P7), university resources (Cambridge, P6; Leeds, P14; Warwick, P11), and even as evidence for increased student engagement through increased response rates to the NSS e.g., 'the team has overseen a rise in NSS response rates from 62% in 2013's NSS to 79% in the 2016 survey' (UCL, P2). This can be summed up by this quote from Exeter (P1), that 'Our sustained commitment to excellence in teaching and learning is evidenced by data from 2008 to 2016 which shows NSS overall satisfaction scores in excess of 90%', showing the extent that teaching excellence is being produced as synonymous with student satisfaction. That two of the submissions also make explicit their attention to non-mandatory questions in the NSS is also notable. York (P3) make it clear they were keen to ask 'the additional NSS questions on Feedback from students' as well as providing their positive results for these questions. This was also echoed at Newcastle (P2) where they espouse that the importance of their approach to student satisfaction 'is reflected in the fact that we ask our undergraduates to complete the NSS additional questions on course delivery', highlighting the perceived import of using these measurement tools as a reflection of good practice.

Whilst the NSS is the most proliferated tool for capturing satisfaction throughout the submissions, this is often supplemented with other feedback tools or internal metrics. Nottingham (P1) pair the NSS with internal student evaluations to assess student satisfaction. Sheffield (P2) draw on student experiences measures such as the THE Student Experience Survey and the THE Europe Teaching Rankings 2018 which ‘complement our assessment of students’ satisfaction with teaching’, in addition to their ‘internal student evaluation’. Interestingly, Sheffield draw attention to this in part due to the NSS metrics (for the year they are taken for this round of TEF) coinciding with the NSS boycott, and therefore the need to have a well-rounded selection of data. In terms of other mechanisms of student feedback, many submissions also promote their student councils or representatives who provide direct feedback to the university, for example Warwick’s (P7) ‘network of 700 student course representatives [who] contribute to the constant evaluation and redesign of the student learning experience’, the centrality of this is shown in the following sentence, that ‘student evaluations, feedback, and co-design of learning are pivotal to teaching success and learning outcomes’. Whilst only mentioned in one submission, a notable example of constant and direct feedback during the course of a lecture was QMUL’s (P2) description of ‘the use of voting ‘clickers’ in some teaching sessions’, so that students can give feedback in real time, highlighting the panopticonic constant use of surveillance.

As is already being demonstrated, the integration of NSS results into university practices and processes was a major theme, showing how this specific form of measurement is embedded into institutions with material effect. QMUL (P3) describe that they ‘closely monitor performance in the NSS’ to show and maintain ‘steady improvement’, and York (P7) highlight how NSS results are used to inform practice, stating that ‘we analyse NSS results extensively, both centrally and in academic departments, and use them as a core element of enhancement planning’. Durham and Sheffield both underline how NSS results are used to track changes in student satisfaction with Sheffield (P9) explicitly noting that they are ‘being used to promote best practice’. Finally, Imperial (P1) show the import of NSS feedback, annually compiling an ‘NSS Response, which includes a set of recommendations put forward to the College’ around which to implement change. Once again, NSS scores are also used to produce competition through ease of ranking, with Sheffield (P4) and QMUL (P1) specifically using them to highlight competitive advantage against other Russell Group members.

8.4.3. *Effects of this approach*

As with all these themes, it is not that these priorities are inherently negative or even undesirable, it is the centrality of them at the expense of a more rounded, nuanced perspective which embeds the assumptions of this as the only measure of progress and teaching excellence. Additionally, it is the uncritical use of tools, in this case the NSS, which is framed as capturing an accurate reflection of student satisfaction with aspects of university provision. Thus, there are several points to be made about the impact of student satisfaction and the uncritical proliferation of these kinds of measurement instruments throughout university infrastructure. Firstly, given its weight in the TEF metrics and its visibility throughout these submissions, the NSS is not only centring ‘satisfaction’ as a crucial aspect of teaching excellence, but these satisfaction frameworks are also being presented as an accurate and objective reflection of the teaching that it is measuring. It presents the students as the bearer of ‘perfect knowledge’, when most students have no experience of higher education outside of the one specific experience they are currently having, and so there is no baseline or deeper understanding by which to judge or compare. NSS is also a world-making apparatus; students are being asked to focus their attention to their levels of ‘satisfaction’ in terms of teaching at the expense of other measures. Students’ satisfaction then becomes the signifier by which students can *recognise* teaching as excellent and how it becomes judged to be so more widely, as alternate conceptions of teaching excellence such as rigour, stretch, its diverse application, specialisms, or expertise, are no longer fundamental to its definition.

As well as the particular expectations which students may bring to this measurement apparatus, it also intra-acts with wider assumptions about who can more easily embody excellent teaching and the types of knowledge which hold value in the current university environment. For this reason, many studies have shown that NSS and similar student surveys have a negative impact on women who are more likely to be rated lower in these apparatus (e.g., MacNeil et al, 2015), through their intra-actions with negative perceptions of female academics as ‘knowers’ (Morley, 2013b), norms around expectations of women’s behaviour such as warmth in the classroom (Madera et al, 2009), a more acute focus on behaviours than expertise (Gelber et al, 2022) and disparity in the ability of women to be able to embody notions of excellence (Coate & Kandiko Howson, 2016). Knowledge of this, adds to the labour which women must often conduct both in the classroom, and outside of the classroom by

putting more work into their classes to derive the same levels of respect as their male peers (Morris et al, 2022). It also adds to psychological and mental distress felt by women and minority groups who are measured in this way, particularly when these measures are embedded into wider assumptions about academic performance (Heffernan, 2021). Research has shown that those who are perceived as good teachers by their students, tend to align with stereotypes about who students think most embodies who an academic 'is', with gendered and raced consequences (Ford, 2011). These mechanisms therefore intra-act with these normative conceptions of who an excellent academic is.

Once again, the centring and interpolation of these kinds of measurement instruments have an iterative effect, with measurements becoming reality-making apparatus, seen to reflect 'truths' about performance, which are then embedded into mechanisms such as promotion criteria limiting women's career progression further and further. We see that NSS is not only reproducing itself by being embedded in TEF, but within TEF, there is discussion of how NSS is also built into other tools of measurement such as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) (e.g., Cardiff, P5, Manchester, P8), highlighting the proliferation of NSS as a world-making apparatus. The effects of this on academic identities will be further discussed in the following chapter.

Finally, the focus on student satisfaction reproduces the dichotomy of student as consumer and the university and its staff as service provider. This reinforcement of the customer/provider dichotomy is seen throughout the literature as a hallmark of the neoliberalisation of the university and the transition to a new business model (Ingleby, 2015 Mintz, 2021; Nixon et al, 2018). The previous chapter demonstrated evidence of this through TEF with ramifications on how the university is situated. In terms of the academic, it shifts their role from teacher to experience provider, whose aim is to make the student feel 'satisfied'.

8.4.4. Problematisation of student satisfaction within the submissions

However, despite its overall centrality, as with the themes in the previous chapter there are still occasional points of disruption and even critique from within the submissions regarding the extent of this focus in the TEF metrics. These critiques tend to be discussed in

relation to the university's own underperformance against the metrics, but in doing so, they highlight aspects of teaching excellence that are not captured through the metrics alone. They also occasionally highlight the problems with only conceptualising excellence through student satisfaction. Birmingham, for example, raise the tension between the desire for an intellectually challenging course which demands rigour and stretch, and the way this may feed into lower student satisfaction overall. With regard to their lower student satisfaction with assessment and feedback, they emphasise that it 'has not impacted negatively on student attainment and outcomes or overall satisfaction with teaching and academic support', rationalising these results as part of a balancing act with a curriculum and assessments that are 'designed to stretch and challenge, and we acknowledge that this can lead to student discomfort' (Birmingham, P2). It is notable here that 'overall satisfaction' is still leveraged as a key measure of success. Similarly, Oxford (P8) note their poor performance on NSS questions pertaining to teaching and assessment and argue that 'students perceive a disconnection between the qualities promoted in the teaching that they experience and the qualities that they deem to be required in their summative assessment', but this is a deliberate pedagogical approach by the university 'that does not seek primarily to teach to a particular assessment task...and enables deeper learning and understanding about a subject'. This emphasises the effects of the minimisation of learning for learning's sake in TEF and the wider educational landscape, whereby the influence of students' expectations around what teaching and learning is for (to be measured and tested) intra-acts with their levels of satisfaction in learning. Alongside these universities, Warwick (P3) also contrast their lower NSS results with their 'excellent student outcomes'. This contrast is worth highlighting when thinking about the NSS itself as a measurement instrument, as all three universities use student outcomes to justify why their approaches are still successful despite NSS results, showing that one does not accurately reflect the other and demonstrating that focussing only on one tool is a choice which determines particular effects.

LSE (P2) explicitly state that the quantitative NSS scores are 'a partial – and not entirely accurate – reflection of the education that our students experience'. It is worth replicating a substantial segment of their analysis here – that:

'NSS results need to be read in the context of the intentionally challenging learning experience the School's teaching and assessment methods create for students. These methods

create an academically taxing learning experience. But they have a long track record of success in equipping students to achieve very high standards in assessed academic performance, and in securing highly skilled employment. Furthermore, there is a clear distinction between the high levels of student satisfaction our internal module-level surveys record, and the more muted programme-level NSS results. Our internal surveys also attract much higher response rates...Further context here is the 'London effect'. It is well known that NSS scores from students in London-based research-intensive institutions are lower than in non-metropolitan universities, and that this effect is attributable to more than living costs. Living in the capital can contribute to a sense of alienation since students are not part of a residential university campus' (LSE, P2-3).

Later in the same submission, a statement from the Students' Union also criticises what is left out by using NSS as a metric. They describe an additional supplementary module 'LSE100' which uses innovative methods such as peer to peer interdisciplinary learning and engaging with a range of academics on 'real world issues' (LSE, P15). However, because it is supplementary, 'an integral aspect of LSE's education is missed in the metrics, which thus portray an incomplete image of LSE's education' (LSE, P15). These examples from LSE highlight a range of interwoven factors which come to produce particular effects in NSS but are taken as neutral accounts. It also highlights the erasure of other aspects of teaching excellence, which are then omitted from the TEF framework which constitutes a far narrower depiction of what teaching excellence is.

Other factors entangled to produce particular results in the NSS, include UCL's hypothesis that the fall in rates of student satisfaction (starting in 2014/15) 'may be related to this cohort's status as the first to pay the £9k tuition fee' (UCL, P1). Though with this caveat they are keen to express that a poorer performance in the NSS has also 'reinforced for us just how important it is that we respond quickly and directly to student concerns, given the sizeable investment they are making in their futures' (UCL, P1), showing the extent to which NSS is shaping behaviour and reinforcing the link between tuition fees and the shift in focus toward student satisfaction. QMUL put forward two unique but interesting suggestions as to why NSS results may not be an accurate reflection of satisfaction. The first is the discrepancy between students' and mature students' response to the NSS question regarding 'Assessment and Feedback'. They note that whilst they have a negative flag on this measure overall, amongst only their mature student population they have a positive flag. Their hypothesis is that because the majority of their NSS respondents are young students, what needs to be addressed is not satisfaction per se, but the provision of this group with 'an understanding of

feedback, confidence in questioning and seeking support to strengthen the maturity of their approach and acquiring realistic expectations – characteristics that might be expected to be more developed in students with a better understanding of HE’ (QMUL, P3). Whilst recognising that this is a specific piece of work which needs to be done, it nods towards the fact that students do not necessarily have perfect knowledge of how institutions are run, and apparatuses based on student responses do not provide perfect or objective information. The second point that QMUL raises regards the impact of a specific forum run with the sole purpose of raising issues which are important to students. In the year which saw the theme of the seminar as ‘feedback on assessed work’, there was a fall in NSS results, and thus they posit that ‘somewhat perversely, it may be that the focused debates around the issues of feedback and assessment led to our dip in year-3 results in this category’ because attention was drawn to these issues, and students had them at the forefront of their minds (QMUL, P5). Although these examples are unique, and provided as context to their underperformance in the metrics, they are important inclusions because they provide room to think about some of the reasons why the metrics do not provide a full picture, disrupting these measurements as providing a comprehensive, objective reflection of reality from within the institutions.

8.4.5. Student feedback as decision making mechanism

These alternate accounts are important because the NSS, student feedback, and student satisfaction more broadly are shown to be affecting university and teaching *practice*, by putting the student at the heart of decision-making processes, with this demonstrated in every single submission. What follows is just a small sample of the material which makes up this theme. Examples of the centring of feedback mechanisms as part of university structures include York (P3), ‘students make a significant contribution to quality assurance and quality enhancement at the University [and] opportunities for them to give their opinion are provided at all levels’; Leeds (P1) ‘structures put students at the very heart of decision making-processes’; and Birmingham (P5) ensure student views are prioritised by putting in place institution-wide annual feedback surveys (in addition to NSS), ad hoc surveys, and focus groups. The outcomes of all student consultations are scrutinised in conjunction with students through the committee systems’. The same can be seen across all of the institutions.

In terms of direct influence on the curriculum, examples come from across the spectrum of submissions. At Leeds, who mention this point multiple times in their submission (e.g., P1, P2, P4, P14), 'Student engagement is real and meaningful including co-creation of the curriculum, its content and delivery' (Leeds, P14); at Newcastle (P1), 'students and their representatives participate in all aspects of the monitoring, governance and, crucially, development of our undergraduate programmes'; At UCL (P2) 'students now play a major role in setting the education agenda'; and this is echoed at Cambridge (P3), Birmingham (P5), King's (P6); Liverpool (P5), and Cardiff (P2). The same is true at LSE (P6) whereby 'departments must demonstrate that they have consulted students about proposed course content, teaching and assessment methods as part of the approval process' it is worth noting, that the measure of success for this mechanism is the number of students who are 'satisfied' with course content according to an internal survey.

An effect produced through this representation is that where the student becomes centred, the academic becomes marginalised as they are not constituted as having an important role in this process. The centring of student feedback and input in module design (at the expense of discussion of the academic's role) assumes that students are better placed than academics to judge this facet of teaching. This subjugates the specialist and technical knowledge of teachers, e.g. knowledge of systems, operations, and required learning outcomes. This is not to say that students do not have a particular experience which is highly important to account for, but the balance in these submissions is unevenly distributed and this attribute is taken as an unquestionable good. Once again, students are primarily guided by the current norms and expectations of what a university education should provide under the current paradigm, and are informed by their relationship to the university as fee-payers. At the same time, the values and knowledge-base of the academic are marginalised, and their labour and expertise rendered invisible. The tensions that are noted above by Oxford regarding the balance between student satisfaction and academic stretch are also resonant, in the situating of the student as a consumer and the prioritisation of post-graduation employment, this focus helps to embed one set of priorities amongst a myriad of other possibilities. Bunce et al (2017) found that the student as consumer model made students less engaged with the act of learning and more 'entitled' to positive academic outcomes. The production of the student in this way could intra-act with feedback mechanisms which punish

female academics more harshly for critical feedback (Heffernan, 2021) and the gendered conceptions of 'high-value' degrees, discussed in the previous two chapters. The way that student input is framed in the majority of the submissions is not just about the student having a stake in their own education, but rather a stake as a consumer in a service for which they have paid.

In contrast, only three submissions explicitly consider staff as well as students when conducting reviews of educational design. Warwick (P2) describe their institution-wide evaluation of courses which included '329 Warwick staff, 296 students, and 30 external panel members' and were followed by '4 Faculty engagements at which thematic issues relevant to each Faculty were considered'. They conclude this account highlighting that 'all reviews were undertaken by panels comprising staff and students' (Warwick, P2). Exeter (P3) describe their core student feedback mechanism elucidating that 'the blueprint...was established by a student-staff working group' and explain that the mechanism 'has enabled us to give student representatives an enhanced role, *alongside* module leaders, in the analysis of data thereby enhancing the quality and visibility of the partnership between staff and students' (Exeter, P3-4, emphasis added). Durham (P8) also adopt a collaborative approach, giving examples of assessment as feedback reviews conducted via 'student and staff focus groups' to review online assessment and feedback'. This is in addition to their discussion of 'Curriculum Diversity and Inclusive Learning' which adapts educational programmes based on an initiative of 'students and staff [working] together in two cross-cutting groups' (Durham, P5) and highlights not only that more collaborative approaches can be taken, but that they are an important facet in their success.

The only submission which solely references staff in conjunction with module design is Oxford (P2) who link this explicitly to the aforementioned tensions between student satisfaction and stretch. In their detailing of course design and review it is 'communities of academic staff brought together in departments and faculties' who have control over this work, complemented by reviews from external examiners. The framing of course design is entirely around ensuring that 'students are stretched academically' and that they 'challenge students to perform at the highest levels possible' (Oxford, P2). A final anomaly which again highlights the potential for a wider purview in regard to staff and student satisfaction, is Sheffield who elicit *staff* feedback twice in their submission (P7, P11). This includes a

reference to a specific staff survey on the responsibilities of the university as institution, asking their level of agreement to the question ‘the University delivers a good quality service to students’ (Sheffield, P11), which serves to highlight the difference between the responsibility of the overall institution with teaching staff towards the student body.

8.5. Material Resources as Teaching Excellence

The final way in which universities express their teaching excellence is through the discussion of material resources. It is not within the scope of this project to discuss all the different types of resources in detail; however, they must be acknowledged because they are centred in such an overwhelmingly large part of every application which produces access to material resources as a core tenet of teaching excellence. The resources in question span from discussion of libraries, digital technology, and departmental facilities, to museums, IT suites, and classrooms. Every submission contains a detailed account of their material resources and provisions, with at least two pages at a minimum delineated to this topic, but more commonly this spans across three or more pages (e.g., Cambridge, P6-9; Southampton, 7-10; Bristol, P8-10; Oxford, P9-11; York, P9-11, Leeds, P12-14; Newcastle, P7-9; Cardiff, P7-9; Liverpool, P9-11; UCL, P8-10). The only outlier to this rule is QMUL, who do not have a specific section but reference resources and spending throughout the text. Most of the universities also proliferate their submissions with further references to resources even with the addition of a delineated section. This is used especially as a context-setting device to centre its import, e.g., on Leeds’s first page ‘[We] invest in facilities and services to support academic excellence’, and Bristol’s (P14-15) section entitled ‘Looking to the future’, which closes their submission is primarily about investing in resources.

Quality and extent of resources tend to be evidenced through referral to total spend or investment. Thus, teaching excellence is ultimately constituted and measured through the cost and quantity of resources. There is nothing wrong with the provision of resources which aid learning, but the extent to which they are centred, particularly comparative to teacher, classes, and seminars, shifts the lens as to how *teaching* is conceptualised not to mention excellent teaching. The effect of this centring at the expense of the human subjects minimises their role and will be analysed more thoroughly in the following chapter to establish its effect on academic identity. It produces a conception of technology as only additive to student

experience, and all developments of this nature (e.g., online modules) as progress. The only disruption of this trajectory is from Cambridge (P8) who state that: ‘The university strongly believes that face-to-face interactions such as lectures and supervisions should remain at the heart of the Cambridge educational experience, and that digital technologies should be introduced only when they clearly meet the needs of teachers and learners’, which as with all of these anomalies, serves to show how homogenised the remaining twenty submissions are. The centring of resources also helps the universities which are the most financially stable and puts pressure on the gaining of additional ‘high-value’ income streams. In a higher educational landscape marked by risk and financial imperatives, outlined in Chapter 2, this serves as a further imperative to shape behaviour.

8.6. League Tables Standings as Demonstration of Teaching Excellence

Finally, aside from levels of student satisfaction, the primary way in which teaching excellence is measured and demonstrated to be ‘objectively’ excellent, is through league table standings. As has already been alluded to, there are multiple references to pre-existing league tables throughout the submissions. These were touched upon in the preceding chapter to demonstrate their role in displaying global prowess, however, there are even more references to their weight as a proxy (in both national and international forms) to ‘evidence’ the teaching prowess of an institution. This not only shows how embedded league tables and the metrics that form them have become, but is even more pertinent in a framework that is framed as disrupting norms, but instead has embedded them as an unquestionable evidence base.

In addition to the data which was examined in Chapter 7 on *international* league tables, there are various other national league tables which are referenced here to demonstrate the prowess of teaching specifically. These league table standings also tend to be referenced early in the submissions, often setting the context for the ‘pre-given’ prestige of the university. Some examples include: Cambridge (P1) THE Table of Tables; Exeter (P1) University of the Year in the Sunday Times Guide; and Durham (P1) Complete University Guide, Times Good University Guide 2018, Guardian University Guide 2018, THE Table of Tables, Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2016/17, and QS World University

Rankings 2017/2018. Birmingham and Liverpool, both follow up on the second page of their submissions with their league table placements.

Some of the league tables are tangible as highly specific to teaching. Bristol (P2), for example, cite their standings in the Times Higher Education (THE) League Table for Teaching, and QMUL (P6) highlight the subject rankings in which they have excelled, 'Medicine at QMUL is ranked second and Dentistry is ranked third in the UK by the Guardian University Guide 2017 – UK subject rankings', as well as underlining their league rankings in student satisfaction in these subjects – using NSS data discussed above. Liverpool (P2) also reference their placement in The Guardian University League Table for their overall NSS satisfaction. Others cite the topping of league tables or awards which whilst prestigious, are more general. For example, Cambridge's (P1) citing of their topping of the 'Times Higher Education's 'Table of Tables', which is based on the combined results of the UK's three main domestic university rankings', it is not noted in the submissions, the extent to which this links back to teaching qualities specifically. Likewise, Leeds (P15) highlight their awarding of 'The Times and The Sunday Times University of the Year 2017' which they posit 'provides external recognition of our commitment to teaching excellence', and Exeter (P1) also refer to their being 'awarded the title of 'University of the Year'' by the Sunday Times Guide' a few years prior. Interestingly, they accompany this with a quote from the Editor of The Sunday Times University Guide, which states that Exeter 'has responded to the challenge of £9,000 fees by raising its game more than any other university' (Exeter, P1).

Elsewhere, league tables are used to provide evidence of excellent teaching by their rankings of 'services and facilities spend', Cambridge (P6) in The Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide; for value added and degree classification, Birmingham (P2) in The Guardian and The Times League Tables; for degree completion, Cambridge (P11) in The Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide; for employability, Cambridge (P12) in the Times Higher Education Supplement's Global Employability University ranking and the QS Graduate Employability Rankings (which cites both European and worldwide rankings); and, of course, for research, Cambridge (P9) in the Academic Ranking of World Universities and QS and Times Higher Education World University Rankings. Warwick, on the first page of their submission, combine many of the themes that have been discussed thus far in the contextualisation of their institution including league tables, student satisfaction, REF, and the global, stating that:

'Achievements in education and research are reflected in national and international rankings, with Warwick ranked 57th in the QS World Rankings 2018, 91st in the Times Higher World University Rankings 2018, and 8th in REF2014. Warwick has consistently featured in the top 10 student experience-focussed national league tables for the past quarter of a century, currently ranking 8th in the Complete University Guide and the Guardian and 9th in the Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide 2018. Our exceptional student experience has gained particular recognition through Warwick being named 2015 University of the Year (Times and Sunday Times) and 17th most international university in the world (THES 2017)' (Warwick, P1).

This presents a clear picture of the way in which all these themes are utilised, and crucially, are enfolded and intra-act with one another, which is representative of the way in which institutions tend to reproduce problematised notions of excellence throughout the submissions. As with the NSS, these league tables are used bluntly as a shorthand for quality. Using league tables uncritically as evidence for teaching quality, embeds the assumptions that are present in these measurement apparatuses, without unpacking what indicators they are measuring or how they are measuring them. As shown in the quote above, this closely follows the themes of the previous two chapters, with degree completion, degree classification, employment outcomes, and resource spend, all being metrics which constitute teaching excellence. It also re-entrenches the import of pre-existing metrics, with these aspects being further embedded into TEF's measurement apparatus and taken as unquestionable evidence, allowing less room for the disruption of traditional hierarchies, and without asking whether these tables serve as adequate proxies for teaching specifically. League tables are also notable for what they do not capture, including measures of gender equity (Matthews, 2012) or other types of labour, skills, and priorities which are currently sidelined. Ultimately, league tables as legitimated evidence towards gaining a better result in TEF, means that TEF only serves to (re)entrench pre-existing measures and proxies. In adhering to and reproducing established norms and hierarchies, TEF does not allow for the potential of any growth in terms of new ways of thinking, doing, or being.

League tables themselves rely on proxy measurements that must be quantifiable to rank institutions against each other, which is their key purpose. This means that, once again, 'teaching excellence' is only produced through quantitative data, which in many of these examples is assessed through metrics such as 'spending' and 'research quality', as well as the already problematised NSS data. This sidelines any additional or alternate skills which TEF aimed to address, and institutional qualities which cannot be quantified. As with the

discussion on international league tables, that they are inherently a tool for ranking institutions against each other constitutes teaching excellence as a zero-sum game in which there are always academic 'winners' and 'losers'.

8.7. Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the Russell Group university submissions produce a very particular constitution of teaching excellence through what they centre and what they sideline. In doing so, they sideline labour that is both more *associated* with women and labour which women are disproportionately conducting in the university. Although what is centred in the conception of teaching is in some ways broad, in that it centres anything that might be considered relevant to 'teaching mission' including resources and research acumen as well as contact time, the breadth of what constitutes an 'excellent teacher' is a much more singular conception. Where the academic is concerned, an excellent teacher is primarily centred as an excellent researcher. These facets of teaching excellence are further narrowed through the limited measurements of their success, primarily conducted through levels of student satisfaction, which have been shown to embed gendered inequalities or relative results in league tables. Whilst there are attributes which are captured through the submissions which are not present in the metrics such as the discussion of pastoral support and its impact on the student, the labour involved in this on the part of the academic remains sidelined. The way that these processes are measured also serves to embed tools such as REF and NSS, which are noted to have gendered effects, further entrenching inequalities whilst portraying these results as neutral, objective, and reflective.

Chapter 9. Constituting Staff as Academic Subjects

9.1. Introduction

Chapters 6 and 7 discussed how TEF constitutes a particular conception of the purpose and role of HE, and Chapter 8 how TEF (re)produces what it included and excluded in the constitution of the university and teaching excellence (RQ2). Both constitutions intra-act with neoliberal and patriarchal normative values and assumptions to produce inclusionary and exclusionary gendered effects (RQ3) devaluing feminised labour in the university (RQ4). This chapter provides further analysis as to how academics are situated in the submissions and the mechanisms which act to constitute them as gendered academic subjects.

Firstly, the chapter discusses how the TEF submissions produce the academic subject as disembodied through: their place as an absent referent; the lack of attention given to their needs; the passive way their labour is discussed; and their positioning as resources. In addressing these themes, it analyses the gendered nature of the labour which is being separated from the academic. The chapter shows how the university is produced as a neutral and meritocratic organisation, erasing the gendered nature of organisational inequalities (Acker, 1990; 2006) making these inequalities more hidden and difficult to disrupt. However, this section will also highlight an emerging academic subjectivity which is produced through the inclusion of student comments regarding staff, which centres elements of academic labour that have traditionally been undervalued and are associated with feminised spheres of labour in the university.

Secondly, the chapter discusses the responsabilisation of staff through tools of observation and measurement against this neutral and meritocratic backdrop where success and failure are individualised. This analysis highlights the technologies of surveillance and behaviour management (such as observation and reward mechanisms) which are embedded and promoted through TEF, itself a behaviour management tool. It examines the extent to which these tools constitute the boundaries separating 'valuable' and 'sidelined' academic practice, and *who* can be constituted as a 'valuable' academic subject. These apparatuses affect who is rewarded, who is disciplined, and whose identities are foregrounded at the exclusion of others. It asks how these apparatuses guide the possibilities of 'conduct' (Foucault, 1982), the outcomes which they foreclose, and to what effect. It also shows the

extent to which structural rewards, such as promotional procedures, may be serving to constitute ‘the teacher’ as a valuable academic subject. Table 9 shows the core themes collected throughout the submissions, which contribute to a particular constitution of the academic subject.

Core Theme: Constitution of Academic Subjects	Evidence and Attributes
Staff as disembodied	Lack of staff presence in submission Lack of EDI in reference to staff Staff as synonymous with the university Staff as resources
Staff as responsibilised	Measurement of staff performance Language of monitoring Training, facilitation, and support Reward mechanisms

Table 99: Constituting Academic Subjects

9.2. Staff as Disembodied

One of the key tenets of Acker’s work on gendered organisations, is that they are able to present themselves as neutral ‘through obscuring the embodied nature of work’ (Acker, 1990:139). This masks how organisations produce and embed gender and gendered processes, because the idealised worker is not universalised but masculinised, through its sublimation of masculine relationships to the body, reproduction, encumberment and paid work (Acker, 1990). Some of the ways academic labour is disembodied have already been touched upon in themes in previous chapters, such as the sidelining of the academic in favour of the employer, catering to the prioritisation of employability as a prime educational outcome (Chapters 6 & 7) and through the centring of student voice at the expense of academic expertise (Chapter 8). This section argues that academics are also disembodied through the way that they are conceptualised throughout the documents, as well as through the wider operations of the university apparatus.

9.2.1. Lack of staff presence

As established throughout these findings chapters, TEF takes a broad view of what ‘teaching’ encapsulates: it is not only about teachers and lessons, but anything that is perceived to be relevant to learning or educational outcomes. Furthermore, its key focus on the outcomes of teaching minimises the process of teaching and the labour involved. This is encapsulated in the submissions through the decentring of teachers to foreground other topics, placing import on university facilities, resources, research prowess, student services, and employment opportunities. Given the length of these documents (317 pages in total), staff feel conspicuously absent, especially when compared to other areas which are emphasised such as employment. The submissions echo the TEF policy, shifting the purpose of a university education to outcomes upon graduation. To take the Birmingham submission as one example, in a full fifteen-page document only seven short paragraphs contain any mention of academic staff. This compares to over three full pages dedicated solely to employment opportunities.

The disembodiment of staff is also produced through the passive discussion of their labour when their roles *are* centred. A stark example comes from Cambridge, who cite supervisions as central to their pedagogy. They start this discussion with a nod to the ‘Supervising Undergraduates: An Introduction’ training that a supervisor must take to perform this role (Cambridge, P2). After a reference towards work that supervisors ‘must’ do to prepare, the supervisor becomes absent and is replaced by the ‘supervision’. For example: ‘The supervision system ensures that students make effective use of their independent study time by providing focused tasks on which they receive detailed feedback’ (Cambridge, P5); ‘Supervisions allow teaching to be tailored in recognition of the individual student’ (Cambridge, P11); ‘Across all disciplines, supervisions help undergraduates develop the ability to communicate effectively...present ideas, evaluate evidence critically and solve problems’ (Cambridge, P12). In these examples it is the ‘supervisions’ doing the work rather than the embodied supervisor, in addition to the framing of the verbs which are also passive i.e., ‘on which [students] receive detailed feedback’ (Cambridge, P5). This renders invisible the active inclusion of the ‘doing’ by the academic, e.g., ‘supervisors provide detailed feedback’. Tutorials are similarly framed, whereby ‘pastoral support [is] provided through the College tutorial system’ (Cambridge, P14). The language of ‘supervisions’ rather than ‘supervisors’

situates this as a university provision rather than labour performed by academics. The university can then show their prowess from the structures of their programmes which usurps the labour of the academic.

Similarly, discussions of contact-time often erase the person behind the contact. This is shown in an example from Birmingham (P5): 'We aim to deliver optimal levels of contact time...Contact time ranges from lectures to individual tutorials to small group teaching and student-led learning and is further optimised through the provision of interactive digital content'. Again, this decentres staff, and instead centres university structures, where provisions are catered for by the 'we' of the institution. Furthermore, this framing eradicates relationships built between student and teacher. In the supervision example, supervisions are portrayed as an organic process, and the centring and promotion of the student's role detracts from the role that the teacher has in these interactions, conveying the entire experience of the student as being self-led. Given the evidence from the literature regarding the devaluation of pastoral labour, and the emotional and communicative skills needed to conduct it adequately (Baker, 2012a; Blackmore et al, 2016; Fleming, 2021), and that this devaluation is in part due to its feminised nature (Kandiko Howson, 2018; Morley, 1998) its absence in these submissions reproduces the devaluation and minimisation of labour of the teacher, despite recognising how important the work is.

There are anomalies to this approach, which both highlight the absence of staff in the majority of submissions, and also open up alternate ways that staff could be conceptualised. The following quote regarding contact-time from Imperial shows how staff could have been integrated into the example from Birmingham in the previous paragraph:

'Students at Imperial have regular contact with a range of staff, including their lecturers, their Personal and Academic Tutor, GTAs, and professional services staff within their departments. The richness of this contact maximises opportunities for students to access appropriate support' (Imperial, P12).

Although discussing the same structures, it directly references contact-time with staff members and elevates the relationship between student and teacher as the important aspect, although it is worth noting that the labour of staff in these interactions is still hidden. In a significant exception, three of the submissions, Exeter, King's, and LSE, mention individual academics by name. Exeter (P10) also dedicate a paragraph to academics from various

departments across the university who have led stand-out acts of pedagogy in collaboration with students. However, the primary place academics are referenced throughout the submissions is in their role as researchers, the gendered effects of which was discussed in the previous chapter. Once again, the terms in which academics are spoken about in this context e.g., 'students experience a research-rich education and are taught by world-leading academics' (Bristol, P10); 'World leading researchers as teachers' (Oxford, P3), is not echoed in the few examples of the academics' role in classroom teaching or support. This arrangement embeds and enacts academic identities as researchers, separating the academic from their work in feminised spheres, and (re)producing the prestige gap between these types of labour.

Lack of authorial voice

The disembodiment of the academic and the neutral façade of the university is compounded by the lack of authorial voice in the submissions. Whilst a minority of the documents contain individual paragraphs specifically attributed to a particular actor, such as a note from a Student's Union or a foreword by the Vice-Chancellor, none, except King's and Birmingham, have a visible authorship. King's (P1) say that their submission 'has been prepared by a TEF Project Board (which includes Faculty representation) and a TEF Steering Group', and Birmingham (P1) state that theirs has been jointly written by 'the University' and the 'Guild of Students'. These references stand out because generally the voice of the submissions is deliberately 'neutral' and 'omnipotent', as the positionality is filled by the 'all-seeing' voice of *the* institution. This constitutes the university and its staff as having a singular voice and experience. Haraway describes the way in which scientific research is presented as objective through claiming to lack positionality, described and relayed as using 'the god trick', situating the scientist as an omnipotent being, detached from the object of their research and being able to 'see everything from nowhere' (Haraway, 1988:581). This can be extended to an analysis of the style in which most of these submissions are written, with the effect that they come across not as a calculated account, but instead as an accurate reflection of the institution.

A lack of authorial voice and passive language regarding staff is also combined, in some circumstances, with a personification instead of the university. This is exemplified most

strongly in Cambridge's submission which contains sentences such as 'The collegiate University takes the view that...' (Cambridge, P6); 'The university is, however, mindful of...' (Cambridge, P6); 'the university strongly believes that...' (Cambridge, P8). The enfolding of these framing and language devices has the effect of presenting the university as one homogenous, omnipotent organisation. Where the university becomes embodied, the academic doing the work within it becomes further disembodied, subsumed into this whole.

Returning to Acker's conception of gendered organisations, obfuscation of gendering process within organisations is perpetuated through 'obscuring the embodied nature of work' (Acker, 1990:139). The effects of the positioning of the academic compared to the institution renders both the labour of the academic as invisible - which has a disproportionate effect on those whose labour is already undervalued - and removes the situatedness of the academic as an employee. It enfolds them into the institution itself, thus removing the responsibilities of the university towards its employees. The lack of discussion of structural inequalities worsens this because it implies that the university is without inequality or endemic issues which need to be resolved. The idea of meritocracy is beneficial for those who already fit with the image of the 'ideal academic', unencumbered, white, and male (Acker, 1990; 2006; Thornton, 2013a). Discussing the viewpoint of 'the university' also constitutes the organisation as one set of ideas rather than the reality of a multitude of differing views, perspectives, and values. Again, this is a benefit to those in the upper echelons of the university, which is still vertically segregated by gender.

Lack of EDI in reference to staff

Whilst discussion on inclusivity for students is on average one to two pages in each submission, there is little comparative discussion for staff. The discussion of EDI in terms of students is encouraged through the TEF metric 'Learning Environment', as well as the disaggregation of metrics to account for particular demographics of underrepresented student groups. The majority of submissions also include detail of additional inclusivity schemes or information on why EDI for students is crucial and the university's multi-faceted role in enabling it. This includes general discussions of diversity within the student body (e.g., Bristol, P13; Leeds, P1) to more specific demographics such as state school intake (York, P2) and students from black and minority ethnic backgrounds (Nottingham, P15). Support

mechanisms are also described to help with employment outcomes for certain groups (Cambridge, P1; Leeds, P8; Imperial, P15), support for women (Birmingham, P2; Cambridge, P14), additional support for low-income groups (Cambridge, P14), students with physical disabilities (Cambridge, P14; Imperial, P13) and neurodiversities (Cambridge, P15). Manchester (P2), Nottingham (P15), and Birmingham (P15) all mention training for staff on unconscious bias, understanding diversity, and inclusive teaching. Every submission also mentions counselling or student wellbeing services within the university.

The same cannot be said for the staff working in the university. There are general statements as to the importance of equality and inclusion. York (P2) state that 'our university was founded on the principles of equality of access and social inclusion, anchored by the highest standards of academic achievement', which could implicitly include staff, and Cambridge (P15) that, 'the University's core values are freedom of thought and expression, and freedom from discrimination, and it strives to be inclusive and welcoming to all its staff and students'. Manchester (P2) mention introducing 'unconscious bias training' for staff in 'key managerial positions', but it is unclear whether this is aimed at preventing bias towards both students and staff, contextually it is implied that it is to cater to the former. Similarly, King's (P12) mention their 'Inclusive Education Network' designed to 'promote inclusive learning and teaching', but whilst the design of this network included 'a survey of staff needs' it is also implied that this is only focussed on students.

Gender is the primary demographic category referenced through promotion of universities' Athena SWAN (AS) accreditation. However, this is only present in the submissions of Bristol, Cambridge, Birmingham, UCL and Liverpool. Of the five, only Cambridge (P15), UCL (P12), and Liverpool (P4) reference their grade (all silver, although Liverpool also mention specific grades for individual schools). The lack of this crucial detail in the other two is notable, as there is a vast difference between a bronze and gold award, but it indicates that having any award is enough. There is also no detail as to what the AS means in practice, mechanisms that are in place, or ventures that are being worked on to improve results – given that none have a gold award. Bristol (P14) is the only submission which gives more than a reference to the 'having' of AS, but in so doing refers only to its effect on students rather than staff, due to it having helped to attract a more diverse array of students, particularly in the STEM subjects. Not only is AS in a small minority of submissions, but the

lack of detail where it is present bolsters the argument that AS can be used to show that gender equality has been 'done' rather than being an active practice (Yarrow & Johnston, 2022). The effects of referencing AS but without any detail as to the position of academics in the institutions or further work being conducted, is beneficial primarily as a reputational tool for the university. Indeed, Yarrow and Johnston (2022:757) have termed the virtue signalling that takes place specifically through the promotion of these kinds of equality accreditations as 'institutional peacocking', seeing this way of focussing on gender as having been captured by a particularly 'neoliberal agenda'. Indeed, this effect is produced here in the highlighting of it in documents which are essential advertisements to incoming students. Nevertheless, it is telling that, given the ease of mentioning this kind of award in a document providing a contextual picture of the institution, most universities did not think it relevant to depictions of teaching excellence, and thus conceptualise teaching as a gender-neutral activity.

In addition to AS, other EDI mechanisms that are mentioned across the submissions are participation in the 'Stonewall Global Diversity Champions network' (Liverpool, P4; UCL, P12) and 'Stonewall Top 100 Employers' (Cardiff, P15; Sheffield, P1); UCL (P12) note their bronze award in the 'Race Equality Charter' and Birmingham (P15) that they are currently doing the work needed to gain this accreditation. Liverpool (P4) cite that they are a 'Disability Confident Employer' and a member of 'Time to Change', which is a commitment to 'addressing mental health in the workplace', and QMUL (P1) are a partner of the Living Wage Foundation. Two universities mention events they have hosted as examples of consciousness-raising: at UCL (P12) a debate entitled 'Why isn't my professor black?', and at Cambridge (P15) the hosting of a 'pre-launch celebration event for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Trans History Month'. Additionally, QMUL (P10) promotes their offer of a 'subsidised' on-site nursery for staff and students as part of their provisions for teaching excellence. Indeed, this can be an essential provision for allowing both female staff and students more flexibility (UCU, 2009) but is limited to one submission.

Including the references to AS, this is a total of eight of the twenty-one submissions which contain any kind of references to an EDI mechanism for staff, and the above is the sum-total in 314 pages of data. Additionally, not one of these attributes is referenced in the feedback in the TEF statement of findings, which indicates that these attributes are ultimately

neglected from the vision of teaching excellence which TEF is producing, and that may shape behaviour for future iterations.

Given the issue of inequalities amongst staff in HE, as outlined in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2, the lack of attention given to structural inequalities by universities obscures their gendered nature. The extent to which EDI issues are discussed in relation to students highlights a responsibility from the institution to students in a way that is not conveyed towards staff, adding to the disembodiment of the academic and the depiction of the university as a neutral entity. Although these submissions are aimed towards universities' offer for students, the reasons for including details on EDI in relation to staff are two-fold. Firstly, research has shown that the demographic diversity of the staff body affects students' sense of belonging in the university (Blake et al, 2022). Additionally, as shown by the recent UCU strikes many students care or are affected by the welfare of the staff who are teaching them. For example, in support of the staff strike, the NUS (2022) released a statement stating that 'the struggles we face as students are inextricably linked to the reasons that staff are striking'. A presumption on the part of the universities that information regarding the welfare of staff is not relevant to students once again sidelines the importance of the relationship between the student and teacher.

Overall, that these references to EDI for staff are only in a minority of submissions erases the responsibility of the university toward its staff and produces the image of it as a neutral organisation and meritocratic site. Acker (1990) tells us that the image of an organisation as neutral entrenches gendered inequalities because the supposedly 'neutral' worker is implicitly cast as masculine. It also erases the responsibilities of the university towards staff, because it projects an image that the work has either been 'done', which alienates women from the inequalities which we know they experience and produces inequality as an issue to be managed individually. Furthermore, that when success in EDI is measured it is done primarily through accreditations, without detailing systematic change or approaches minimises inequalities as systematic issues. As Ahmed (2012) notes, there is a breach between performative diversity 'speak' and the reality within organisations. This erasure of these inequalities (re)constitutes the image of academia as an individualised meritocracy in which everyone has equal opportunity to thrive and be treated accordingly, which as outlined in the Literature Review, is not how staff experience it. It also further

disembodies the academic, in particular those who face systemic inequalities i.e., women and other marginalised groups.

Staff presence in qualitative student comments

Interestingly, the one place where a broader conception of the labour of teaching *is* centred, recognised, and valued, is where the direct student voice is included in submissions. Specifically, the student voice is the primary place where the import of relationship-building is recognised, and the labour of guidance and support is both valued and personified. Thus, inserting qualitative student quotations into their submissions is a way that some institutions produce a differing framing of the academic and their role. These universities are York, Southampton, LSE, Exeter, and Birmingham, five of the twenty-one submissions.

York open their submission with a selection of quotes from students, which all centre their relationship to staff members, for example: 'More than anything it is the enthusiasm and passion of staff that make York so special - everyone is willing to go the extra mile to provide guidance'; 'The staff are amazing – they are enthusiastic about their subject area, and the support they provide is fantastic. There is always someone there if you need some help, or advice' (York, P1); students describe feeling 'really well supported' and another states that 'the staff were consistently supportive and always approachable' (York, P10). Every student quote in the submission focussed on the key day-to-day aspect of the university which the student sees: staff. Southampton (P5) use a student quote to back up their research-led teaching: 'It's really nice to see how our professors collect their own data in the field. It made me feel part of something bigger', and Birmingham (P6) to show student feelings on seminars and supervisions: 'Brilliant! So thought-provoking'; 'A really helpful session - I wasn't made to feel daunted and did not feel judged... [my supervisor] has helped me with constructive feedback which I can use for my next essay'. Here we see otherwise absent glimpses of a much more personalised account, which recognises both the labour and embodiment of the academic, but also constitutes the student/teacher relationship in a different way to that of merely consumer and service-provider.

Exeter's submission includes a word cloud on its first page from students using open comments from NSS. The largest (and therefore most mentioned) word is 'lecturers' (Exeter,

P1). They also bookend their document by giving ‘our last word to our students’, describing this time another word cloud that was made from submissions by students to their teaching awards, and highlighted words such as ‘support, feedback, help, always, and time’ (Exeter, P15). A different conception of the idealised academic is produced through these student accounts than through the submissions as a whole. However, even within universities which have included these student accounts, their wider constitution of what ‘counts’ as academic labour through the rest of the submission remains fixed and narrow. For example, Exeter (P15) describe what students associate with their staff (‘support, feedback, help, always, and time’) and then state that this shows ‘the value that [students] place in learning in a research-rich environment and in becoming co-creators of new knowledge’, when the students’ actual words are much more associated with the care, pastoral work, and availability of their teachers.

Moreover, that two conflicting accounts of the academic are produced further serves to emphasise the ambiguity in requirements academics must fulfil, as the student accounts are still behaviour-shaping mechanisms, producing expected norms of behaviour. This can lead to additional strain on conflicting identity (Clegg, 2008) and workload (Misra et al, 2021). The academic’s role is produced as both dedicated world-leading researchers and as caring and supportive teachers whose time and dedication to the student body is unlimited. These observations on academic workload and expectations put upon the academic adds to the literature on the obfuscation of encumberment, and their gendered effects. Acker argues (2006:458) that work is organised around an ‘unencumbered male worker’. The submissions produce academics’ role as positioned increasingly around this face-time with students during the working day, but research-driven values and measurements are not removed. This allows only those who are unencumbered to manage this workload, as well as a willingness to put work before any other priorities.

The difference between these few accounts based on student feedback, and the way in which staff are portrayed throughout the rest of the documents as well as a lack of TEF metric for capturing the day-to-day and pastoral labour of the teacher, exposes the extent to which this labour is minimised. This aligns with the literature regarding pastoral and social reproductive labour as being gendered, and consequently undervalued (e.g., Ivancheva & Garvey, 2022; Monroe et al, 2008). Additionally, ‘time’, a value highlighted by Exeter (P15), is

not something which any of the submissions consider in terms of their facilitation or support for staff and is difficult to measure. The inclusion of these statements however, albeit in the minority of submissions, helps to produce an alternate academic subjectivity.

9.2.2. Staff as resources

The centring of resources - the import of which was discussed at the end of Chapter 8 - further links to disembodiment of staff as they are routinely produced as akin to material resources. This is done in multiple ways. The first is through the positioning of discussion of staff within the sections of the submissions which discuss resources. A prime example comes in Southampton's submission, in which the paragraph regarding personal tutors is under the section labelled 'Learning Environment' (one of the categories of the TEF framework itself which already constitutes a particular taxonomy of what staff 'are'). This reference is the ninth point in this section, sandwiched between library facilities, extra-curricular opportunities, and sports facilities (Southampton, P9). This is echoed throughout many submissions, in which staff are mentioned in the same discussion as new IT blocks or satisfaction with lecture theatres (e.g., Birmingham). This produces staff as resources for student use and reproduces the consumer/provider dichotomy, which has shown that the student-as-consumer is more demanding on these resources (Tomlinson, 2017). One report which analysed the effect of the student-as-consumer model, even cited multiple references to students making comments about "wanting to fire bad teachers" given what they were paying' (Kandiko Howson & Mawer, 2013:46), directly viewing their teachers as a resource for which they had paid. This is another area of tension in the submissions, where we see the instrumentalist way staff are positioned for use of the student; however, as shown in the section above, there is an alternate narrative produced in how students themselves are depicted as viewing their teachers – albeit a narrative that still shapes academic behaviour.

There are some small but notable departures from this framing in a minority of submissions. Where some documents situate discussion of staff amongst discussion of resources, there are also some implicit and explicit acknowledgements in these sections that material resources can (and should) also benefit staff. This is true in the case of York (P9): 'we have prioritised the support of teaching and learning in the design and specification of physical space'; Leeds (P13) who reference an 'improved learning environment for staff'; and

Newcastle (P9) and Durham (P8), who both describe how their online tools have helped academic staff in their role as tutors. Additionally, Imperial (P9) show the mutual benefit of resources such as library facilities which 'exist to serve the needs of both staff and students', as well as the use of e-learning as a timesaving device - which has had positive feedback 'from students and teachers alike'. Oxford (P10) also nod to students and staff in the benefits of their IT investment: 'providing a suite of resources for departments to adopt and adapt to the needs of their teaching staff and students'. Finally, LSE (P15) draw attention to their architecture and that new learning and teaching spaces provide more opportunities for events which 'enable both students and staff to feel genuinely a part of the LSE scholarly community' (LSE, P13). These are small nods, coming from a third of the submissions, but help to disrupt the homogeneity of a solely consumer/provider paradigm.

Overall, there is a tension in the ways that academic identities are produced through the submissions. Where there is a blurring between material resources and teachers, we see that the academic is disembodied, reconstituted instead as a resource to be reaped by the consumer. With the ratio of discussion of staff in general comparative to university resources and the wider conception of teaching excellence, human labour, is in the main, sidelined. When human labour is discussed in tandem with material resources it also devalues it *as* human labour through objectification (Haslam, 2006). On the other hand, this has not disseminated fully throughout the universities; some submissions maintained a separation between staff and resources, with a minority giving at least a mention to the benefit resources could give to staff and, very occasionally, the university's responsibility in training staff with these materials. Once again this points to a tension in exactly how the academic is situated across these institutions.

9.3. The Extent of Responsibilisation

Another way that inequalities can be masked in organisations is through systems of responsibilisation. Foucault explores the role of responsibilisation (2004) on self-discipline and behaviour management, which he theorises as a 'specific technique of a power' that can coerce 'by means of observation' (Foucault cited in Barad, 2007:199). Responsibilisation can entrench gendered inequalities through centring self-management and disguising structural inequalities, whereby 'self-autonomy, self-reliance, and self-discipline' become internalised,

and inequalities become an individual problem to be self-managed (Evans, 2015). Furthermore, in the case of the university, because of its gendered hierarchies, the majority of surveillance is devised by 'men-in power' (Lynch, 2010:55). This conception of the primacy and import of tools of observation is (re)produced through the submissions. TEF itself is first and foremost a measurement tool, which centres particular priorities – alongside mechanisms of reward and punishment tools which shape behaviour. The submissions also centre and embed various other tools of observation and behaviour management, which serve to reward certain behaviours and attributes at the expense of others. The outlining of these tools and mechanisms of reward and punishment are followed by a discussion of the extent to which academics are facilitated in meeting the behaviours which these tools advocate, as the extent to which workload is individualised has gendered effects on those who are structurally inhibited from fulfilling requirements. This is due to gendered inequalities in encumbrance outside the workplace, discrepancy in labour which is rewarded or penalised within the university, and the perceived attributes of academics which are used to measure their success.

9.3.1. Monitoring and behavioural management

Individual performance monitoring and observation, particularly against a backdrop of a perceived egalitarianism, is a key indicator of responsabilisation in these submissions, and a hallmark of the neoliberal university (Shore & Wright, 1999; Shore, 2008). There are a multitude of ways that these tools emerge as 'neutral' instruments of measurement and are shown to be a pervasive part of the university apparatus. Two of these behaviour management tools have been mentioned multiple times already throughout these chapters as they are so central to the operation of TEF: REF and the NSS. Both of these measurement apparatuses are constituted as key performance indicators against which staff are measured in every single submission. Further to these tools, is the language that speaks directly to staff being 'monitored' or 'observed' in their practice, which responsabilised staff to act according to norms of excellent conduct at all times. As Foucault (1980:154) states, 'power is exercised by virtue of things being known and people being seen'. For example, Newcastle's submission contains six references to monitoring various elements of teaching staff's work (P1, P6, P7, P9, P10). This includes references to monitoring 'adherence' to policy requirements on feedback (Newcastle, P6) and monitoring staff's adequate uploading of information and

resources for their modules (Newcastle, P9). Imperial (P7) describe an ‘annual monitoring process’ informed by student evaluation scores and Liverpool (P5) describe how ‘teaching performance is monitored’ through student feedback.

Most frequently, measurement apparatus and tools of observation are embedded in student feedback mechanisms which are described as having material effect as they feed into staff appraisals, promotions, and additional apparatus to monitor staff performance. Manchester (P4), Leeds (P2), Imperial (P7), QMUL (P14), Leeds (P2), King’s (P3), and Nottingham (P2) all provide a discussion of student reviews of departmental teaching, but there are many submissions which also highlight the effect of student reviews and feedback on individual teachers. Imperial (P7, emphasis added) highlight that ‘a number of surveys, internal and external, are conducted to provide students with an opportunity throughout the year to give their views on *lecturers* and modules, overall programmes, support services, resources, welfare support and social opportunities’. As well as showing that lecturers are constantly observed and monitored through this mechanism, it also highlights the way that individuals are judged using the same mechanisms that are used for university provisions such as ‘social opportunities’. Student feedback is a direct measurement which is used to conduct performance reviews of academic staff at Manchester (P4) and Nottingham (P4). In addition to monitoring through student feedback, Durham, Southampton, and Exeter all highlight their use of ‘Peer-review teaching’. Exeter (P5) use this as a model for ‘individual annual reflection on teaching and learning’ stating that it is ‘mandatory for all staff involved in teaching and is important in identification and dissemination of best practice’.

These systems of monitoring are world-making apparatus – embedded, extended, and naturalised as they are turned into further systems of metrification and apparatus in the form of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), which continually produce particular sets of priorities and standards which staff are measured against. For example, at Leeds (P7) employability outcomes are used as KPIs to oversee ‘institutional and faculty performance’, and Cardiff (P5) have turned their NSS student satisfaction rating into a KPI in which every school must reach over 80%. QMUL (P4) also describe their own recently-designed apparatus which has ‘indicators for managing teaching performance’ and has been ‘embedded into our planning and HR processes’, although they give no indication of what these indicators account for.

Additionally, we see how these tools can be used to discipline staff, when they are judged to not be meeting required targets. Liverpool (P12) state that the monitoring of NSS data informs when an individual's 'poor performance is dealt with via a mandatory action plan'. Nottingham's (P2) student feedback scores are 'monitored' and used to 'improve the performance of individual teachers'. The scores are turned into flags which are used to measure individual staff performance, with certain numbers being imbued with specific meaning, e.g. 'any scores lower than 17.5 require an action plan to be put in place' (Nottingham, P4). 'Metrics imply norms' (Morley, 2016:29), and this statement regarding staff performance provides an example of how quantitative measurements come to be seen as truths about what something *is*, i.e., 17.5 is the dividing line between adequate performance and what constitutes underperformance. They are also used to reward 'good' behaviour. In the same submission good student feedback scores are also used to 'flag colleagues with excellent teaching' and if an individual academic 'receives an 'outstanding' score, they receive an official letter of congratulation from the Vice-Chancellor, and these letters can then be used as evidence to support their case in promotion' (Nottingham, P4). We see also how using specific apparatus shapes behaviour through rewards and punishments towards certain goals, in these cases student satisfaction and employability outcomes.

Next, there is the language of 'requirements' and 'expectations', which constitute the academic as someone who is subsidiary to the university, who 'know best', and sets the boundaries for what constitutes 'good' and 'bad' behaviours. It situates good practice as coming from the top down and in so doing situates the academic as someone who is not only at the behest of the university, but whose behaviour is informed through these hierarchies. Once again, because of the structure of the university, this is also a gendered power dynamic (Lynch, 2010). It also often obscures the labour that the academic is conducting, in favour of using it as a reflection of excellent university procedures. For instance, in this quote from Southampton (P3): 'Our strategic commitment to the facilitation of excellent teaching is reflected in policies that require all members of staff involved in teaching to engage in developmental activities (e.g., peer observation, peer mentoring, good practice workshops'. The 'requirement' depicts a specific image of staff who may not want to engage in pedagogical development such as additional CPD - situating staff as the problem - with the reflection of excellence as the 'policy of requirement' rather than the opportunities available to staff, the

time given to them, or even the labour that staff are putting into these programmes. This kind of paternalistic language is present elsewhere, with other examples including Exeter (P5) who mention that 'Peer dialogue is mandatory for all staff involved in teaching'; King's (P9) that it 'is compulsory for all module leaders to make use of the virtual learning environment'; UCL (P7) that every department has been 'mandated...to take specific, tangible actions in relation to assessment and feedback' (and that the implementation is also being 'monitored'); and explicit references to 'expectations' or 'requirements' to partake in teaching are also present in the majority of submissions. A quote in which we can see the intra-action between expectations, workload, behaviour management, lack of facilitation, KPIs, and their material effects, is this statement from Cardiff (P6):

'We expect our academic staff to develop and sustain significant research and scholarship portfolios: the creation of new knowledge is fundamental to our mission and shapes the learning environment that we offer our students. However, the Cardiff Academic Framework sets out very clear expectations that our staff must engage in teaching and student-related activities as part of their core work and ensure "that learning and teaching is research-led and provides students with stimulating, flexible and intellectually challenging learning opportunities". Teaching excellence is clearly signalled as expected through our criteria for academic promotion, professorial banding and our performance development review framework'.

This quote hints not only at the level of stretch and self-management of the academic and the multiplicity of identities which the role requires, but also the lack of support in facilitation to meet these requirements. It also demonstrates how teaching excellence is being constituted within the university and that this constitution has a material effect on staff's position in the university and their opportunities for progression if they are unable to perform to the expected standard.

The monitoring of staff is further embedded as part of a university's role through its crediting in the TEF statement of findings. Nottingham (who were upgraded on the basis of their submission) are celebrated for 'high levels of contact time which are prescribed and monitored'. Newcastle (similarly upgraded) are commended for their monitoring of excellent teaching, and Durham for their 'rigorous monitoring procedures'. This naturalises the perception that academics are required to be observed in order to guide them towards excellent conduct.

Durham do not by any means dispense with this kind of language or systems of measurement - explaining that modules are 'monitored through a metric-informed annual teaching review' and that individual teaching staff are reviewed through 'Module Evaluation Questionnaires' and 'departmental Peer Review' (Durham, P6). However, they do represent this 'problem' slightly differently. Whilst they state that they 'expect teaching to be excellent' they provide a communal approach for adjustment to performance explaining that when 'issues are identified...we work with teachers and departments to determine the best strategy for improving the learning experience' (Durham, P6). Many of the same values are being (re)produced, that systems of metrification are producing objective information by which to measure staff, and that behaviour is being shaped around student experience, but their approach to amending this issue collaboratively is presented as much more humane. Although it does nothing to negate the self-regulation of behaviours which academics internalise and perform.

In contrast to the paternalism and behaviour management tools which are described above, there are far fewer examples of academics' ability to display agency. However, they are not completely erased: five institutions explicitly reference the freedom of individual staff or departments in terms of training and course design. Durham (P5) describe the 'extremely high levels of staff engagement with internal and external training...Our staff take teaching seriously' and continue that 'in a recent academic staff survey, 40% of respondents indicated that they had recently undertaken training and 45% expected to undertake training in the near future', which indicates that the university is providing opportunities, but staff are able to have agency over their use of time. That feedback is being taken into consideration also implies a mechanism for the university responding to staff needs. Imperial (P6) also make clear that - outside of probationary staff - training 'is offered on a voluntary basis'. Interestingly, they state that 'this is a deliberate policy decision' because it raises 'the status of, and demand for, educational training' (Imperial, P6). Similarly, Oxford (P1) espouse at the start of their submission that the college structure supports scholars 'as individuals' in conjunction with 'the traditions of independent scholarship and academic freedom' and that flexible academic communities is what allows 'excellent teaching and scholarship [to] flourish'. This shows a completely different way of addressing the same issue, with evidence that with agency, staff will still engage with these kinds of programmes. Outside of training,

Manchester (P7) state that 'we do not set minimum expected contact hours for individual degree programmes; these are determined at Faculty or School level in a discipline-specific manner' elucidating that 'we believe that placing the overall format of the curriculum in the hands of those delivering it is both academically sound and pedagogically correct' (Manchester, P8). Similarly, Imperial (P2) explain that they have a devolved structure of governance with faculties 'enjoying a high degree of autonomy' and that remaining 'within broad expectations set by the College, faculties, departments and individual programme and module leaders have discretion as to how education is provided'. This is reiterated on the following page when staff 'discretion' is highlighted to state that 'our faculties have broad discretion to design experiences appropriate to their students' (Imperial, P3). Interestingly, the only other university which very briefly discusses the flexibility of staff 'in designing and delivering programmes', describes this policy as having occurred due to student feedback (UCL, P2).

9.3.2. Training, facilitation, and support

Given this theme of monitoring and individual responsabilisation, it is important to establish the extent to which universities also discuss the support of academic staff. A lack of support for staff has gendered consequences because of the lack of accounting for gendered inequalities which make it difficult for those with more responsibilities outside the workplace to fulfil this breadth of workload. Further, it erases the gendered discrepancy in the work that is being performed within the university, where feminised 'university housework' is not being considered as valuable labour but is still inhibiting the time available to conduct work that is valued. Yet again, this theme presents a core tension within the submissions. Though staff are not present in many of the pages, and evidence is put forward to show that staff performance is monitored and the perceived requisite rules are in place, there is another side to the university's relationship with its staff which references a feeling of collegiality, and facilities for staff training or information dissemination. The tension comes because these discussions tend to be separated out and placed within demarcated segments of the document often producing a counter-narrative to the rest of the submission, comparative to themes such as student satisfaction which are diffused as a coherent thread throughout the whole. Thus, this limited spacing, although providing some very positive discussion, is not holistically displayed

as an ethos throughout many of the submissions, but most institutions do give an example of facilitation or support to their staff, which is important to outline.

Most submissions start this section with a general statement as to their regard and support for teaching. Some examples include: 'We have placed increasing emphasis on the development of our educators' (Southampton, P2); 'We value all who contribute to teaching at Leeds' (Leeds, P14); and 'Excellent teaching is supported and enhanced by ensuring teaching staff are appropriately qualified and trained' (Nottingham, P7). These statements produce a perception of teachers as holding value. Sheffield (P6) further show an understanding of the various factors which they believe are entangled in the constitution of excellent teaching in their statement that:

'We know that teaching is not just about what a teacher does at the front of the classroom, it is part of what happens across the academic community; communities that build on practice based around the concepts of co-production, collegiality, cohesion, accessibility and support. Realising excellent teaching and genuine student engagement is dependent on having motivated, engaged, and committed academic staff, who are developed and supported to be the best teachers they can be'.

This fact that teaching is framed this way broadens what is considered to constitute excellent teaching and teachers beyond the TEF metrics themselves. It helps to embody the staff and places responsibility for their performance in part in the hands of the university.

In terms of general practice and training for staff there are multiple mentions across the submissions. York (P5) exemplify their training and development opportunities through citing the commendation of these practices in their last external institutional review. Leeds (P11) and Manchester (P6) both discuss training opportunities for probationary and long-term staff. Additionally, Manchester (P6) discuss their 'peer review of teaching activities' where faculties can make suggestions for developments and that 'where appropriate' this can be used 'for collecting and disseminating good practice identified', the nuancing of this approach is noteworthy, with differing approaches taken by departments rather than a one-size fits all approach. Seven universities - Birmingham (P5), Liverpool (P6), Sheffield (P7), Exeter (P5), King's (P5), York (P9), and Cambridge (P3) - reference annual teaching and learning conferences which disseminate 'excellent' pedagogy and educational research, often highlighting the collegiality and support that comes from these kinds of networks and events.

Although varying in the detail given, every single institution except Nottingham references university infrastructure such as teaching ‘hubs’ which provide training and dissemination of best practice. For instance, York (P9) mention their ‘Learning and Teaching Forum’, and ‘Scholarship of Teaching and Learning Network’; Bristol (P6) their ‘Bristol Institute for Learning and Teaching’ which holds activities such as ‘Education Excellence Seminars’ and oversees a ‘Good Practice Directory of innovative educational practices’, and Birmingham have a similar scheme in their ‘Teaching Academy’ which provides an annual conference and has an in-house journal focused on teaching. Interestingly, they state that the most recent focus of the Academy was ‘student experience’ (Birmingham, P5) and similarly, when discussing their suite of training, Cardiff (P6) proclaim that it places ‘renewed focus on expectations and support for teaching and the student experience’, showing the extent that this focus is proliferated through all levels of the university, and that these training opportunities are part of the apparatus of guiding conduct.

Some go further, evidencing their facilitation through citing actual investment or funding for scholars. Imperial (P5), Cardiff (P6), and Newcastle (P4) discuss funding for teaching development projects, though the latter two of these schemes are explicitly tied to having direct student input in the project. Southampton (P4) reference their £2.5m investment in a new ‘Centre for Higher Education Practice’, and Cambridge (P3) and Manchester (P10) go into some detail about their equivalents, both of which are designed to facilitate academic development such as training, pedagogic research, conferences, and academic networks. Cambridge (P4) cite their ‘Teaching and Learning Innovation Fund’ which can provide ‘project grants of between £10k and £20k each year up to a total of £100K for the development of innovative teaching’, whilst Manchester (P10) simply state that they can offer ‘small grants’ to developing pedagogy. Interestingly for this research, Manchester (P10) also note that some of this work has ‘allowed a more nuanced institutional understanding of what excellent teaching looks like and of the contexts in which it takes place’, which nods towards a broadening of what might constitute teaching excellence. A final case, notable for its singularity, is Leeds’s (P12) ‘Institution for Teaching Excellence’, the prioritisation of which is measured through investment (‘£3.5m over four years’). They explain that the Institute ‘promotes a culture that gives full credit, prestige and visibility to the staff’, but also crucially that secondments are offered each year which ‘allow staff to dedicate time as well as funds

to teaching scholarship' (Leeds, P12). This is the only case where a facilitation of time is mentioned in the data set.

Teaching Fellowships

Another mechanism which is utilised to show support for teaching and to validate these academic identities is Teaching Fellowships. Just over half of submissions refer to their participation in and support of National Teaching Fellowships (NTFs) of HEA Teaching Fellows. Specifically: Bristol, Birmingham, Cardiff, Exeter, King's, Leeds, Imperial, Newcastle, QMUL, Sheffield, Southampton, UCL, and Warwick, thirteen of the twenty-one institutions. Reasoning for promoting fellowships includes 'to support initiatives and collaborative innovations' (Bristol, P6) to provide recognition and prestige both external (Bristol, P6; Southampton, P4) and internal (Birmingham, P6; Imperial, P5; Warwick, P7; Southampton, P4), and to be used as flagbearers to provide support in disseminating good teaching practice (King's, P5; Birmingham, P6; Warwick, P8; Southampton, P4).

Some institutions use fellowships, and the number of fellowships, as a signifier of their teaching prowess. For example, Imperial (P6) state that they have 'over five times more HEA fellows as a proportion of teaching staff than the Russell Group average' and Southampton (P4), King's (P4), Exeter (P5), and UCL (P5) also refer to the growing number of fellowships to indicate their engagement with educational development. Some use their support of these schemes to show how they recognise and facilitate excellent teaching, exemplified in the cases of Cardiff (P6): 'We actively encourage and support nominations for the National Teaching Fellowship Scheme (NTFS)'; QMUL (P5) who provide 'support to nominees prior to nomination to the NTFS, as well as ongoing support for Fellows'; and Nottingham (P11) who 'have developed and introduced a scheme to support staff members in their applications for Fellowship with the Higher Education Academy'. However, only three institutions give a specific indication of what is gained from being a fellow or specific measures of support that the university will provide. Warwick (P7) cites a funding pot which fellows have access to 'for development projects'; and QMUL (P5), additional funding to employ three new members of staff who can focus on the 'Academic Development, Education and the Promotion of Teaching programme', one part of which is to help more staff work towards a teaching fellowship.

Finally, Sheffield (P7) mention that they also employ a team dedicated to teaching-focused programmes, a part of which ‘helps staff to secure HEA fellowship’.

The discussion of teaching fellows highlights a tangible way in which teaching and teachers are materially centred, particularly in those institutions which show evidence of resource and monetary investment. Teaching fellows are constituted here as valuable members of the academic community, who are supported by the university, and in turn are shown as flagbearers for disseminating good practice across the institution. That teaching staff are recognised here (both in the university and in the submissions), as well as being more financially supported, establishes value in the role of the teacher. In terms of support and facilitation of teachers overall, the picture is mixed, both between as well as within the submissions. Even where there is a clear picture of training opportunities, it is rare that enough detail is given to establish aspects such as the time given to partake in these opportunities, or their value, standing and prestige relative to other academic pursuits. Those submissions which discuss investment in their training facilities, and in pedagogical funding do the most to situate it as a valuable role in the university as well as a responsibility *of* the university, although these are the exception to the norm.

9.3.3. Reward mechanisms

In addition to references of facilitation and support, every submission in some way expresses the great importance of ‘recognising’ or ‘rewarding’ excellent teaching. This can still be considered as a behaviour management tool, guiding the conduct of academics through ‘incentives’ (UCL, P4) and setting the boundaries of what constitutes excellent academic practice. Moreover, the language of incentives is also paternalistic and individualised, embedding an assumption that staff are motivated by rewards from above, rather than being limited in their practice through constraints such as workload, care responsibilities, or lack of support.

However, given the evidence throughout this data, and the literature more broadly, the extent to which the labour of teaching is devalued renders the labour of, in particular women, invisible. Thus, that the submissions are imbuing it with value is highly important to note, particularly when it is structural recognition, i.e. through promotional routes. On the

other hand, it is still important to note that reward mechanisms are still tools which guide and shape the possible terms of conduct for academics. In terms of the key mechanisms put forward to value teaching, this quote from Nottingham (P2) broadly sums up the position of every institution: 'Excellent teaching is recognised via the University's Lord Dearing Awards and the Students' Union-led Staff Oscars, and rewarded by a promotions system that includes specific criteria for teaching-focused colleagues'. How these two mechanisms are framed in the submissions, as well their potential effects are discussed in detail below.

Award Ceremonies

In terms of rewards, every single submission spends time discussing their teaching awards, emphasising it as the primary mechanisms by which staff are recognised and rewarded. Given this centrality, it is worth unpacking exactly how awards adjudicate what constitutes excellent teaching, how this is measured, and what the awards really mean for their winners and teaching more broadly. These awards can be broadly separated into two categories, awards which are decided and adjudicated by peers and management, and those which are nominated by the student body. Many institutions utilise both mechanisms, with Durham (P6) promoting three different mechanisms. There is variation in the level of detail concerning what awards are being given for. In many instances where there is a lack of explanation, this simply serves to reconstitute the norms of 'excellence' or 'outstanding' teaching, as the reader is left to assume the definition. Bristol (P6), Newcastle (P5), UCL (P3), and Southampton's (P3) descriptions of their teaching awards are limited, with each stating only that the awards are about 'recognising' members of staff. Bristol (P6) and Liverpool (P6) recognise 'professional services staff' in their awards and Manchester (P7) broaden this to library staff and teaching assistants. However, none give any indication of whether there is more to the awards than 'recognition', what is deemed to constitute excellence, or the mechanisms through which this is judged.

Categories which *are* referenced as being celebrated by award ceremonies include 'promoting employability' and 'diversity' (York, P6), 'best undergraduate supervision' (Manchester, P6), 'course design and delivery, teaching quality, learning materials, assessment methods, feedback, teaching innovation and outreach' (Imperial, P5), 'Personal Tutor of the Year, Most Effective Teacher, Most Uplifting Staff Member, Student

Representative Coordinator of the Year, Most Innovative Staff Member and Welsh Education Champion' (Cardiff, P7), 'Personal Tutors, Supervisors, Teaching and University Life' (Nottingham, P7), 'Best Feedback' and 'Most Inspirational Teaching' (Leeds, P12), 'Lecturer of the year' ('outstanding contribution to research-connected learning and teaching') and 'Outstanding contribution to public engagement' (Liverpool, P6); 'most supportive staff member', 'research-inspired and innovative teaching', 'those rated best in the categories: lecturer, postgraduate teacher, taught supervisor, research supervisor, employability support, feedback provider, research community and subject' (Exeter, P5); 'feedback, welfare and research support' (LSE, P4), and 'Sustained Excellence, Student Support, Student Experience, and Innovation in Teaching' (King's, P5). These award categories give an interesting insight into the kind of labour which is being imbued with value, as well as an explicit demonstration of the many roles and identities which staff members are expected to perform. Although some forms of feminised labour are recognised here in contrast to the rest of the submissions, for example in recognising 'support', it also brings into clear view the labour which is expected of academics, such as the emotional labour of being 'uplifting'. As has been demonstrated many times across these findings chapters, the expected behaviours exhibited by staff in order to performatively display these behaviours is stratified by gender, (Heffernan, 2021) as they intra-act with expectations of normative gendered behaviour (Morris et al, 2022).

The main mechanism by which most of the awards are decided is through student nominations (e.g., Newcastle, P5; Birmingham, P6; King's, P5). Even in non-student led awards, this is sometimes still done by proxy. For example, York (P6), who have both student led and Vice-Chancellor awards, in the latter describe how initial nominations are 'informed by departments' internal mechanisms for identifying excellence, such as student evaluations', naturalising the students' conception of good practice, and staff behaviour as guided by the needs of the student. Birmingham (P6) and Cardiff (P7), both have two award ceremonies, one with student nominations, but in the other allow staff to nominate their peers which is an anomaly across the submissions. The naturalisation of the singular conception of excellence as measured by the student is further embedded as multiple universities note that student feedback from their nominations are used to inform good practice. For example, Imperial (P5) note that the written nominations from students are analysed and the data used

to develop ‘a detailed, student-generated corpus of best practice, positive stories and examples of staff excellence which is then used to work with Imperial to improve the academic experience for students. For example, the results of the Best Tutoring award were used jointly by the ICU and the College to create a new Personal Tutors’ Guide’.

In the vast majority of cases, what awards mean for their recipient is not discussed, emphasising the role of awards as a performative tool, given they are so central to universities’ evidence that teaching staff are valued. In one case, the only reward is seemingly a larger workload. York (P6) who have a primarily recognition-based approach, explain that ‘the winners are presented at graduation ceremonies’, and continue that they are ‘also *required* to disseminate their practice’ (York, P6, emphasis added). It is unclear from this, other than the award, whether there is any other benefit given to the winner other than a ‘requirement’ to conduct more work in teaching, with no mention of facilitation. Five of the twenty-one institutions attach remuneration to the award, Imperial (P4), Warwick (P8), Durham (P6), Oxford (P12), and LSE (P5), the latter here being the only university who mention personal remuneration rather than project funding. Durham lay out the most detail of the benefit for staff enfolded many of the topics that have been discussed so far. They explain that:

‘We operate three institutional schemes for excellence in teaching; two reward outstanding current practice, as identified by our students, and one provides project funding for innovation and enhancement in scholarship. Our Excellence in Learning and Teaching and Excellence in Supervision awards were begun over a decade ago. These student-nominated and judged awards recognise and reward staff who have made an outstanding contribution to learning and teaching at Durham; annual awards have a value of £9,000, which can be shared between staff and their departments. These prizes are complemented by our Enhancing the Student Learning Experience (EtSLE) awards, which were introduced in 2005. Each year a studentstaff committee, chaired by the PVC Education, funds projects that will transform the educational experience. Individuals and small groups may receive up to £7,000, while large scale initiatives may receive up to £35,000’ - (Durham, P6).

Although still not a structural solution, the impact on the department is notable here as it disrupts the criticism of awards being inherently individualistic (e.g. Flemming, 2021), and shows how these tools could be mobilised to encourage or reward collaboration. Other institutions which reference a wider view of who can receive awards is York (P6), who state that their Student Union awards celebrate ‘individuals, teams, and departments’, and Liverpool (P6) and Sheffield (P7) who also recognise ‘team excellence’.

Interestingly, Cambridge frame their whole discussion of student-led teaching awards not as symbolic of excellent teaching, but as evidence of student engagement: 'Further evidence of student's engagement with their studies is the success of the Student Led Teaching Awards...Student's engagement with these awards has soared; from 192 nominations received from students in 2014...to 703 nominations received in 2016' (Cambridge, P3). Here, student engagement can be measured through their quantitative nominations of staff. This has the effect of sidelining teaching staff, because their accomplishments are used as an indicator to demonstrate student engagement, erasing the links between staff and students and the work staff are doing to establish this engagement, so that they become a periphery to their own work.

There are several points to discuss here. The first is the length of discussion around this reward mechanism, which is situated primarily as a tool to raise prestige for teaching comparative to discussions of support or systemic change. Even the lack of detail regarding how the rewards benefit staff, with only a small minority of submissions mentioning anything other than 'prestige', is important. The implication is that the value of teaching is heightened, but without structural change, there is a danger that these gestures become tokenistic and entrench a lack of support for staff conducting this labour. This is particularly true because of the primarily individualised nature of awards which means that work can be recognised as 'stand-out' or exceptional and therefore does nothing to raise the prestige of teaching as a whole or recognise the day-to-day labour that goes into this work. It also serves to primarily benefit those who are more unencumbered, and have the time, space, and flexibility to conduct work that must be 'outstanding' to be recognised. This individualism also produces a competitive rather than collaborative environment and adds to the narrative around 'stand-out' work and individual 'star' academics – discussed in Chapter 7 - ignoring labour elsewhere that facilitates this work. Although the few submissions which put emphasis on teams and departments did show alternative ways of conceptualising excellence as a collaborative venture.

There is also a variation between the submissions in how many facets of 'excellent' teaching are recognised, with some allowing for a multitude of attributes which constitute excellence, and others which have a much more limited and static view. Again, given the emphasis on student nominations it is also worth linking back to the literature regarding

student feedback mechanisms in Chapter 8 which showed how these mechanisms intra-act with the students' values and assumptions around excellence in HE and gendered assumptions around who can embody these notions of excellence (e.g. Coate & Kandiko Howson, 2016; Ford, 2011; Gelber et al, 2022). The effects of this intra-action can have a negative impact on women who are more likely to be rated lower through these mechanisms (e.g., Heffernan, 2021; Macneil et al, 2015).

Promotional Procedures

In terms of systematic reward, promotional procedures are the key mechanism by which teaching is produced as holding value. In terms of the inequalities within academia, one of the key issues covered in the literature review is the leaky pipeline due often to gendered labour which is undervalued or not captured at all (Baker, 2012a; Kandiko Howson, 2018; Morley, 1998), and progression through teaching tracks could be an important balancing feature. All of the submissions discuss the import of recognising teaching in promotions, with the majority emphasising a specific teaching track including Bristol (P5), Cardiff (P6), Durham (P6), Exeter (P4), King's (P5), Liverpool (P6), LSE (P3), Nottingham (P8), Sheffield (P7), and Southampton (P3). Interestingly, many of these explicitly highlight how recently these tracks have been introduced indicating a shift towards the prominence of teaching.

Among institutions which show that this parity of esteem is a recent development is Warwick (P7) who 'revised promotion criteria providing parity of recognition for teaching and research' and mention again this 'parity of esteem' on the following page (Warwick, P8). Leeds (P11) 'reviewed [and] updated our definitions of excellence to align with our strategic plan and provide opportunities to reward all forms of excellence across the full spectrum of an academic career'; Birmingham (P9) 'invested £9.9m in teaching-focussed appointments and promotions over the TEF period'; UCL (P4): 'substantially revised our promotions criteria to ensure we are rewarding leadership in education....an institutional review of UCL's promotions criteria, with the specific aim of addressing the question of parity between research and teaching in promotions'; and LSE (P4), King's (P5), and Manchester (P6) all reference their overhaul of teaching tracks. Durham (P6) quantify the success of this change in the increase of teaching staff promoted to the highest level. QMUL (P4) are overt as to how

teaching being reframed and show the beginnings of a shift in the types of labour which is recognised and thus constitutive of what good academic practice looks like:

‘The primary aim of this revision is to enhance understanding of what kinds of evidence are appropriate in promotion submissions. It provides flexible promotion pathways, describing more clearly the range of areas of contribution within which academics can demonstrate their different expertise: student experience and education; scholarship; research; engagement with society/impact; management and collegiality; and professional practice. This revised approach gives a more up-to-date articulation of the academic role as it continues to evolve and, importantly, allows clearer pathways to promotion to professor’.

Further, universities that do not mention a separate track all emphasise that teaching plays a role in the judgement of all promotions, as is the case at Cambridge (P3), Imperial (P6), and Oxford (P11). Many of the institutions are also explicit in stating that they are endeavouring to treat research and teaching equally. These include York (P6): ‘We recognise and reward teaching excellence equally with research in the promotions system...We make no distinction in academic title between those who are on Research and Teaching, and Teaching-only contracts’; Leeds (P11), ‘Our promotions criteria reflect parity of esteem between teaching and research and offer pathways that take into account excellence in student education and scholarship, in research and innovation, or in academic leadership’; ‘Newcastle (P4): ‘One of our core institutional values is ‘to accord parity of esteem to research and teaching’; as well as Manchester (P6), Southampton (P3), and Nottingham (P8). Nottingham (P8) even confirms justification for assuming a lack of parity of esteem between research and teaching, stating: ‘Promotion via the teaching and learning route has long been an option, but it was a route rarely taken as it was perceived by some academics to be a ‘2nd class’ route to a chair’ which led to new promotions criteria and a ‘clear career path for colleagues specialising in teaching and learning’.

However, the question remains as to how excellent teaching is judged within the promotion criteria, and the kinds of behaviours which it rewards. Where it is mentioned, this process is usually reliant on student feedback (e.g., Nottingham, P4; Newcastle, P3, Imperial, P6), embedding the same problematisation of this singular notion of excellence, which then affects women’s structural ability to ‘climb the ladder’, but with these mechanisms situated as reflecting a truth about merit. At Imperial (P6) for example, staff must use evidence from the ‘Student Online Evaluation survey’ with ‘evaluation scores for each candidate are

provided to promotions panels as part of the evidence which they must consider. Students are also a key part of hiring procedures in many of the institutions as seen in this quote from Leeds (P2) students 'participate in the appointment process of staff responsible for delivering education'. QMUL (P2) cite using students on new appointment panels and Sheffield (P6) name their Student's Union as being involved in the appointment process. Newcastle's (P3) promotion process is reliant on student feedback whereby staff must 'submit the results of the staff-specific questions as part of their promotion application'. However, they also temper this with further detail of their own responsibilities which include providing resources for staff aiming for promotion on this track, and importantly making explicit that 'promotions committees have been briefed on the consideration of promotion applications based on claims of excellence in teaching' (Newcastle, P5), which helps to reconstitute what 'excellence' can mean to those who have been embedded in traditional value systems and have the power to shift the emphasis. Outside of promotions, a couple of anomalies worth highlighting are Leeds (P11) who make a nod to pay-scale, explaining that 'teaching staff are rewarded for outstanding contributions through our reward and recognition schemes, through the professorial salary review', and Birmingham's (P6) reference that teaching focussed staff have the same 'opportunity to apply for study leave'.

Overall, the discussion around teaching promotions produces some positive effects in terms of work that was not formally recognised before. It structurally validates and raises the prestige of teaching as an academic identity, reconstituting it as valuable work which can and should be recognised in its own right. In many cases the point is made that this is a deliberate attempt to gain parity of prestige between research and teaching, which speaks to the problems highlighted in the literature concerning the gendered prestige gap (Aiston & Jung, 2015; Baker, 2012a; Santos & Dang Van Phu, 2019; Subbaye & Vithal, 2017; Zulu, 2013). The effect of this is that a wider set of skills, attributes, and labour is recognised and those who want to focus on teaching and pedagogy have more opportunity to do so and more recognition for this work, including via structural change. As discussed in the literature review, given the disproportionate number of women and early career academics represented in teaching (AdvanceHE, 2021), as well as women spending more time on students and teaching related activities more broadly, and a noted lack of structural recognition of this work (Morris et al, 2022; Baker, 2012a; Brommesson et al, 2022), this is an important shift.

There are however still significant tensions. The first is the paradox between the extent to which teaching tracks for promotion are elevated and discussed within a discreet section of the submissions in contrast to the emphasis throughout the rest of the submission on research. As discussed in Chapter 8, the elevation of research-led teaching is the core tenet of almost all these submissions. Other than showing that teaching tracks exist, the submissions do not make it clear what an academic whose focus was predominantly on teaching would do, and this is only exacerbated by the extent to which academic's research portfolios are discussed and valorised. Furthermore, that the majority of submissions espouse the requirement of all researchers to teach, which means that whilst pointing to the importance of teaching-only promotional tracks as raising the prestige and emphasis on pedagogic skills, its elevation is undermined by showing that teaching can and should be done by all academics without specialised training. Given that research-led teaching is produced as a key signifier of teaching excellence, the documents themselves only reproduce the esteem for those who primarily demonstrate research excellence. Without a discussion of the specialisms of those on the teaching tracks, it begs the question of the extent to which teaching really can be regarded as a specialised skill in its own right rather than something which inherently comes with being an excellent researcher.

9.4. Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated first, how the submissions produce the labour of the academic as disembodied, through their lack of bodied presence in the submissions, their positioning as resources, and the lack of structural adjustments made in the university to account for EDI for staff members. This has gendered effects because when the labour of the academic is disembodied, it is firstly devalued, and secondly, is rendered as universal, disguising the gendered nature of labour. This embeds the image of the university as a neutral and meritocratic site, serving to hide structural gendered inequalities which exist. Secondly the chapter has demonstrated the centring of tools of observation and mechanisms which reward or punish certain types of behaviour, these being KPIs based on student feedback, peer observation, award ceremonies, and promotional tracks. These tools are conceptualised as neutral instruments which reflect truths about staff behaviour and conduct.

We see how these tools are primarily shaped around notions of excellence through the gaze of students, constituting this as the key goal around which academic identities must be shaped. It also demonstrated how these measurement apparatus produces truths about academic excellence by quantifying what constitutes 'excellence' or 'underperformance', with material effects in the form of performance management review or promotion. Against the backdrop of an organisation which situates itself as neutral and meritocratic, academics are individualised and responsibilised for their own performance, despite the fact that we know them to be sites in which gender and gendered inequality is produced. Given the extent of gender inequality in the university, this erases the burdens of encumbrment and makes it more difficult for women to push back against these inequalities as they become increasingly hidden.

Nevertheless, there is evidence of an increasing value placed on feminised labour in some aspects of these submissions. This is produced through student comments which focus predominantly on the pastoral and emotional labour which academics perform. It is also produced through the universities' emphasis on a shift towards a parity of esteem between research and teaching which, again, values feminised skills and attributes that have been sidelined in other measurement apparatus. This has material effects in the opening up of routes of promotion for academics whose focus is predominantly pedagogical. There remains a question however, as to the extent to which these attributes can be valued on their own, or whether they are still tied to traditional academic identities, increasing the burden on staff who are now pulled between two potentially conflicting identities. Further, that these reward mechanisms are reliant on academics exhibiting particular behaviours, informed by the gaze of students, which guide the possibilities of academic conduct.

Chapter 10. Discussion

10.1. Introduction

The overall problem that this research aimed to address was the issue of persistent gendered inequalities amongst academic staff in UK universities. Through a Baradian theoretical lens, the measurement apparatuses which have become embedded in the neoliberal university were identified as tools which could produce gendered inequalities, through their intra-action with gender, university cultures, and increasingly neoliberal and managerial values in HE. Furthermore, the embedded nature of these measurement apparatuses renders their inclusionary and exclusionary effects increasingly hidden (Barad, 2007). The naturalisation of these measurement practices makes them critical to interrogate and disrupt. With this in mind, TEF - as a recently introduced measurement tool, the gendered effects of which had been under-analysed - was chosen to assess if or how it (re)produces gendered inequalities in the university. The research questions used to analyse the TEF data were: 1) What are the assumptions embedded in TEF and how is it being presented as an 'objective' measurement tool? 2) How is it constituting HE, including the university itself, teaching excellence, and the academic subject? 3) How is this constitution being produced in gendered ways? and 4) What is the effect of this constitution and how is it producing gendered inequalities?

10.2. Tying Together the Gendered Implications

The ways that TEF constitutes HE, teaching excellence and the academic subject were analysed in the preceding four chapters of this research and considered alongside the wealth of literature on gendered inequalities in the university. This analysis demonstrates a clear picture of the entangled phenomena which intra-act with TEF to embed and (re)produce gendered inequalities in research-intensive universities. The intra-action of all these processes constitutes gender: gendered subjects, gendered practices, and gendered inequalities. This research shows three core dimensions of the gendering process. First, that the TEF process itself represents a continued privileging of 'objective' measurement practices, embedding a notion of objectivity which feminists have shown to be deeply flawed (Barad, 2007; Haraway, 1991). Second, that what is brought into being through TEF (re)produces the devaluation of practices that have historically been in the feminised sphere (Kandiko Howson,

2018; Monroe et al, 2008; Morley, 1998; Watermeyer et al, 2020). Third, that the material effects of these practices homogenise universities through their narrow constitution of excellence, at the expense of a broader, more inclusive set of values. TEF excludes feminised practices and knowledges from spheres of excellence, and as a result, delegitimises them as valuable assets in HE spaces, with women bearing the brunt of cuts and university restructures in the name of progress towards these narrow goals. These aspects are entangled with the depiction of HE as a meritocratic space (Śliwa & Johansson, 2014) but where indicators of merit intra-act with gendered notions of prestige and value (Lund & Tienari, 2019). This (re)produce gendered inequalities under the guise of neutrality. The following section explores the three dimensions in further depth.

10.2.1. TEF embeds the privileging of 'objective' measurement practices

In answer to RQ1, 'What are the assumptions embedded in TEF and how is being presented as an 'objective' measurement tool?', the first way that the research demonstrates that TEF has a gendering effect is through the embedding of measurement practices which are assumed to provide objective assessments of teaching excellence. In doing so it continues to privilege 'objective' measurement practices. The embedding of measurement practices enacts what comes to 'matter' in the constitution of excellence (Barad, 2007), with that which is excluded, increasingly unthinkable. This is exemplified through the TEF metrics and the evidence used in the university submissions which is assumed to reflect an objective account of excellence. As with REF, and other problematised instruments, the assumption throughout the documentation is that the measurement process in TEF reflects something 'real' that we can uncover through these instruments. This implicitly assumes firstly that there is a 'objective' conception of teaching excellence which can be 'uncovered'; and secondly that if there were, the tools of measurement which constitute TEF are actually capturing the phenomena that they are assumed to be measuring, rather than measuring a proxy. However, because TEF is a performative apparatus, it produces what it is attempting to measure, embedding these proxies as *the* signifiers of excellence.

These practices connect to a bigger argument around the governmental project regarding HE and how it conceptualises the purpose of the university, and valuable knowledge. It centralises what it views as 'useful' or 'high-value' knowledge which can be

calculated through ‘evidence based’ and ‘objective’ tools and apparatus. Through the DfBIS Green (2015) and White (2011;2016) papers, high-value knowledge was shown to be that which can calculably contribute to the economy. This value is embedded in TEF, which only measures attributes of university provision that align with the wider neoliberal paradigm of HE.

An array of measurement practices are naturalised and embedded through TEF because so much of the data which informs the metrics are recycled, i.e., NSS, and HESA and DLHE data. As was shown in the latter three findings chapters (Chapters 7, 8 and 9), the provider submissions also intra-act with pre-existing measurement apparatuses which are centred to ‘objectively’ evidence their excellence, i.e., the NSS and other student survey tools, (global) league tables and awards, and REF. All three of these apparatuses have also been shown to embed gendered inequalities (Heffernan, 2021; Morley, 2016; Yarrow, 2018). These measurement tools are uncritically embedded into TEF, with even less information and context as to the specificity of their systems of metrification, or how they relate to *teaching* excellence. A prime example in this sample is the use of league tables as objective evidence of excellent teaching, with little contextual information regarding either the inputs which constitute these rankings – rendering their underlying priorities and assumptions invisible – or what aspects of teaching excellence they are supposed to relate to. In doing so, the submissions embed and enact these proxies of teaching excellence as teaching excellence itself. The privileging of these measurement practices and their positioning as objective and neutral instruments can be critiqued through feminist critiques of science and objectivity (Haraway, 1991). TEF embeds specific values and upholds them as common-sense and neutral, because what is being produced is hidden in increasingly naturalised tools.

Another key aspect of measurement which is positioned as objective and comes across throughout all of the findings chapters, is the use of student feedback, as a tool for measuring all aspects of university life, including the performance of academics. This situates the knowledge of the student in producing a conception of excellence as the most important. Without the use of other instruments which take into account other perspectives and bodies of knowledge - such as the experiences of academic themselves – the experience of the student is produced as the *only* measure of excellence that holds value.

A reliance on 'objective' measurement practices also embeds a quantitative bias, meaning only that which is easily quantified is measured, thus in TEF we see the centring of aspects of life such as high-value earnings over more 'subjective', difficult-to-measure aspects of life such as happiness or fulfilment. Both of these flaws in measurement apparatuses, the focus on the 'objective' and quantifiable, were seen throughout the rationalisation for TEF and the values that underpinned its design, having the effect of sidelining disciplines such as creativity and the arts, non-instrumental reasoning for learning, such as the acquiring of knowledge for its own sake, and areas of university activity which are difficult to calculate. Quantitative biases can be seen on a micro-level in other examples across these findings chapters, for example in the assumption that courses which are low-subscribed are innately less valuable than courses which are highly subscribed, rather than conceptualising these courses simply as providing specialist knowledge which may only have relevance in a particular field, but may nonetheless be highly valuable in that field. These embedded norms continue to be (re)produced through the centring of this kind of knowledge.

10.2.2. TEF (re)produces devalued feminised practices and spheres within the university

A second dimension of TEF's gendering process was ascertained through RQ2, 'How is TEF constituting higher education?' and RQ3, 'How is this constitution being produced in gendered ways?'. Namely, TEF's (re)production and continued devaluation of feminised practices and spheres. Despite TEF being introduced in part to shift universities' focus from research to teaching in an attempt to value practices that were devalued within HE, the way that TEF defines and measures teaching excellence reproduces the devaluation of the act of teaching, and in doing so devalues feminised practices and spheres. Therefore, TEF embeds gendered norms and gendered inequalities through the unequal stratification of, and value given to, gendered labour.

Since the 1970s, feminist scholars have argued that feminised work, labour which was traditionally and predominantly conducted by unwaged women in the private sphere, is undervalued in the marketplace (e.g., Bubeck, 1995; Hochschild, 2012a [1979]; Okin, 1989). Additionally, some have argued that the process of neoliberalisation has compounded this issue in two ways. Firstly, by producing an ideal individualised subject, who is competitive and modelled on masculinised conceptions of a flexible and unencumbered worker (Lynch, 2010).

Secondly, by obscuring the structural inequalities that underlie the image of universities as meritocratic sites (Acker, 1990).

This thesis has demonstrated that TEF (re)produces this gendered stratification of value. The data showed that TEF is underpinned by a set of neoliberal assumptions and values which situate HE as a private good, and a university education as an individual investment, with the assumption that students take an instrumentalist approach to their education. This framing led to TEF's centring of 'value for money', particularly in regard to employment outcomes and student satisfaction. Chapter 6 showed that these assumptions were embedded and (re)produced as 'truths' about the values, aims, and purpose of HE. These truths were then further embedded and enacted through what is measured in TEF, with these measurements and metrics (re)producing themselves as common-sense norms and values. In doing so, their part in gendering processes is rendered invisible.

The devaluation of feminised labour occurs not only through the TEF metrics themselves, but also through the Russell Group provider submissions. Shaped by the TEF framework, the submissions produce high-value employment as an idealised outcome, prioritise student satisfaction, and centre aspects of university life such as research impact and global prowess. In the breadth of discussion regarding university provisions which constitute universities' teaching mission, and consequently the attributes which come to constitute teaching excellence, what is neglected is detailed coverage of classroom teaching. Thus, the labour that is sidelined is the academic labour of teaching, lesson planning, student engagement and relationship building, feedback and marking, and all of the additional labour that is involved in undergraduate teaching. Thus, what is left hidden in the constitution of teaching excellence through the Russell Group submissions, is work that is feminised, through its association with social, emotional, and reproductive labour, and which is disproportionately conducted by and expected of women (Heijstra et al 2017; Lynch, 2010).

This is worsened when aspects of classroom teaching are occasionally discussed, whereby the labour is attributed to other groups. For example, the emphasis on the role of employers in teaching or shaping module design, with no mention of staff involvement. Similarly, students are shown as having more agency in shaping courses than the academic. The relational work between student and teacher in classroom teaching is also depicted as

being primarily derived from the input and labour of the student, with the academic's role in this process is obfuscated. Furthermore, where the academic subject is centred in regard to teaching, they are positioned as researcher first with teaching naturally assumed to follow. Thus, the act of teaching, and the additional labour involved in it, is subsumed into the labour of the researcher. Without extrapolating the skills needed for the various facets of each role, it is the feminised 'every-day' labour of the teacher which is lost, as the skills required to be perceived as an 'excellent' researcher are given priority and value. In the current paradigm, research excellence is also constituted through masculinised values, in terms of the types of knowledge which are judged to have impact, and through its production as a competitive venture which can be ranked with research 'winners and losers' (Morley, 2016). These values are (re)produced through the submissions which uphold these values as markers of institutional and individual prestige.

In the submissions, where the effect of feminised work is valued and its import highlighted, i.e. the support that students gain from pastoral provisions which was a major theme throughout the texts, the academic labour behind this role is sidelined and devalued. One of the ways this happens is through the differences in how contact time and research-led teaching are discussed. In the former, feminised labour, such as care, collaboration and social reproduction are not produced as embodied acts of labour. Instead, they are separated from the academic, and presumed to happen organically, rather than situated as the result of specific skills, labour, and expertise. The work that academics must put into these relations is rendered invisible. This is in direct contrast to the way masculinised skills such as research acumen are constituted, as an embodied and specialist skill. Highlighting tensions in the student-as-consumer model, the one area in which pastoral labour was embodied and valued was in submissions which included the direct accounts of students. Through the emphasis on the import of student bodies of knowledge, this could indicate an area in which a shift in values is starting to take place, as this is the labour which students come into contact with the most. However, it is crucial to not take this as an innocent practice, given the problematisation of student feedback (Heffernan, 2021), and its clear use by universities as a behaviour shaping mechanism, embedded into the tools which monitor staff conduct.

Relatedly, one aspect of the submissions which did convey a shift in values was the discussion of new promotional tracks for teaching. This is a real structural change in the

valuing and promoting of teaching, and the potential progression of women, and should be recognised. However, the lack of detail in the documents mean the tensions discussed above are not significantly overcome. For example, the emphasis placed on the importance of researchers also undertaking teaching work as an 'add on' to their function as a researcher undermines the importance and prestige of teaching-only promotional tracks and the specialist pedagogical skills they are intended to instil. The submissions themselves continue to produce the divisions in esteem. Additionally, promotional criteria were once again frequently informed by student feedback mechanisms.

Through the WPR framework, the data show that it is not just the types of labour conducted in the university whose value is (re)produced along gendered lines, but gendered notions of value are also replicated across disciplines and subject areas. Subjects that are most valued within the university intra-act with work that is considered as high-value outside the university, which is entangled with the higher valuation of masculinised attributes by wider society. Thus, masculinised work is considered as more prestigious and worthy of higher remuneration in the marketplace. This intra-acts with masculinised disciplines in the university which best serve these higher valued employment opportunities, devaluing other areas of study and research such as the arts and humanities. These subjects are devalued through the submissions as they are not constituted as part of an *economic* notion of value, and once again are areas where female academics are disproportionately situated. Similarly, in the discussions of research-led teaching, research reflecting masculinised disciplines such as STEM subjects is the most visible, whereas types of research conducted elsewhere are left unseen. This produces masculinised areas of research as legible at the expense of feminised areas.

In centring masculinised spheres and sidelining feminised spheres, and the erasure of labour conducted primarily by women, what is being valued and measured through TEF (re)produces the gendered devaluation of particular attributes and entrenches gendered hierarchies and inequalities, though the unequal valuation of types of labour. These assumptions are so firmly embedded into TEF's measurement apparatus and the assumptions which underpin what constitutes excellence in a Russell Group university, it means that gender is constituted within TEF's success criteria. TEF defines what 'excellent' teaching is, and is informed by societal gendered values which are also proliferated and reproduced

through the university. Therefore, the practice of counting what and who is 'excellent' in TEF is gendered. It is produced through the TEF metrics, designed by the government to service a wider set of aims and values regarding the place of HE in a masculinist neoliberal capitalist society. It is also produced through the Russell Group universities' accounts of themselves in their TEF submissions. Whilst the Russell Group are shown to have broadened their focus to align with these renewed priorities of government, through a centring of student satisfaction and student outcomes, what remains of the more traditional conceptions of excellence is focussed around research prestige. Both the old and the new centre historically gendered notions of excellence in academic work.

That TEF sidelines many aspects of teaching, despite it being a measure of teaching excellence, further hides its gendered effects, as academics positioned primarily in teaching roles are ostensibly being forefronted, but at the same time their labour is being separated from them. In Russell Group universities, the submissions also produce an additional workload, as their priorities are not *refocussed*, moving attention from research and onto teaching, but instead are widened, with academics expected to fulfil multiple roles with limited resources. This additional workload idealises the masculinised unencumbered worker with gendered effects (e.g. Ahmad, 2017; Baker 2012b; 2013; Maxwell et al, 2019; Wolfinger et al, 2008).

10.2.3. TEF produces the university as a homogenised site, further excluding diverse identities

The final dimension of TEF's gendering role – captured through RQ4 'What is the effect of this constitution and how is it producing gendered inequalities?' – is a narrowing of conceptions of what the university is for, and what counts as excellence within it. TEF is a boundary-making practice, and its narrow purview homogenises the higher educational space. The intra-action of this narrowed space with the gendered stratification of excellence and value, produces barriers to women excelling (or even entering) the organisation.

The limited aims and purpose of the university can be seen across the data set and aligns with the wider literature regarding the trajectory of HE under neoliberalism (e.g., Flemming, 2021; Giroux, 2020; Shore, 2008; Shore & Wright, 2015), situating the university as a private good and an increasingly managerial space. From the data we see that TEF is

producing a somewhat singular vision of the aims of HE, focussed on student satisfaction, outcomes and 'value for money', with a particular conception about how these phenomena themselves are constituted. The metrics themselves shape the behaviour of both institutions and their staff members to strive for a limited set of goals.

Moreover, TEF both produces and intra-acts with the wider competitive HE policy landscape. TEF, through its rankings systems and embedding of the ideological tenets of competition, produces institutions which can become coded as HE 'winners' and 'losers' (Morley, 2016). This materially effects the kinds of subjects, knowledge bases, and labour which are valued in the university and sidelines those which do not fit with this specific constitution of excellence. The mechanisms through which TEF shapes behaviour become all the more acute as the financial imperatives of being an HE 'winner' – outlined in Chapter 6 – become all the more important. This produces significant risks in non-conformity and the pursuit of other goals and visions, as they become no longer relevant to the constitution of teaching excellence.

TEF shapes the behaviour of both institutions and individual academics. The data showed universities' centring and promotion of tools of measurement and observation which make staff compliant to their wider goals, and to judge and shape individual academics' performance. This was demonstrated across Chapters 7 to 9. Chapter 7 highlighted the role of international league tables; Chapter 8, the REF and other indicators of individual research quality, and the NSS, and Chapter 9 internal mechanisms such as KPIs and performance review. Through embedding these practices, the submissions (re)constitute what it is to be an ideal academic, through mechanisms which have all been shown to have gendered effects due to their intra-action with the prestige economy, markers of excellence, perceptions of gendered norms, and encumberment.

In practice, the narrowing of the university's purpose and gendered conceptions of excellence in academia, and its intra-action with an increasingly defunded sector means the cutting of feminised courses and the sidelining of feminised knowledge which is marked as less valuable. The devaluation of this knowledge and labour hinders the progression of women through the university as their ability to embody excellent practice becomes illegible.

This also intra-acts with an increasingly casualised sector, whereby academics whose positions *are* in the lower echelons of the university are increasingly vulnerable in cutbacks.

The homogenisation of the sector has gendered implications for both male and female academics, as what is being produced as excellent practice is a specific kind of masculinisation, marked by competition, individualisation, and a business case for the university, as well as a focus on specific kinds of masculinised high-value work and knowledge-making practices within the university, harming anyone who does not fit into this model. However, the intra-action of perceptions of female academics as less easily embodying notions of excellence, as well as their pre-existing disparity at the lower echelons of the university alongside the discrepancy in male gatekeepers, in addition to gendered inequalities outside of the workplace, may make women feel this disparity in value even more acutely.

10.3. The University in Transition?

However, these three dimensions of the gendering process are not the only findings from the data set. The data demonstrates areas of tension between the TEF framework and the university submissions so that they do not produce one cohesive conception of the university or teaching excellence. The qualitative submissions had the potential to offer a broader view of teaching, rather than only that which can be counted. Analysing the submissions in depth has shown there to be some areas of tension between how the university and excellence is constituted in the submissions compared to the governmental framework, primarily through the submissions' centring of the import of research excellence, but also in touching on their civic responsibilities, and the skills that they equipped their students with outside of those aimed only at employability. Ultimately, the submissions produce a picture of the university which is in flux or a period of transition and echoes the literature that indicates that the reach of the new managerial project is incomplete (Clegg, 2008). Although managerialism is the overriding trajectory, it is not the only narrative which emerges.

10.3.1. TEF framework restrictions

The ability of TEF to shape conduct is part of how it embeds its values, and this is demonstrated in the homogeneity of the submissions. Although there was often an outlier in

each theme that was covered throughout the findings – universities that in the discussion of a particular topic would provide an *additional* mode of conduct, perspective, or approach (for example, the import of the local alongside the global) – ultimately, all the submissions produced a very similar picture of HE and teaching excellence overall. This was defined primarily by student satisfaction, employment opportunities, the availability of support, and in addition to what is valued through the metrics but was still homogenised throughout the submissions, research excellence. This exemplifies the limited range of responses which are produced when every institution follows the same (narrow) framework and set of indicators. All institutions emphasised the same key points, attributes, and evidence bases: as proudly research-intensive universities, mobilising their results in other pre-existing league tables, their REF results and wider research acumen, student satisfaction rates, physical resources, and their contributions to employability outcomes.

Due to the specificity of the TEF framework, there is very little space for individuality, differences between universities, specialisation, disruption of these indicators or a reimagining of how HE could be conceptualised. TEF constitutes a very particular set of norms which are embedded as neutral, naturalising a specific conception of HE and teaching excellence. This works to shape a singular image of the ‘ideal academic’ who fits into this specific arrangement: hitting all indicators, increasing employability and involved in more ‘employable high earning’ subjects, focused on economic value, and success in gendered tools such as REF. From the evidence presented in the literature review, we see how concepts such as the ideal worker, the masculinisation of neoliberal values, and the gendered organisation intra-acts with the specific gendered attributes of the value imbued onto the above priorities, to further entrench and embed gendered inequalities.

10.3.2. Statement of findings

Furthermore, one of the most notable aspects of analysing the TEF panel’s Statement of Findings alongside the submissions is the extent to which additional material that conveys teaching excellence in the submission is not taken into account by the panel. The information derived from the panel is limited, with under a page of information as to their decision, the majority of which is in bullet point form. The way their reports are phrased tend to be around whether the university has accounted for a particular result in a benchmark, rather than any

kind of holistic or overall view of the ethos and activities of the university. This means that if the qualitative information in a submission does not in some way relate to a TEF metric, it is discounted. The statements of findings show that information regarding the facets of teaching provision deemed to be outside the remit of the TEF metrics was not considered in the final panel decision. This produces not only a tension between the institutions and the framework, but also demonstrates the explicit controlling of what counts and what is foreclosed through the TEF mechanisms.

Interestingly, the topic that was centred the most in the statement of findings, which is not captured directly through the TEF metrics, was the emphasis on research-led teaching, which was commended in the majority of findings and linked directly to the constitution of teaching excellence. What was particularly noticeable as being left out of the statement of findings, was the discussion of the wider role of the university (such as its civic responsibility), and the skills universities equip students with outside of those directly related to employability. The information submitted by universities regarding their function as part of the local community or their role in contributing to wider social good is never mentioned as part of the panel's findings, as it is not interpreted as aligning with any of the benchmarks. Only once in the sample was credence given to the wider social values given to students through a university education. Although only a small sample of universities mentioned their EDI measures for staff, these were also not flagged by the TEF panel. Thus, it can be considered that these elements of the universities' role do not 'matter' in the constitution of teaching excellence, as ultimately, they are not included in the final verdict.

Given that these documents are in the public domain, the decisions made by the TEF panel provide an extra layer of behaviour-shaping mechanism, where it is clearly visible which behaviours and priorities are rewarded and which are not. This round of TEF has been the exemplar of the requirements of universities which get the highest award (and the actions of those who do not). Thus, as I will discuss in the section on further research (10.4.2.), this may have a compounding effect on shaping conduct in future iterations, with aspects of individualised pedagogy disregarded if they do not closely align with the measures of 'what counts', and universities left with an increasingly narrow set of priorities.

10.3.3. Exposing tensions between the metrics and the provider submissions

Although much of this data points to the TEF becoming wholly embedded in university systems – naturalising its underpinning logic and assumptions and obfuscating its productive effects – there was some evidence of direct resistance to the TEF. These included moments of explicit critique of the TEF metrics written into the submissions. King’s (P1) declared that their participation in the early rounds of TEF was in the hope that ‘currently unsatisfactory metrics should be reviewed and improved for the future’, and specifically that the weighting given to the universities’ provider submissions in the final TEF result should be increased, because of its ability to provide a rounded, contextualised picture, i.e. broadening what ‘matters’ in the constitution of excellence. They were joined in specific critique of the metrics by Bristol (P1) and LSE (P3). Overall, the key area of critique across the submissions was the problematisation of student satisfaction as the primary measure of teaching excellence. This critique was less concerned with student satisfaction as a measure in itself, but a problematising of it being the *only* measure of teaching excellence. It is worth noting, that these issues were also centred primarily when universities had failed to reach a benchmark which was based on NSS results and had to contextualise their results, rather than principled resistance – although there were fleeting glimpses of this occasionally. Despite this problematisation, ultimately all the submissions still produced student satisfaction and student voice as central in their operation at the expense of the academic.

10.4. TEF: A Disruption to Hierarchies?

One of the central reasons explicitly put forward by the government for the development of TEF was that it could serve as a tool for disruption. It should change the focus of universities, in particular universities which traditionally top league tables and whose entrenched reputation and research prowess was seen as a lack of motivation to adequately shift their priorities towards the student body (e.g., Grove, 2017; Bothwell, 2017). TEF’s focus on teaching was supposed to provide a mechanism to highlight how institutions with traditional prowess were still catering to fee-paying students and providing the appropriate skills and priorities which they would want to acquire from an institute of higher education in the 21st Century.

In a discussion paper released by the Higher Educational thinktank HEPI after the first suite of TEF results was released in 2017, there were allusions to the way in which TEF had

caused serious disruption, stating 'reaction to the TEF results has been mixed. With some Russell Group institutions receiving Silver and Bronze awards and other newer providers achieving Gold status, it is safe to say the TEF sent shockwaves through the UK higher education sector, testing assumptions of conventional hierarchies and ranking systems' (Beech, 2017:11). However, the data collected in this thesis, which focussed specifically on the Russell Group, did not display a seismic shift from within the institutions. Whilst all Russell Group universities may not have received a gold award, their key foci and the exemplifications of excellence were very similar to embedded notions of prestige and excellence, albeit also shaped around the 'newer' shift towards student satisfaction and experience. These 'traditional' attributes of prestige, in particular research excellence, *were* also recognised by the TEF panel, validating their role in the constitution of teaching excellence.

Given that the TEF metrics were drawn from pre-existing data, such as the NSS, which is also a data source used in assembling many UK university league tables, these metrics were already entangled in the positioning of universities before TEF was actioned. In fact, all the universities used one or more of their standings in league tables, or the research-oriented REF, to bolster their position in the qualitative TEF submissions. This demonstrates the extent to which all of these indicators or touchstones of prestige are embedded and entangled, with each feeding into another either through the literal recycling of data, or through their mobilisation as unquestionable signifiers of excellence. This was no different in TEF. Rather than serving as a disruptor, the TEF metrics themselves appear to entrench and consolidate current norms of the neoliberal purpose of HE, and the Russell Group submissions continue to (re)produce historic and gendered signifiers of excellence within academia.

Furthermore, studying the impact of the university submissions on the final TEF award raised an interesting question as to whether TEF was disrupting entrenched hierarchies of prestige. There were a total of eight Russell Group universities which were upgraded to a higher award due to the impact of their submission. Birmingham, Imperial, Leeds, Newcastle, and Nottingham were all upgraded from a silver to a gold award. Bristol, King's, and UCL were upgraded from bronze to silver. This was eight of a total of thirty-three institutions which were upgraded (one further non-Russell Group university had its grade downgraded, making a total of 34), almost a quarter of submissions whose results were amended based on their

submissions (Beech, 2017), despite the Russell Group comprising under a tenth of total submissions.

There are two ways that the effect of impact of the universities' submissions could be assessed. The first pertains to one of the key points of this thesis and wider work done around quantitative tools, that they are a blunt instrument, only able to count what is countable and rendering all other qualities invisible. Thus, the weight given to the submissions which were able to 'account' for their results is not inconsequential. The second is that it is potentially historic indicators of prestige which hold the most weight in university submissions. The Russell Group Universities accounted for 15% of TEF submissions but made up 24% of those which were upgraded on the basis of their submissions, making them more likely to be upgraded than non-Russell Group universities. This would indicate that the Russell Group are at an advantage in the upgrading process, which negates some of the ideas around the wider shake-up of HE. Whether this is linked to the extent of 'excellent' teaching in these institutions or not, it shows that their central focuses and measures of prestige are still rewarded, and that these norms are not being upended in the way which was envisaged in the policy documents.

In terms of how this effects gendered inequalities, the effect of the university submissions highlights the import of qualitative accounts to expand what is valued in a way that these metrics cannot capture, *and* that there is a mechanism within TEF which takes this into account. On the other hand, given that in this sample the TEF panel's statement of findings still did not account for labour or practices that in some way could be linked to the metrics, blunts the power of these tools overall for producing a more inclusive notion of excellence. Furthermore, given that gendered hierarchies in the prestige economy are more acute in research-intensive universities, the evidence that these historic signifiers are being rewarded in this framework only serves to (re)produce their import through TEF.

10.5. TEF Metrics Producing Behavioural Changes.

Given these tensions, the question remains, for the current (2023) and future iterations of TEF, whether these priorities to achieve a gold award will be further and further embedded. Indeed, after TEF2, think-pieces have been put together for universities in writing

up their next round of submissions (e.g., Higher Education Academy, 2017). There were even a couple of examples from within these submissions of explicit statements regarding TEF as now informing practice. Birmingham (P2) declared that: ‘the TEF data are helpful in further refining our strategy as they provide more detailed information upon which we can act’, and York (P1) made amendments to make sure that they did improve their TEF result: ‘One year since we were awarded silver, we re-enter institution level TEF with improved metrics and compelling evidence of how we support, evaluate and **improve** the student experience.’ Section 11.4.2. in the following chapter addresses the further research that could be conducted to assess the impact of TEF as it becomes an increasingly naturalised tool of performance management.

10.6. Conclusion

This research found that TEF aligns with similar tools of measurement which have been rolled out in the neoliberal university. TEF focusses on a particular set of masculinised behaviours and values and renders other values almost invisible, so that they no longer count in the constitution of excellent teaching. These values run along gendered lines, making it difficult for women to embody these naturalised conceptions of excellence. These findings did, however, also add to the literature that the new managerialism project may not be entirely complete, with moments of resistance and alternate narratives becoming clear throughout the submissions. It also showed that there were new subjectivities emerging from this paradigm, which may open up new legitimised roles in academia centred around the teacher and feminised labour in the university. However, this is being constituted in a specific way – catering to the servicing of the student, with the labour behind the role remaining devalued. The following and final chapter will take these findings and show what they mean for the research questions, as well as outlining the limitations of this research and areas for further study.

Chapter 11. Conclusion

11.1. Introduction

The thesis started by demonstrating the extent of gendered inequalities amongst academic staff in the university. Chapter 2 outlined the wider socio-political context of the neoliberal university and of gendered inequalities. Chapter 3 went on to discuss how gendered inequalities in HE had been examined in feminist scholarship and highlighted how the neoliberalisation of the university, its values, and the rise in audit culture intra-acted with these inequalities. Chapter 4 outlined the metaphysical framework of Baradian agential realism and showed how this lens reveals the productive nature of material-discursive instruments such as TEF. The foregrounding of the constitutive role of measurement practices, allowed for deeper analysis of their role in the production of gender and gendered inequalities in the university. Chapter 5 proposed an in-depth study of the TEF, as a recently-introduced measurement framework in the neoliberal university, to analyse its productive effects on gender and gendered inequalities. In particular, the research focussed on the Russell Group qualitative submissions, documents in which the universities (re)produced themselves, shaped by the measurement restrictions of TEF. Chapter 6 demonstrated through an analysis of government policy documents that TEF was not an objective tool of measurement, was produced through neoliberal values and assumptions, and embedded these assumptions into its measurement apparatus. Chapters 7 to 9 showed how TEF in turn embeds and enacts these values and assumptions across three key aspects of the university. Chapter 7 assessed how the submissions produced the aims, values and priorities of HE; Chapter 8, how they constituted teaching excellence; and Chapter 9 how they constituted the academic subject. Each of these chapters showed how TEF intra-acts with gender in particular ways, with all three aspects – university values, teaching excellence, and the academic subject – entangled with each other. Chapter 10 analysed these entanglements by highlighting TEF's production of three dimensions of gendered inequalities: 1) the privileging of 'objective' measurement practices, making them both easier to embed and harder to disrupt; 2) the devaluing of feminised practices and spheres, continuing to undervalue work where women are disproportionately situated; 3) the homogenising of HE spaces, excluding or marginalising

a wider array of identities and knowledges. These three issues are deeply intertwined and intra-act to produce material inequality for women in the academy.

11.2. Conclusions in answer to the Research Questions

In this section I provide some concluding comments by providing answers to each of the four research questions that guided my study. This is followed by a section explicating the theoretical, contextual, methodological, and pedagogical contributions of my research.

11.2.1. RQ1: What are the assumptions embedded in TEF and how is it being presented as an objective measurement tool?

This research has shown that TEF is not a neutral instrument – the innocent means of measuring ‘teaching excellence’ that it is assumed to be. It was introduced during a great shift in HE, not only nationally but internationally, which was marked by an assumption that HE is an individual rather than a public good. As part of this shift the burden of university funding was passed in the main to the student, situating them as a consumer of a university education. This made universities more directly accountable to the student – who carried most of the financial burden – and the taxpayer – who was now paying for a good which was ‘individualised’. TEF firmly embedded these assumptions, constituting teaching excellence in terms of student satisfaction and positive *outcomes* for the student body. ‘Outcomes’ is also value-laden, whereby ‘excellent outcomes’ is constituted in terms of swift and high (economic) value employment, at the expense of alternative outcomes which would value other ways of thinking, doing, and being. The ‘cuts’ (Barad, 2007) that are made in the design of this apparatus are not acknowledged, instead they are assumed to be neutral whilst alternate conceptions of excellence are rendered invisible.

11.2.2. RQ2: How is TEF constituting higher education?

The study has also demonstrated how TEF constitutes HE in particular ways. The first is that TEF situates universities as competitive businesses competing for funds on the world stage. This constitutes universities as profit-maximisers and as key contributors to local and national economies. Through these (global) comparisons, TEF has the effect of homogenising the sector around specific comparable goals, leaving far less room for a diverse sector as

outliers are reputationally, and therefore financially, punished. These comparisons also constitute the possibility of “winners” and “losers” in the HE sphere.

The second aspect is the constitution of a university education as an individual pursuit catering to positive economic outcomes for the student. Thus, the legibility of an excellent university education is necessarily entangled with this constitution. In doing so it centres material resources, *access* to staff support, and student outcomes, all conceptualised as student’s ‘value for money’. Additionally, all aspects of university provision are primarily measured through their relation to student satisfaction. TEF therefore produces an enfolding of student experience and student voice into the key processes and practices of the university to cater to this specific measure of excellence. Furthermore, in producing the student-as-consumer, the university becomes the agentic force providing the product, of which the academic is a part. Thus, we observe the normalisation of behaviour management tools, such as KPIs, to coerce staff into prioritising these goals, as well as an emphasis on these tools as a way for universities to demonstrate they are “taking action” – ultimately casting the academic as “the problem”.

Finally, TEF constitutes the university as a vehicle for employment. My study shows that, in the Russell Group, this has led to the requirement of employability as core to the curriculum, marginalising academics and academic expertise. This is produced through the invisibility of academic labour in key processes such as module design, the centring of employers, and the situating of all elements of university provision through the lens of how they contribute to employability. At the same time, this marginalises the university as a site of knowledge production, and the value of HE as a good in and of itself.

There were, however, tensions between the submissions and the rest of the TEF framework. The submissions, in outlining additional facets of university provision outside of that directly measured by the TEF metrics, broadened what constitutes excellence in HE, such as their role as a civic institution and the import of research acumen. This indicates that Russell Group universities, rather than having undergone a wholesale shift to neoliberal values, are instead undergoing a period of transition. There is evidence of new language, concepts, goals, and priorities but alongside the continuation of older values. Problematising the ways the university is constituted through both new and old values is still critical, as

gendered inequalities were and are persistent in both, but the submissions indicated a stronger sense of resistance to wholesale enfolding of neoliberal values than is suggested in much of the literature.

11.2.3. RQ3: How is this constitution being produced in gendered ways?

TEF frames the university in a narrow way, with its limited measurement practices and definitions of excellence intra-acting with existing exclusionary, gendered practices in HE and the broader knowledge economy. This mechanism tends to marginalise and undervalue forms of labour more often associated with women, such as care work, emotional labour, and academic administration. This undermines “feminised” labour, which the submissions implicitly demonstrate is crucial to the student experience but is still not emphasised in definitions and measures of excellence. Additionally, when this labour was referred to, it was not embodied. TEF also sidelines and devalues subjects in which women are disproportionately situated. In focussing on high-value employment, subjects such as STEM are emphasised, whilst the arts and humanities are given little coverage.

The reliance on student feedback mechanisms also has gendered effects, as these tools intra-act with gendered conceptions of excellence, normative gendered behaviours, and pre-existing value systems around what excellence teaching “is”. The use of these measurement instruments has been shown to have poor outcomes for women. Throughout the TEF metrics and the university submissions, it is demonstrated that these mechanisms have become increasingly uncritically embedded and are being used to inform processes and practices throughout the university, such as evidence needed for promotion, or the KPIs of individual academics.

11.2.4. RQ4: What is the effect of this constitution and how is it producing gendered inequalities?

The narrow constitution of excellence has tangible effects on the lives of female academics, particularly in an environment where academics are responsabilised through blunt quantitative measurement practices. In a paradigm which emphasises economic efficiency, and is shaped by risk, this leads to the erasure of that which is seen as ‘low-value’. This is apparent in cuts to modules where female academics are disproportionately represented,

such as the arts and humanities. As well as devaluing feminised labour, due to the continued production of student-as-consumer, at worst, TEF also defines this labour as a resource to be used by the student, increasing demand with little recognition for its effects on the person, or support for its facilitation. Given that a demanding and inflexible workload is already seen to be a factor in limiting women's progression, especially as it intra-acts with more demanding unpaid workloads outside of the university, this could be extremely detrimental to women's progression through the university hierarchy.

11.3. Contributions, Advancements and Implications

11.3.1. Theoretical Contribution

The shifting landscape of HE, combined with the rise of neoliberal measurement practices and stalled progress on gender equality, necessitates innovative theoretical approaches to understanding gendered inequalities in academia. This study advances our theoretical understanding of these inequalities by applying a feminist agential realist lens, which reconceptualises measurement practices as performative material-discursive apparatuses with constitutive effects. By applying agential realism in this research, TEF is not understood as a neutral or passive assessment tool but as a productive boundary-making practice that constitutes phenomena such as institutional values, academic identities, and hierarchies within universities, necessarily with exclusionary effects.

By illuminating the ways TEF intra-acts with wider phenomenon that constitute gender, this research demonstrates that TEF itself co-constitutes gender and gendered inequalities. The cuts that it makes in the specificity of its measurements reinforce the devaluation of feminised practices, in turn contributing to the devaluation of particular gendered academic identities.

Thus, this theoretical lens has underlined the pivotal role played by measurement apparatuses in the constitution of gendered inequalities and the complex entanglements that prevent us from easily identifying or disrupting their effects. This perspective advances the field by underscoring the dangers of perceived neutrality in measurement and assessment frameworks in HE and beyond. It has demonstrated the import of research which foregrounds measurement apparatuses as *constitutive* of phenomena, and shown how agential realism

offers a framework for critiquing institutional practices, as well as highlighting our role in providing accounts for their disruption. Consequently, future iterations of TEF, along with other forms of academic audit, must be critically examined in this light.

Additionally, in the underlining of a Baradian ethos (and their drawing upon Haraway) the research has advocated for a diffractive reading of feminist texts when addressing these issues. This approach recognises how insights generated from decades of feminist research help to understand the entanglement of phenomena intra-acting with TEF and iteratively co-constituting inequalities. Whilst accepting that not all tensions can be resolved, this research builds on decades of feminist thought and considers their usefulness through an evolving onto-epistemological lens, encouraging researchers to take these insights of the material *and* the discursive to think about their mutual constitution, rather than discarding insights in the name of a wholly new paradigm.

11.3.2. Contextual Contribution

This study offers a contextual contribution by providing a critical analysis of TEF within the landscape of the neoliberal university, revealing how it reinforces and reproduces gendered inequalities despite its surface neutrality. It is the first in-depth study to examine how TEF contributes to the (re)production of gendered inequalities in HE.

By examining TEF's metrics, policies, and institutional submissions, this research highlights how ostensibly objective measures of teaching excellence are embedded in, and reinforce, a narrow, market-driven definition of educational value. The findings add to existing knowledge by demonstrating that TEF represents a continued privileging of 'objective' measurement practices, which feminist scholars have argued to be deeply flawed; that TEF (re)produces the devaluation of practices that have historically been feminised; and finally, that the material effects of these practices reinforce patriarchal norms, by homogenising spaces where knowledge is made at the expense of a more inclusive set of values and identities. In doing so, this research deepens our understanding of how specific institutional policies and measurement frameworks contribute to persistent gender inequalities in higher education.

Further, the research challenged not only the concept of an objective definition of excellence but also the assumption that it is possible to obtain an 'accurate' measurement of

any chosen definition. This research has demonstrated how TEF, as an instrument of measurement, does just this, defining teaching excellence in a universal, abstract, decontextualised way, and then relying on measurements which are considered to represent rather than constitute that which is measured. This contextual insight into TEF's role contributes to ongoing discussions in HE policy by underscoring the need for more inclusive recognition of the diverse contributions of academic staff, the need to critique future reform and policy for its unintended constitutive effects, and to make clear the cuts which measurement apparatus necessarily make.

However, as outlined in 10.3., although TEF is helping to constitute gendered inequalities through these processes, there were counter-narratives against the core values and aims of TEF which ran throughout universities' accounts of their own practices. Although TEF did not account for these alternate conceptions of excellence in HE, as seen in the TEF panel's devaluing of these contributions, these open up pivotal spaces for counter-narratives and alternate practices to emerge. It demonstrated that there is still room for disruption, and that the literature which indicates a fundamental take-over of neoliberal values should take heed, providing an optimistic call to researchers who aim to disrupt these narratives. Through an agential realist lens, keeping these spaces open to provide an alternate account to make different differences matter is crucial.

11.3.3. Methodological Contribution

Agential realism, though increasingly influential over the past decade, remains a relatively new theoretical lens, prompting researchers to adapt analytical tools for a shifting understanding of materiality. This research makes a methodological advancement by presenting an adapted version of Bacchi's WPR analytic framework to widen our understanding of the constitutive nature of policy and practice through an agential realist lens. By combining agential realism's focus on the constitutive role of measurement apparatuses with WPR's problematisation framework, this thesis introduces a novel method for analysing how policy instruments such as TEF are both constituted by and are constitutive of wider phenomena in their socio-political context. Employing Barad's concept of intra-action, the research enhances WPR's analytical scope, showing how tools such as TEF are not only constituting problems, but materialising specific realities through how policy problems and solutions are measured and documented.

Thus, this contribution offers a tool for researchers and policy-makers aiming to critically examine the performative effects of policy agendas and their interlinked measurement practices.

11.3.4. Pedagogical Contribution

As discussed in Chapter 4, Haraway (1991; 2016) and other feminist researchers (Barad, 2007; Suchman, 2007a; 2007b) stress the importance of the stories we tell as part of our research. If we think about the import of differing accounts then we can conceptualise research as having a tangible effect on how we think about the world, which in turn affects the way that we make it and offers up a wider array of possibilities for being and ‘becoming with’ the world (Haraway, 2016:12). Thus, the very act of doing this research, problematising the issues and posed solutions, is itself an intervention and as such can be viewed as feminist praxis. Suchman (2007a; 2007b) tells us that the act of telling a different story is not just about altering our semiotics, it is an ontological intervention. It changes how people think and then what they do. As she states, ‘feminist research practices are marked by the joining of rigorous critique with a commitment to transformative intervention’ (Suchman, 2007a:152).

By questioning dominant narratives and exploring alternative perspectives, we can become more aware of the ways that dominant narratives shape our lives and how they are shaped by historical and cultural contingencies. Similarly, in this piece I hope that by telling this story it has disrupted the naturalisation of tools which have arisen through political and cultural conceptions of ‘excellence’ and has allowed for a deeper understanding of the assumptions upon which they come to be, for a fuller interrogation of their negative effects, but also that this process opens up the possibilities for thinking about how things ‘could be’.

As Barad (2007:178) puts it: ‘particular possibilities for (intra-)acting exist at every moment, and these changing possibilities entail an ethical obligation to intra-act responsibly in the world’s becoming, to contest and rework what matters and what is excluded from mattering’. In conducting this research, and centring the import of gendered inequalities, this research serves as a productive tool in bringing this issue to the fore.

11.4. Limitations, reflections, and further research

11.4.1. Limitations and personal reflections on the study

Much of this research was conducted during the Covid-19 pandemic. Although I was fortunate that the research design of the project mitigated some of the potential impact of Covid restrictions on the research itself – no human subjects, or equipment that I could not access – it is without doubt that the pandemic and associated lockdowns shaped how this research came into being. I learnt a lot about my place as a researcher and the limitations of academic work which was, for a time, individualised, lacking in conversations in offices or hallways, testing arguments, or general discussions about the subject with friends and colleagues. For me, research is always part of a wider conversation, and I am hopeful that now this research can now contribute as a small part of this conversation.

Conceptually, in using Barad, the research itself was also configured as a material-discursive practice, which was boundary-making because of its own assumptions, values, and commitments, and the cuts that I made in choosing the sample, collecting the data, analysing the data and organising it in the form of a thesis. This process also had performative effects in bringing into being a specific conceptualisation and materialisation of the TEF and gendered inequalities in HE in this study, which is important to recognise.

Many of the limitations of this research lie in the scope of the project. The following section outlines some avenues for further research, which were untenable due to the limited scope of this project, as well as the timing with only one major set of outcomes of TEF having been performed (i.e., the four-year window). Certainly, one of the key limitations is the lack of longitudinal data, inevitable when researching a framework which is so much in its infancy.

The scope only made it possible to interrogate a small sample of universities. The justification for focussing on solely the Russell Group was outlined in the methodology and was intended to provide a particular account of the tensions between research and teaching and how this intra-acts with the constitution of excellence, and gendered inequalities. However, by definition, because of their particular situation it may not be generalisable to all other UK universities. I would hypothesise that, in particular, academics situated in the post-1992 universities which were already associated with more with teaching, may have a different experience of TEF.

11.4.2. Possibilities for further research

Due to these limitations, there are multiple opportunities to further this research. The first is to carry out a study on a broader selection of universities to ascertain how different differences are produced in Russell Group universities compared to non-Russell Group institutions. As well as different ‘types’ of university, there are various other modes of comparison which could be usefully examined but were not addressed in this research due to the sample size. For example, a comparison of a selection of universities who received each of the awards across gold, silver and bronze, to determine the extent to which their outputs and the way in which they were produced through their submissions differed according to grade.

This leads on to the other piece of research which will be crucial to conduct in the future, which is a longitudinal study of TEF. As discussed, the most recent awards were released in October of 2023 as this thesis was being finalised. A longitudinal study comparing the 2017-19 rounds to the 2023 round – and beyond – could highlight some useful data about the trajectory of HE and demonstrate which aspects of TEF have been most embedded. In particular, whether universities have (re)produced themselves and their submissions in differing ways, especially after it has been demonstrated what was rewarded in previous iterations of TEF.

Coupling this with performative interviews with staff inside institutions about changes that have taken place in the university between TEF periods and the way in which TEF as an instrument of measurement is presented to them would also be fascinating. In anecdotal conversations during the course of presenting this research in a Russell Group university, many staff were unaware of exactly what TEF purports to do, what it measures, and how it works in practice. Whether this is and remains the case would be interesting to discover in order to establish the extent to which TEF makes itself explicitly known to or is centralised to academics’ sense of being, in the way that REF has been shown to do.

11.5. Overall Conclusion

This research built on the vast body of feminist literature critiquing gendered ‘objective’ knowledge-making practices. It provided an interrogation of TEF with a view to understanding how its inclusionary and exclusionary effects intra-act with pre-existing

inequalities in the university to (re)produce gendered subjects and gendered inequalities within the university. The research showed three dimensions of the gendering process. First, that the TEF process itself represents a continued privileging of 'objective' measurement techniques, which intra-act with normative value systems and the gendered constitution of excellence. Second, that what is brought into being through TEF is the (re)constitution of the devaluation of practices and that have historically been in the feminised sphere. Finally, that the material effects of these practices reinforce patriarchal norms, homogenising spaces where knowledge is made at the expense of a broader, more inclusive set of values, excluding feminised practices and knowledges from these spaces. As Bacchi and Eveline (2010:4) argue, policies are necessarily '*gendering practices*', and this research has demonstrated that these kinds of policy instruments must always be interrogated to determine the value systems upon which they are built, the effects which they produce, and at whose expense.

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Appendix A: References for the Data Set

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Appendix B: Example of a data collection analysis sheet, University of Cambridge TEF submission

Questioning the Data: Carol Bacchi and Problematization or What is the Problem Represented to be (WPR)?

Teaching Excellence Framework: Year Two, Statement of Findings: **University of Cambridge**

Provider Submission, available at: https://apps.officeforstudents.org.uk/tefoutcomes2019/docs/submissions/Submission_10007788.pdf

Statement of Findings, available at: https://apps.officeforstudents.org.uk/tefoutcomes2019/docs/statements/Statement_10007788.pdf

Result: **Gold Award**

	What is the problem represented to be? / (What is the virtue represented to be?)	What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation?	How is it being defined and measured?	What effects are produced by this representation?	How are subjects constituted within it?	Who is likely to benefit from this representation?	What is left unproblematic in this representation?	How would responses differ if the 'problem' were thought about differently?	Notes/ gendered link
Provider Submission									
'In 2016, Cambridge topped the Times Higher Education's 'Table of Tables', which is based on the combined results of the UK's three main domestic	Standings in various league tables can be used as a proxy to show excellent teaching. These can be presented as evidence against the policy gap that students as consumers are	Current understandings or hierarchies are a proxy measure of 'excellent' teaching specifically. Also entrenches the sense of	Quantitative league tables: Times Higher Education; Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide; Academic Rankings of	Entrenching of norms and traditional hierarchies. 'Teaching' in and of itself can be represented by quantitative data, and data which is	Entrenchment of norms and traditions, means an entrenchment of the academic subject with its current priorities. The variation in	Those who are contributing to these quantitative gains, researchers, and those whose work is already most valued. Institutions that do well from	Any kind of disruption or interrogation of the effectiveness of current systems of measurement and ranking. Whether these serve as	The kinds of labour which might be included. A different way about thinking about what 'teaching' and 'pedagogy is. Is there more which is not	Invisible labour and attributes of teaching which are not captured here, link explicitly to work conducted on gendered labour. The value in the tables

<p>university rankings, for the fifth consecutive year.' (p1)</p> <p><i>'The Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide 2017</i> ranked Cambridge first in the UK for 'services and 'facilities spend'. (P6)</p> <p>'[Research] is consistently placed in the top five in the Academic Ranking of World Universities and QS and <i>Times higher Education World University Rankings</i>.' (P9)</p> <p><i>The Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide for 2017</i> placed Cambridge first</p>	<p>not feeling an equal weighting on teaching quality.</p>	<p>competition between universities - inherently winners and losers.</p>	<p>World Universities; QS and Times Higher Education World University Rankings.</p>	<p>assessing things such as 'spending' and 'research'.</p>	<p>league table priorities potentially also adds to the juggling and uptake of work which requires flexibility and a lack of encumbermen t. League tables as inherently quantitative, and so pushes staff to be target-hitters (and renders other work irrelevant).</p> <p>Many of these league tables also link to the concept of 'world-leading' which also adds to the flexible, global academic.</p>	<p>existing measurements and traditions. Old ideas, traditional hierarchy.</p> <p>'Spend' is interesting, as this forms a loop of those universities who are already able to spend more on facilities - links back to justifying monetary value from education.</p>	<p>a proxy for teaching specifically. What is left out of these kinds of quantitative measuring instruments, and then specifically whose work, labour, and identities may be being left out.</p>	<p>being captured, where one needs to be in the classroom to provide a qualitative account. Unseen or hidden labour which could be promoted?</p> <p>A decentring of traditional value systems, e.g. focus on research.</p>	<p>themselves and competition is macho capitalism.</p> <p>Placement of these is interesting here. At the start of the second paragraph as a framing device, and then throughout. This has been given priority placement in the report. Inherently sets up the meaning that the panel should take from these ratings in a report which is ostensibly about teaching.</p>
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<p>in the UK for degree completion for the third year running.' (P11)</p> <p>'The university consistently ranks in the top three in the <i>Times Higher Education Supplement's</i> Global Employability University ranking...' (P12)</p> <p>'The new QS Graduate Employability Rankings also placed Cambridge top in Europe and fourth in the world.' (P12)</p>									
<p>'The university is sector-leading not only due to its world-class research and outstanding resources, but</p>	<p>That to be world-leading is to be the best, that institutions should be thinking about global reach.</p>	<p>Again, that competition globally is an inherent good. Linking 'world-class' research to an inherent</p>	<p>Spending, quantity and quality of resources, extent of profile (which contextually is</p>	<p>Emphasising money and competition. Focus on the global again creates a particular</p>	<p>As a researcher first and foremost. As competitors. As flexible and</p>	<p>Those who are more likely to fit this profile. Research which is most valued. Those who are able to be</p>	<p>That there is an explicit link between research prowess and teaching acumen. Who</p>	<p>A delinking between teaching and research as inherently reinforcing. Thinking</p>	<p>Gender and impact of 'global reach'.</p>

<p>also due to the way these are used to enhance the University's learning and teaching provision.' (P1)</p> <p>'The Collegiate University's resources are world-leading' (P6)</p> <p>'Cambridge University has a strong research profile worldwide' (P9)</p>	<p>Often link to research when talking about the global/world-class, implication that 'world-class' researchers make the best teachers -there would be a problem if they did not possess this particular world-beating set of skills.</p>	<p>good for teaching.</p>	<p>backed up by positions in quantitative league tables.</p>	<p>image of unencumbered and flexible academics. In the context of a document about teaching, that the perfect researcher looks the same as the perfect teacher.</p>	<p>unencumbered.</p>	<p>competitive, perform well in research frameworks (e.g. REF) Are more flexible, unencumbered and able to travel - to show global impact/reach.</p>	<p>fits the bill of being a 'world-leader' particular image, and in practice this works in favour of those who have fewer commitments outside of university - gendered.</p>	<p>about the ways that impact happens locally. Working together rather than competitiveness.</p>	
<p>'Students are consistently and frequently engaged with developments from the forefront of research and scholarship, and have numerous opportunities to get involved in research activities.' (P1)</p>	<p>Linking of research and excellent teaching/pedagogy as a proxy. Again expectation that this is the solution to 'problem' of balance in focus on fee-paying students.</p>	<p>That research has to play a part in teaching and that this must trickle down (and can trickle down effectively).</p>	<p>Based on 'opportunities' and implicitly how many acclaimed research scholars there are teaching to produce contact and engagement.</p>	<p>A centring of the research in teaching, both in the university, but also linking teaching and research together as necessarily the best approach and as a teaching proxy.</p>	<p>Centring on the value of the researcher. Strangely this does cast it as 'research' rather than 'researcher', the person is sidelined here. Especially given they are presumably providing the</p>	<p>Once again those who already excel in research which is valued and at 'the forefront'.</p>	<p>What is the labour that is put into providing opportunities?</p>	<p>researchers vs research? This is actually different from the maj. of submissions as this is framed as an additional, rather than purely research-led teaching.</p>	<p>In these examples research is situated differently to many of the submissions - research as almost additional rather than research before teaching, or as an innately standing in for</p>

					opportunities. What labour is involved in thinking about ways to involve students - work involved in this positionality?				excellent teaching/ pedagogy.
'Courses are rigorous and intellectually challenging, helping students acquire knowledge, skills, and understanding that are highly valued by employers '. (P1)	Implicit that some university education will not equip students with skills that employers would want. Here these skills are all centred around being purposely designed for employment.	University education is for employability, but here that is not solely the remit, that is an effect.	(Not explicit with this quote) Flags on post university employment/education. Employer league tables.	That university education must cater to the purposes of employment.	Situating academics as needing to provide a particular set of skills, ones that will track with employment in our current paradigm.	Subject areas that naturally link to the areas that are valued by employers/ current society.	What is left undervalued in this model? Knowledge that doesn't immediately get into a remunerated job, the arts vs the sciences? Centring employment as opposed to furthering knowledge etc.	Other skills that can be gained from universities. This would also have knock-on effect on the valuation of particular subjects. Other roles that academics can provide not just to serve employers.	Subject areas that are undervalued/ less 'employable' tend to be where female staff are situated.
'The university achieves consistently outstanding outcomes for	Thinking about EDI in terms of students. Focussing on gender, disability,	EDI is important, there are ways of succeeding for all.	Through students only quantitative measures through flags.	The university as a level playing-field. A benevolent institution.	Academics as equal. Academics as support staff,	Students, especially monetarily. The University in terms of	Academics role in facilitator, and the extent to which this is	University as responsible for students <i>and</i> staff. Role of academics	training <i>for</i> staff in terms of guiding students, but nothing on staff

<p>students from all its backgrounds...[with] additional flags in 'employment' for BME students and students with disabilities' (P1)</p> <p>EDI for students (Pg13-15) colleges support for female students (P14) bursaries for students from low incomes (P14) 'Pastoral support provided through the College tutorial system' - also passive (P14)</p> <p>Counselling service, and strategy for student wellbeing (P14)</p> <p>Disability Resource Centre</p>	<p>socio-economics. Various measures of support listed, and done so throughout the document (rather than an offhand)</p>	<p>BUT this is all about students and not staff - assumption that staff are a non-issue.</p>	<p>Monetary measures (bursaries) Systems that are in place e.g. tutoring system, mental health services.</p>	<p>The invisibility of staff- both in terms of how the university caters to them, but also the additional workload? A mention of facilitation in a specific scenario, but not in terms of the tutoring.</p>	<p>pastoral workers etc.</p>	<p>reputation. Perhaps this does increase recognition of the importance of the issue, but still a lack of representation of those doing the work.</p>	<p>recognised. University's duty to its staff.</p>	<p>centred and rewarded in terms of their work on these issues.</p>	<p>EDI, except the final mention of Athena SWAN (see below)</p> <p>There is also mention of <i>support</i> for staff doing pastoral work in Aspergers example, so a hint at facilitation in this work. But, pastoral work being done by tutors - importance recognised in the document, does it go further?</p>
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<p>which also 'runs courses for academic staff on teaching disabled students.' (P14)</p> <p>'The DRC has a highly effective programme of support for students with Asperger's Syndrome and for the staff supporting them.' (P15)</p>									
<p>'The General Board, Council, and all Faculty Boards have elected student representatives, ensuring students are involved in the University's decision making at the highest levels and enabling quick, flexible, robust, and focussed</p>	<p>Student representation, opinion, feedback as central.</p>	<p>Students with perfect knowledge of systems, operations etc.</p>	<p>Amount of student rep, tools that are available for feedback.</p>	<p>Centring of the student. Student as consumer - get what they want from payment.</p>	<p>Academic as at the behest of the student. Imbalance of page given to students vs staff situated the student as the one in control. Especially 'quick' speed and reaction is vital here in responding to</p>	<p>Guided by what students think a university education should provide - informed by their relationship to the university (fee-payers) and current norms and values.</p>	<p>Their knowledge of how systems work.</p> <p>The value of experience and the academic's experience.</p>	<p>As a community, shared partnership. Back and forth. How the university also uses the views/ feedback of its staff.</p>	<p>This is not to say that student representation is bad! But there is an imbalance between what is represented here, and anything to do with staff feedback etc.</p>

<p>responses to student needs.' (P1)</p> <p>'In addition to the NSS, the collegiate University takes many opportunities to solicit student feedback at course and college level. Student feedback is taken seriously by Faculties and Departments, and has a significant impact on the development of educational provision' (P3)</p>					<p>student's needs.</p>					
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‘Colleges are responsible for... pastoral support through tutors.’ (P2)	That tutors are also able to offer pastoral support	That academics have the skills, time, to offer this kind of support and guidance. Document mentions throughout about ease of arranging additional sessions etc. Assumption that this is something that is easy to take on for tutors also, and an impression of ever-presence .	Existence of system that is in place.	University as benevolent. Staff as flexible and always available. Multiple roles as teacher and pastoral support (and researcher)	As available, flexible, present, supportive.	University. Again, there is mention of the import of having pastoral support, but never quite goes back to the tutors who are actually providing it	Similarly, what is the recognition for extra workload which may come from this, how is it being rewarded/facilitated?	How can this work and the staff doing it be more promoted and valued? How can the university help to facilitate it?	Again, not a bad thing, but the lack of the human doing the work and the framing of availability is interesting. Pastoral work/invisible labour tends to be feminised. Also may be something gendered if not living up to feminine warmth/availability of this kind of role etc.
‘Anyone appointed as an undergraduate supervisor must take the “Supervising Undergraduates: An Introduction” training course...which ensures	Similar to the above. Role of academic as supervisor/tutor/pastoral. Language puts the focus of control on the university ‘must take’ opposed to ‘all take’. Similarly	Similar to above. That this role can be taken on. That the university as an organisation is centred (passive voice). ‘Must’ - that it is down to the	training courses	Academic as subject to the university. Students as independent learners - thus focus on how they independently get something	Disembodied. Subject to university regs (which are needed)	University? Independent students, cuts the link between student/supervisor relationship.	The supervisor’s role/link to the student. The supervisor’s workload/time. Self determination	Partnership, academics as wanting the best for students and how a university facilitates this.	Supervisions rather than supervisors other than when taking about specific training. Passive voice. Disembodiment .

supervisors receive guidance in order to help their students get the most out of the supervision so that supervisions support student's independent study effectively.' (P2)	language of 'supervisions' puts it as a university provision rather than labour performed by academics.	university to make academics carry out this training.		out of the supervision, again rather than cooperation between supervisor and supervisee.			to undertake these kinds of extra training.		
'The positive impact and value of supervisions is evidenced by students consistently rating supervisions highly in the NSS... ' (P2) 'NSS results offer clear evidence that Cambridge students find that their 'course is intellectually	Student satisfaction /feedback as central. Use of the NSS results as a virtue (refs throughout the entire application to back up many of their points)	Omnipotence of student response (especially as a comparative tool to other universities) Neutrality of student response - links to gender here in professor ratings.	NSS	Student as central. Student as omnipotent. Only that which is counted in the NSS counts.	As the student sees the academic. Again links back to norms, biases, and the positionality between student and teacher/ academic.	Those who 'fit' an ideal image, and who have the most time, are perceived to give the most in terms of academic. In terms of institution those who can promote the university based on student experience.	What is captured by the NSS is what counts and is important. The knowledge and neutrality of students. The emphasis put on this one tool as a marker.	Partnership, conversation, engagement, a variety of mechanisms. Using results critically	All of the gendered issues which have been documented in NSS

<p>stimulating...’ (P2)</p> <p>‘The impact and effectiveness of supervision feedback is indicated by the collegiate University’s high scores in NSS compulsory question 9.’ (P6)</p> <p>‘Cambridge scores for NSS questions relating to physical and digital resources...significantly exceed the sector average.’ (P6)</p>									
<p>‘Further evidence of student’s engagement with their studies is the success of the Student Led Teaching Awards,</p>	<p>Student engagement with the university</p>	<p>That students being invested in their tutors is a sign of their engagement.</p>	<p>Through nominations of staff</p>	<p>The staff are actually minimised, because they are used as a tool to show student engagement, rather than to show the links</p>	<p>As periphery to their own work. As relevant through the student experience.</p>	<p>Thinking about awards - star academics, charisma, popular with students, fitting particular categories? In terms of the university, here</p>	<p>The nature of awards generally? Here we are given no information, what the rewards are, what kinds of things are</p>	<p>Again the relationships that are built by the students/ staff in their own right. The work of the staff. Collegiate</p>	<p>Who is nominated? Star academics rather than collegiality? Is there actually any reward/ recognition/ remuneration.</p>

supported by the Pro-Vice Chancellor for Education but organised by the students themselves as a 'Students Choice' award for excellent teaching and learning support. Student's engagement with these awards has soared; from 192 nominations received from students in 2014 ..to 703 nominations received in 2016'. (P3)				between staff/students or the work that the staff are actually doing.		awards are being used to enhance their own prestige, as evidence about the success of the <i>students</i> not the teachers.	being rewarded.	rewards? Recognitions?	Here this is used as a sign that the students are engaged rather than the quality of the staff.
'The University values high-quality teaching: evidence of 'effective contributions to undergraduate or postgraduate	Focusing on gap of teaching, by showing how it is a requirement for promotion. Explicit link between promotion	What constitutes as 'excellence' and what constitutes as a 'contribution'.	teaching measured as important because it features as a criterion. teaching is measured	It does centre the import of teaching for all academics if it is part of promotional procedure for everyone. Does	Teaching as part of their core workload?	Depends on how this is measured and defined in reality? It is not clear from the representation here, what is	Terms are not clear, this could be putting focus on teaching or could be a tick box. What is the line at	Specificity in terms, clarity and transparency. (again not implying that this information	Link to promotional pathways for teaching, here even further as it specifies all. Does that mean there are also

teaching is a requirement for promotion to senior academic positions of Professor or Reader, while promotion to the position of University Senior Lecturer requires evidence of 'sustained excellence in teaching'. (P3)	pathways and teaching.		through murky terms of 'excellence' and 'effective contribution'.	not show how it captures amount/type of labour.		actually taken into account.	which you have fulfilled your 'contribution'. Is additional labour also taken into account. What defines 'excellence'?	isn't available, but in these submissions it is enough to use this short-hand proxy.	teaching specific pathways as these are not mentioned? Undoing hierarchy or holding it once teaching is 'ticked off'. Gendered notions of excellence in teaching.
'The Cambridge Centre for Teaching and Learning (CCTL) provides a focus for teaching innovation and excellence by providing training, developing networks for academics, hosting seminars and conferences, and presenting	Promotion of knowledge exchange, collegiality as teaching. (Recognition of teaching through awards). Mention of funding to facilitate projects. Offers of professional development - onus on the academic.	These attributes as threads which lead into excellent teaching. Import of recognition and facilitation	Infrastructure, events, funding (although this is unspecified)	A centring and promotion of these kinds of attributes. Variation in what teaching means/is.	More embodied, more adult ('offered' as opposed to 'must'). Dynamic and collegiate.	Those who are able to take advantage of these opportunities. Whoever is seen as worthy of awards (limited information here). Those who are able to try new approaches with funding etc? Room to	Room for specifics - what kind of funding, who gets awards, what is excellence defined as?		collegiality, teaching networks, knowledge exchange.

<p>awards for excellent teaching, as well as encouraging and funding innovative teaching projects.' (P3)</p> <p>'CCTL organises an annual Teaching Forum in which Teaching Officers across the University gather to share best practice and explore innovative pedagogical approaches.' (P3)</p> <p>'The university through CCTL offers its own range of professional development courses, some of which are accredited by the Higher</p>						think outside the box.			
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Education Academy.' (P3)									
<p>'The University encourages and rewards excellent and innovative teaching through the annual Pilkington Prize...Twelve awards are presented each year by the Vice-Chancellor to academics whose teaching is regarded as exceptional' (P4)</p> <p>'Recent winners have demonstrated excellence in a variety of ways' some have made outstanding contributions to widening participation and outreach work...some</p>	Recognition of 'excellent' teaching through awards.	That stand-out teaching gets through, is recognisable, can be given to individuals.	Through awards ceremonies judged by particular 'outstanding' factors.	individual star academics. 'outstanding' work as the bar for excellence	As an individual.	<p>Stand out. Additional time, help, labour?</p> <p>Ability/ flexibility to embark on these things that would make one stand out?</p>	<p>the day-to-day labour of teaching.</p> <p>Invisible labour - conversations in corridors etc. Does this get captured by this mechanism?</p> <p>Work done by others which gives the time/space to produce additional, 'outstanding work.</p>	<p>Again, collegiality. More than awards? What does the reward give, additional recognition? Remuneration ? Centring teaching and the work of teachers more broadly?</p>	<p>This presentation does give more of a sense of what is actually being rewarded opposed to many submissions. What do the rewards actually give you? Remuneration?</p>

have developed innovative new approaches or resources...while some were rewarded for being outstandingly gifted lecturers and teachers who inspire their students with enthusiasm for the subject' (P4)									
'The university facilitates innovative teaching through the Teaching and Learning Innovation Fund (TLIF)...The TLIF provides project grants of between £10k and £20k each year up to a total of £100K for the development of	Teachers actually facilitated to perform well through monetary funding	That there is a monetary aspect, or a responsibility from the university, rather than just individual responsibility.	Through budgetary means	That the university has a responsibility and a facilitating role	As part of the institution, in tandem with the requirements of the organisation, rather than self-responsibilise d within it?	Possible lack of information, as to the type of schemes which gets funding, time given to being able to apply, but also allows more focus/ prestige to be given to teaching as it is linked to a monetary element.	Similar to the previous, who is this funding accessible to and why. As a proportion is this monetary link enough?	This is anomalous to many submissions and is a way of thinking about this differently, subject to the gaps in the previous columns.	ANOMALY - how the university actually facilitates teaching.

innovative teaching'. (P4)									
' External Examiners commonly comment that the undergraduate degrees offered by Cambridge are some of the highest quality on the UK [with accompanying quotes]' (P5)	The import of external examiners who provide qualitative accounts of what goes on in the classroom	That these accounts are needed in addition to quantitative measures.	External examiner comments. However all comments to do with courses/exam content, no mention of teachers or staff.	A broader understanding of what teaching means and being able to capture some of the wider elements of it.	With regard to the content of the comments (that were seen as priorities to include in the applications) teachers/staff were not mentioned so even here still disembodied and labour erased.	The university reaping the benefit of this labour. Potentially staff performing day to day as this is qualitatively assessed, so more broadly, perhaps staff feel seen, but also don't know the pressure on staff for examiners, and no evidence here of what is being recognised.	Pressure on staff is unknown. Any appreciation of staff through this procedure is unknown	More focus on the work of staff.	Anomaly: qualitative examples, but invisible labour still hidden in this document which produces gendered effects.
'the significant gap between the attainment of Cambridge students and those at a Russell Group university with a good history department is as	Taking the sample of Russell Group, and excelling ahead of them, therefore they must be the best of the best.	That the Russell Group/ Research intensive universities are a step beyond and so this is the group that is worth a comparison.	Through the RG sample (and then quantitative example/ standing within it).	Entrenching hierarchy of traditional universities as well as assumption of research intensive universities as <i>the</i> comparator	As members of research intensive university, thus as researchers first and foremost	Research intensive staff.	Disruption of hierarchies. Disruption of the core facet of research.	Comparator against all groups. Again this is inherently competitive, creating winners and losers.	Comparison to RG universities. Assumed hierarchy. Research vs teaching links back to gendered nature.

marked as ever'. (P5) '...19.6% of Cambridge graduates were in further study or "work and further study" after three years, compared to 16.7% of Russell Group graduates...' (P11)		Also emphasis again on employment, as well as inherent competition.		when it comes to good teaching.					
'The supervision system ensures that students make effective use of their independent study time by providing focused tasks on which they receive detailed feedback.' (P5) 'Supervisions allow teaching to be tailored in recognition of	Continued use of 'supervisions' as the thing that is virtuous (rather than supervisors)	That students are independent, takes away the relationship between student/teacher. Implication that these supervisions happen organically, and are a product of university structures, rather than	The skills which 'supervisions' provided (qualitatively presented rather than numerate, assumption that they have given students these skills)	Dehumanising, centring students and university structures.	Completely taken out and disembodied. Labour rendered invisible.	The university as shows prowess and they ride of the back (usurp?) of the labour of the academic.	Who is getting the credit, appropriate recognition for this work. Re-entrenches a sense of invisibility, that the work of the teacher is minimal/unimportant.	Relationship between supervisor/supervisee. Recognition of work, active voice when speaking about staff.	supervisors spoken about in passive. Final quote included as a small example where the supervisor is explicitly mentioned to show weighting given. Gendered links to invisible labour, the value of certain types of labour - this could be

<p>the individual student's...' (P11)</p> <p>'Across all disciplines, supervisions help undergraduates develop the ability to communicate effectively...present ideas, evaluate evidence critically and solve problems.' (P12)</p> <p>'...students are subject to continuous formative assessment through the written work submitted for supervisions, which is assessed and commented on by their</p>		labour of the supervisor.							<p>seen as the everyday labour that keeps things ticking over, crucial but undervalued.</p>
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supervisors.’ (P5)									
<p>‘The collegiate University takes the view that...’ (P6)</p> <p>‘The university is, however, mindful of...’ (P6)</p> <p>‘the university strongly believes that...’(P8)</p>	<p>The university is presented as one homogenous, omnipotent organisation. Neutral and with a ‘view from nowhere’.</p>	<p>That the university is all-knowing, all-seeing, with perfect knowledge. That the university <i>is</i> the organisation.</p>	wording	<p>The university as authorial, perfect organisation. Its own embodied thing.</p>	<p>Disembodied, subsumed into this whole. And those within the university at the behest of the university</p>	<p>Those who fit with the image of what the university ‘is’, fit the mould and echo the message.</p>	<p>Room for differing voices. In terms of gender inequality/EDI , that the university has perfect knowledge of the situations in it.</p>	<p>People within an organisation? Different way of thinking about large organisations - presenting themselves as a paternal homogenous mass.</p>	<p>Particularly prescient when there is no authorial voice.</p> <p>Definitely disciplinary/responsibilisation.</p> <p>Paternalistic.</p> <p>Personified</p> <p>weird because subjective language?</p>
<p>Resources discussed for 9 paragraphs/3 pages. Including discussion of libraries, departmental facilities, museums, IT services (P6-9)</p> <p>HOWEVER</p>	<p>Material resources as excellent teaching.</p>	<p>That these kinds of resources are a proxy for excellent teaching (and given the extent to which they are discussed, akin to human teachers).</p>	<p>literally cost and quantity of resources.</p>	<p>A blurring of the lines about what constitutes ‘teaching’. Universities are centring money and high quality resources - this is a specific attribute to highlight? This submission</p>	<p>In line with the material, as a resource to be reaped - there is a caveat in this submission which is rare, however even this is in the passive voice as discussed elsewhere.</p>	<p>Universities who are the most financially stable.</p>	<p>The extent to which the academic is decentred.</p> <p>Consumerisation?</p>	<p>Resources are obviously a good thing to have, but it is the extent to which even in the layout of the submissions they are talked about as one with human labour.</p>	<p>See below for caveat to this. Consumerisation? What is the relationship between student teacher, when it is situated as a consumer relationship. Is there a gendered way these resources</p>

‘The university strongly believes that face-to-face interactions such as lectures and supervisions should remain at the heart of the Cambridge educational experience, and that digital technologies should be introduced only when they clearly meet the needs of teachers and learners’. (P8)				does, caveat with this disclaimer below.					will then be reaped?
‘The vast majority (89%) of the University’s teachers are also active researchers , and are expected to use their research expertise to	Value of research led teaching	Inherent hierarchy of research/teaching. That the best researcher will be the best at teaching/ pedagogy.	Quantitatively.	entrenches teaching vs research hierarchy. Research first and teaching will naturally follow	As researchers	Those with more research prowess. Those with the confidence to do the work in research and assume that the teaching will follow, rather than juggling both.	Is this hierarchy accurate? Gendered element in confident researchers who are able to talk about research with little planning,	What do each bring to the table, are there other ways of focussing on pedagogy without research? Is there a particular prowess or type of person	Research/teaching as discussed is gendered. Confidence/time point is interesting to research - notes on gender split in teaching preparation.

guide their teaching'. (P9)							opposed to those doing	that then fits the image of teacher and researcher.	
'There are also subjects in which the learning environment is enhanced by professional engagement , as well as scholarship...The undergraduate course in chemical engineering is supported by a consortium of ten industrial companies that provide input on content and assist with teaching...' (P10)	Anomaly is in the way that this is framed compared to other universities. Centring of employers/ employment and highlighting the active role that companies provide on the courses themselves.	Again not the extent here as other submissions but, feeds into the university being a place for increasing employability, and therefore that employers 'know best' and can provide better teaching than academics.	through employer involvement.	Decentring of the academic. Emphasising employability	Disembodied and specifically less in the hierarchy than employers.	Institutions/students focussing on employability as focus of university.	Role of academic? Other university attributes?	Framing is better here, than most submissions, viewing it as 'enhancement', but content still driven by employers in this example.	Not quite to the extent of some submissions (Newcastle) but worth noting some inclusion. Employability, competition, earnings, masculinity?
' additional supervisions can be offered to students who require additional	Additional support/time given to students who need it.	That the time/resources are available and that pastoral support will be	Through time spent with students.	That the university (supervisor) can provide limitless resources.	As additional resources for students.	Again university reaping this labour, which is not recognised is even being performed here,	Who is conducting this work, how is this workload facilitated?	How can support be put in place that is recognised and rewarded,	Who is conducting this work, how is this workload facilitated? passive voice

support or are struggling with particular topics.' (P11)		given out evenly.				or how staff will be facilitated to do it.	passive voice once again even when talking about an additional workload.	and part of a particular workload? Who is getting this work in the first place and does it get due recognition?	once again even when talking about an additional workload.
'each student has a college personal tutor who is responsible for pastoral support...the consistent personalised support offered by Directors of Studies and Tutors is highly effective at helping students succeed in their studies' (P11)	Importance of pastoral support, and duty to students. (Here tutors directly recognised as having a role in students' success which is anomalous in these submissions)	Holistic import of pastoral support at a university	Link between pastoral support systems and student success rates. (Follow up with stats on degree completion)	Whose responsibility it is (not a pejorative, and that is recognised here)	as support for students. Caring, and helpful, but also always on.	Dependent on hierarchies, who is benefitting from this everyday labour? Is someone able to excel because this work is taken on elsewhere? Not enough information here to know.	V. good that recognition here, what are the structures that reward this day to day support in practice, is it valued in the university, different to 'excelling' start awards.	Anomalous submission, provides recognition.	Anomaly: recognition Gender link supportive roles seen differently? Same kudos in reality as 'award-worthy' work.
'The TEF employability metrics clearly show that Cambridge graduates are	Emphasis and focus on employment, and specifically highly-skilled employment	Focus of the university as a place to further employability.	TEF metrics	University positioning itself with employment central.	As cogs in this process, links back to which subjects are more employable -	Hierarchy of knowledge which is valued, skills, and priorities which take to highly-	Employability in the first place. But the aspect of hierarchy of employment	University education for knowledge in and of itself, for ideas whether they	Employment values, masculinised in current paradigm. Importantly in

<p>exceptionally successful in gaining highly-skilled employment. The metrics show this is true for every single group, including groups at risk of less positive outcomes such as mature students.’ (P11)</p> <p>‘The Careers Service supports students in securing highly-skilled employment through many initiatives and activities aimed at improving graduates’ employability...’ (P12)</p> <p>(3 paras on careers service)</p>	<p>(Although again this is caveated here in the statements below)</p>				<p>shape to fit what the paradigm most values in employability - masculine, sciences etc.</p>	<p>skilled employment. Counter to many submissions this is also diluted by the statements below, which do show a fuller spectrum of ways into different employments.</p>	<p>is diluted by the below.</p>	<p>work or not, or how quickly they biome monetised. other kinds of employment etc.</p>	<p>this submission diluted by the below.</p>
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<p>‘Importantly, the Careers Service offers personalised support to students to find employment that they will find meaningful and fulfilling...[it] uses money paid by other recruits to subsidize representatives from non-profit organizations to attend recruitment events...[funding] is used to support the Career Service Summer Bursary Scheme, which allows students to undertake low-paid or unpaid summer placements with companies in Media, Arts and Heritage or not-</p>	<p>Emphasis on lower-paid employments, or “alternative” careers.</p>	<p>That employment should not all be focused on monetary factors. (Though employment still remains central as well as the temporality of payments.</p>	<p>Through opportunities and quantitative funding.</p>	<p>That there are alternative options available, not one set route, or set of values.</p>	<p>Allows for a wider set of values or needs which are seen as acceptable (whilst still within the employability remit)</p>	<p>A more diverse array of identities.</p>	<p>Employability to begin with.</p>	<p>This is anomalous, and provides the alternative to many of the submissions (when working within the TEF metrics).</p>	<p>Anomaly: recognising importance of lower paid work/ “alternative” career paths.</p>
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for-profit sectors.' (P12) 'For students interested in using entrepreneurship specifically to tackle social challenges, Cambridge Hub, a student-led group supported by the Careers Service, offers volunteering opportunities...placements...and summer internships.									
'Cambridge undergraduates are highly sought after by employers' (P12)	Centring employment and the skills that a Cambridge education gives students.	That this is the aim of university. However, here, as opposed to many submissions, the assumption is that Cambridge do this innately.	Employability stats and employability rankings in league tables.	Puts confidence in the university education generally.	(Hard to elucidate other than a comparator to other submissions) Faith put in university and staff, although discussing employers, the emphasis is on them	The university and its staff benefit from this representation.	Employability still centred.	See above.	Anomaly: university first, confidence in their own practices. University inherently giving useful skills.

					coming to you. Far less paternalistic.				
'The Careers Service provides data on graduate employment and careers engagement for the university's periodic reviews of Faculties and Departments, to help assess how effective courses are in providing students with skills for life and employment.' (P12)	Problem that some modules do not provide skills for employment, but careers service can provide feedback to change.	That employability is the prime objective for all courses.	Quantitative means. Not clear how 'skills for life' would be measured.	Situates employability above all else. Academics and courses at the behest of the Careers service	Counter to the above, this is more paternalistic. Sidelines the skills and knowledge of the academic, and subsumes them under the more important goal of employability. An additional target, which academics must make sure they are meeting for the valuation/worth of themselves/their subject.	Again, particular topics which are seen as valuable in the paradigm.	Room for risk, gaps, time between graduating. Alternatives to wants from particular modules. Assumptions that there is knowledge being taught which does not in any way give one a 'skill for life'.	What other benefits are being gained from this. How else might we value knowledge?	Gendered subject areas. Employment (and inherently value and worth) all gendered things. What labour is worth being paid well etc.
'To assist students in gaining skills employers value,	Additional language courses (But framed only in terms of their	Only value worth mentioning in a language	In terms of added value to employability skills. (and	Missing all of the other reasons why languages are	Again hierarchy of subjects, which will put	Those who see knowledge as useful in terms of monetising,	Literally every other reason why additional languages are	See previous column.	Again neoliberal discourse, money, valuation of

the University's Language Centre offers extra-curricular courses and conversation groups in a range of languages...' (P13)	benefit for employability).	specifically, is because it is useful for employability.	literally here in no. of extra curricular courses available).	valuable. Puts presidents and weight on what language is for, and targets that should be met for those then teaching.	some subjects over others.	entrenches this neoliberal remit.	a fantastic resource, for culture, community, etc.		particular things as masculine society?
<p>'The University's core values are freedom of thought and expression, and freedom from discrimination, and it strives to be inclusive and welcoming to all its staff and students.' (P15)</p> <p>'Cambridge was a founder member of the Athena SWAN charter and the University won its first award in the inaugural round...since the university has</p>	EDI	That the institution should hold these values close. That these link to teaching more broadly	Though statements, and accreditations.	That these are important values.	As diverse and able to be equal	This does allow for differing identities - depends on practice/words	Lack of specifics or acknowledge ments of areas that do need work - thus assumption is that everything is fine. (especially in conjunction with 'the university thinks' discourse)	Acknowledge ment of areas that do need work. Specific data points (interesting this is an area where they are not really provided).	Closes on this message, which is structurally interesting. Also mentions staff in its EDI which is rare in these submissions, although very general messages, outside of AS - which has its own issues in the literature.

<p>successfully renewed its Bronze Athena SWAN award in 2009 and 2012 and in 2014 achieved a Silver Athena SWAN award.’ (P15)</p> <p>‘The university further signalled its support for diversity by hosting the national pre-launch celebration event for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Trans History Month 2016...’ (P15)</p>									
Statement of Findings									
‘a student learning experience based on small groups and	World-leading as the key attribute (very little else mentioned and absolutely	Again, that competition globally is an inherent good. Linking ‘world-	Spending, quantity and quality of resources, extent of	Emphasising money and competition. Focus on the global again	As a researcher first and foremost. As competitors.	Those who are more likely to fit this profile. Research which is most valued.	That there is an explicit link between research prowess and	A delinking between teaching and research as inherently	Gender and impact of ‘global reach’. Nothing else particularly

responsive supervisions which enables students to engage with world-leading scholars...' 'extensive opportunities for undergraduates to undertake research projects alongside world-leading academics'	nothing that has been pointed to as anomalous or a different way of framing things in this submission.) That to be world-leading is to be the best, that institutions should be thinking about global reach. Often link to research when talking about the global/world-class, implication that 'world-class' researchers make the best teachers -there would be a problem if they did not possess this particular world-beating set of skills.	class' research to an inherent good for teaching.	profile (which contextually is backed up by positions in quantitative league tables.	creates a particular image of unencumbered and flexible academics. In the context of a document about teaching, that the perfect researcher looks the same as the perfect teacher.	As flexible and unencumbered.	Those who are able to be competitive, perform well in research frameworks (e.g. REF) Are more flexible, unencumbered and able to travel - to show global impact/reach.	teaching acumen. Who fits the bill of being a 'world-leader' particular image, and in practice this works in favour of those who have fewer commitments outside of university - gendered.	reinforcing. Thinking about the ways that impact happens locally. Working together rather than competitiveness.	pulled out from submission, especially different ways of doing things, this all undercut in findings.
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Authorial voice: 'The Provider Submission has been drafted with input from academics across the University and Colleges. Representatives of the Student's Union were invited to participate, but chose not to do so.' (P2)

Lots of anomalies in this submission, including the above, as well as caveating many features of other submissions such as employer engagement, and importance of resources. The biggest anomaly is the university seeming confident in its own practices inherently being a benefit to employers. Interesting that it is Cambridge, that it perhaps has more ability/prestige to be able to do this? Interestingly, none of these noted in the findings. Continued homogeneity sticking specifically to the wording of the metrics.

Structure: opening sentence to do with education and learning. Closes with EDI discussion. Other sections fairly evenly balanced, and academics (even if in the passive) discussed throughout.

Appendix C: Ethical Approval

