Dear Niall, Molly, Pip and Sahadev,

TEACHING EXCELLENCE FRAMEWORK

Thank you very much for your letter of 9 August regarding the above subject.

The University Executive Board (UEB) has now had an opportunity to discuss the issues raised in your letter. We have also briefed the President of Council, Dr Paul Preston, so that he is aware of your concerns.

We should say from the outset that UEB strongly agrees with the underlying principle of the TEF. In essence, this is to improve the student experience by ensuring that teaching in universities is of the highest standard.

Raising further the esteem of teaching nationally has to be the right thing to do and, indeed, is consistent with what we have been doing here at the University of Reading. UEB acknowledges the hard work that has been done by a wide range of stakeholders in developing the TEF thus far. Crucially, staff here at Reading have played an active part in this process.

However, we also recognise that TEF, as currently conceived, is not without its challenges. For example, it may prove difficult to distinguish between high quality and poor teaching between different institutions. It may also be difficult to identify poor teaching between different subject disciplines and departments within individual universities. Equally, however, there is an opportunity for universities to tell their own story about the quality and range of what they do via the contextual statement that will be a TEF requirement.

Niall Hamilton, Education Officer
Molly Philpott, Student Activities Officer
Pip Oppenheimer, Welfare Officer,
Sahadev Joshi, Diversity Officer

8 September 2016
We have confidence that the expert review process that will accompany such submissions will be fair and transparent.

In summary, we recognise, as does Universities UK, that more work is required to ensure that the TEF is fit for purpose. To make this a genuinely shared enterprise, we think it is better that the sector works with ministers and officials to make the TEF as strong and robust as possible. In the same vein, we very much want to work with RUSU to ensure that we get this right for Reading.

Turning to the issue of tuition fees, it is clear that inflation has reduced the spending power of the £9,000 fees since they were first introduced in 2012. As a result, it means that there is less funding in real terms to invest in teaching and student services. Our intended rise to £9,250 for new undergraduates in 2017/18, pending legislation, will ensure that current and future generations of students continue to benefit from their education here at Reading.

The Government has set a very ambitious timetable to develop and implement the first phase of TEF. In our view, it is right to allow the new system to bed in and assess its strengths and weaknesses, before making any long-term decisions on whether to raise tuition fees on the basis of an improved TEF 'score' from 2018/19 onwards. In the meantime, you have our publicly stated assurance that we are fixing our fees at £9,000 for existing undergraduate students and those starting this autumn.

We look forward to working with you and discussing these issues further over the coming academic year.

Sir David Bell KCB
On behalf of the
UNIVERSITY EXECUTIVE BOARD

Cc: Ben Cooper, RUSU President