



# **Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023**

## **Summary TEF 2023 panel statement**

**Aston University**

# Summary of outcomes

## Overall: Gold

Typically, the experience students have at Aston University and the outcomes it leads to are outstanding.

### Student experience: Gold

The student academic experience is typically outstanding.

Outstanding quality features include:

- outstanding teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are highly effective, embedded and tailored to students' needs
- course content and delivery in partnership with students and industry representatives
- using research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement to contribute to an outstanding academic experience
- outstanding support for staff professional development and excellent academic practice
- a supportive learning environment, where students have access to a wide range of outstanding quality academic support
- adopting a Student as Partner approach to support student engagement in continuous improvement.

There are also some very high quality features, including:

- physical and virtual learning resources are used effectively to support very high quality teaching and learning.

### Student outcomes: Gold

Student outcomes are typically outstanding.

Outstanding quality features include:

- a highly effective and tailored strategic approach to supporting student success
- outstanding rates of continuation and completion
- outstanding rates of successful progression
- clearly conceptualised educational gains around a Student as Partner culture, work-based learning and preparing students for the world of work
- highly effective support for educational gains that are aligned with industry needs and social mobility
- an outstanding approach to evaluating and demonstrating the educational gains made by students.

# About the assessment

The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) is a national scheme run by the Office for Students (OfS) that aims to encourage universities and colleges (providers) to improve and deliver excellent teaching, learning and student outcomes.

The TEF does this by assessing and rating providers for excellence above the high quality baseline that we expect from all providers. It covers undergraduate courses.

Throughout this document, we use the terms ‘outstanding’ and ‘very high quality’, which are defined in terms of the TEF 2023 assessment as follows:

- ‘outstanding’: the quality of the student experience or outcomes are among the very best in the sector, for the mix of students and courses taught by a provider
- ‘very high quality’: the quality of the student experience or outcomes are materially above the relevant high quality minimum requirements, for the mix of students and courses taught by a provider.

The assessment was carried out in 2022-23 by the TEF Panel, a panel of academics and students who are experts in learning and teaching. This document sets out a summary of the panel’s findings and judgements.

The panel reviewed the following evidence:

- numerical indicators produced by the OfS, using national datasets
- a submission made by the provider, setting out its own evidence
- a submission made by the provider’s students, setting out students’ views.

The panel applied its expert judgement to:

- identify particular features of the student experience and student outcomes that are excellent (above the high quality baseline requirements)
- decide a rating for the ‘student experience’ and for ‘student outcomes’
- decide an overall rating for the provider.

Throughout the assessment the panel took account of the context of the provider and judged how well it delivers teaching, learning and student outcomes for its mix of students and courses.

In making its decisions the panel took account of the OfS general duties and the public sector equalities duty.

# Summary of panel assessment

## Information about this provider

Aston University states its mission to be ‘the UK’s leading university for students aspiring to succeed in business and the professions, where original research, enterprise and inspiring teaching deliver local and global impact’. The provider has a diverse student body and has created a ‘student as partner’ culture which is a strategic principle of its education strategy.

Based on data from 2020-21, it is a medium sized university, with around 12,000 full-time and 290 part-time undergraduate students. A wide variety of subjects are studied full-time with a large proportion studying business and management (27 per cent) followed by engineering (13.6 per cent). Fewer subjects are studied on a part-time basis with engineering the most popular, studied by 40.4 per cent of students.

The provider stated in its TEF submission that, it is second in the UK for the proportion of its students being from ethnic minority backgrounds (based on the Times and Sunday Times 2023 social inclusion rankings). 52 per cent of its full-time students are from an Asian background.

Over half of the provider’s full-time students (55.1 per cent) are from deprived socioeconomic backgrounds. While the vast majority of full-time students (94.5 per cent) are under 21 years old when they start their course, there are a large number of mature part-time students, with 44.6 per cent aged 21 to 30 years.

The assessment considered information about the provider’s undergraduate courses and students on those courses.

Full details about the provider’s student demographics used in the TEF 2023 assessment are available at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/data-used-in-tef-2023/](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/data-used-in-tef-2023/).

More information about this provider can be found on the OfS Register at [www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/the-register/the-ofs-register/](https://www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/the-register/the-ofs-register/).

## **Student experience: Gold**

Throughout this section, we refer to indicators. These indicators are based on students' responses to the National Student Survey. The indicators are 'benchmarked' to show how well the provider performs for its particular mix of students and courses. For this provider, there were no part-time indicators available so the panel's judgements in relation to the student experience indicators were therefore based on survey responses for full-time students.

Across the student experience aspect, the panel found:

- most features are outstanding
- one feature is very high quality.

The panel applied the criteria and considered that the rating with the best fit is 'Gold'. This is because most features of the aspect are outstanding for all groups of students and courses.

The panel noted that approaches are adopted across the whole provider, with some targeted at specific groups, including underrepresented groups.

The panel's assessment of the student experience features is set out below.

### **Teaching, assessment, and feedback**

The panel considered this feature to be outstanding.

The full-time indicators provided initial evidence that:

- there is evidence of very high to outstanding quality 'teaching on my course'
- there is very strong evidence of very high quality 'assessment and feedback'.

The provider and student submissions show evidence of an outstanding feature quality including:

- collaborating with students to ensure a clear understanding of assessment criteria post-coronavirus
- a university-wide policy on effective feedback and using various types of assessment
- both submissions show a tailored approach to supporting students through online and in-person teaching, recognising students who have work or family commitments alongside their studies and the provider's education strategy aligns with this approach
- student feedback also highlights the provider's positive response to student needs during the coronavirus.

Considering the evidence in the round, the panel found the provider has embedded outstanding teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are highly effective and tailored to supporting its students' learning, progression, and attainment.

## **Course content and delivery; student engagement in learning and stretch**

The panel rated this feature as outstanding.

The panel found evidence of outstanding quality in the provider and student submissions. This included:

- authentic and diverse assessments, including methods such as interviews, exhibitions, research projects, and case studies
- integrating workplace practices and technologies into teaching and module assessments, such as:
  - using design briefs to reflect industry-related problems which students can work through using industry-standard software
  - employer-informed courses to help students gain up to date knowledge and skills, along with programmes to meet regional and employer needs (for example, BSc Cyber Security)
  - a focus on interprofessional and interdisciplinary learning across a number of professions
  - offering events and activities to encourage enthusiasm for subjects and future careers
- engaging students through initiatives such as professional mentorship and participation in a peer assisted learning scheme
- work-related learning opportunities throughout students' degree courses
- opportunities for students to extend their studies beyond the curriculum with initiatives such as the 'engineering for people' design challenge, run in collaboration with Engineers Without Borders.

The panel noted the provider's approach to developing course content and delivery in partnership with students and industry representatives and using real world business case studies to assist in development of entrepreneurial skills.

Overall, the panel concluded that course content and delivery inspire the provider's students to actively engage in and commit to their learning, and stretch students to develop knowledge and skills to their fullest potential.

## **Research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement**

The panel found this feature to be outstanding.

The provider submission shows evidence of an outstanding quality feature, including:

- teaching staff are active researchers and often teach in their specialised research area

- students participate in research projects and real-world problem solving as part of their teaching
- strong engagement with employers, addressing current requirements and future work needs
- staff have published scholarship as a result of teaching
- 79 per cent of publications submitted for the Research Excellence Framework were judged to be 'world leading' or 'internationally excellent'
- joint appointments with NHS practitioners and ex-practitioners to inform course content, in subjects such as law, human resources, accountancy and finance
- contributing to the Engineering Council's accreditation of higher education programmes
- using sector and scholarship research to shape the provider's education strategy.

The panel considered the submission demonstrates an outstanding quality feature. The panel found the provider uses research in relevant disciplines, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and/or employer engagement to contribute to an outstanding academic experience for its students.

### **Staff professional development and academic practice**

The panel found this feature to be outstanding.

The provider submission outlines evidence of an outstanding quality feature, including:

- the central education department collaborates with strategic leaders to offer extensive support to staff
- investment in a Master's in learning and teaching in higher education (MEd) and a professional doctorate in higher education
- all staff are required to hold an Advance HE Fellowship upon appointment or within two years. 55 per cent of academic staff hold this qualification which the provider states is above the sector average
- 214 academic staff members hold Advance HE Senior Fellow status, while 20 are Principal Fellows
- four National Teaching Fellows were awarded to staff between 2017 and 2021
- an institutional staff development programme called Active Learning and Teaching Online (ALTO) became mandatory for teaching staff from 2020.

Looking at the evidence overall, the panel concluded there is outstanding support for staff professional development and excellent academic practice is embedded across the provider.

## Learning environment and academic support

The panel found this feature to be outstanding.

The full-time indicator provides compelling initial evidence that 'academic support' is very high quality.

The provider submission showed evidence of an outstanding feature, including:

- academic support is a significant aspect of the provider's education strategy
- various initiatives establish a sense of community before students enrol
- using a university-wide learner analytics system to measure student engagement, with targeted support offered through personal tutors and other staff when needed
- the 'Get Ahead at Aston' online platform which supports students transitioning into university life, with 29,976 hits in the first term
- addressing lower performing areas through interventions such as extra maths support
- student feedback shapes online engagement and blended learning.

Considering all the evidence, the panel concluded the provider ensures a supportive learning environment, and its students have access to a wide and readily available range of outstanding quality academic support tailored to their needs.

## Learning resources

The panel found this to be a very high quality feature.

The full-time indicator shows compelling evidence that 'learning resources' are very high quality.

The provider and student submissions provide further evidence of very high quality, for example:

- significant technology investment during coronavirus including laptops and internet access
- investment in the physical campus to create study and social spaces in collaboration with the students' union
- after a student's union survey identified a lack of study spaces, the provider repurposed the union's ground floor into a study space, involving students in the process
- financial support of £1.02 million for 2,267 students who had low household incomes in 2021-2022
- investment of around £400,000 in a new tissue culture laboratory.

The panel considered the evidence to show a very high quality feature though noted that the submission did not provide evidence on the take up and evaluation of investments and how these are tailored to meet the needs of different student groups.



Considering all the evidence the panel judged that physical and virtual learning resources are used effectively to support very high quality teaching and learning.

## **Student engagement in improvement**

The panel found this feature to be outstanding.

The full-time indicator shows compelling evidence that 'student voice' is outstanding.

The provider and student submissions provide further evidence of an outstanding quality feature including:

- adopting a Student as Partner approach, with the students' union Vice President (Education) meeting regularly with the provider's Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education). This has resulted in:
  - a number of collaborative projects including designing social learning spaces and co-creating student surveys
  - students being involved in committees to allow the student voice to be represented
- initiatives such as Speak Week in the first term to promote student voice
- having student experience champions and student involvement on review panels
- carrying out short pulse surveys to capture broader student views during key changes
- positive student feedback on the effectiveness of the student representation system, including:
  - a strong culture of student representation at all levels of the provider
  - multiple formal and informal avenues for student feedback and voice to be heard
  - examples of actions prompted by student feedback include the shift to online assessments due to student concerns during coronavirus.

Considering the evidence in the round, the panel found the evidence to demonstrate an outstanding quality feature where the provider embeds engagement with its students, leading to continuous improvement to their experiences and outcomes.

## **Student outcomes: Gold**

Throughout this section, we refer to indicators. The indicators for continuation, completion and progression rates are based on national data about higher education students. The indicators are 'benchmarked' to show how well the provider performs for its particular mix of students and courses.

Across the student outcomes aspect, the panel found all features were outstanding quality. The panel found evidence that the outstanding features applied to all the provider's courses, subjects and students, including students from underrepresented groups.

The panel applied the criteria and considered that the rating with the best fit is 'Gold'.

The panel's assessment of the student outcomes features is set out below.

### **Approaches to supporting student success**

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The provider and student submission provides evidence which includes:

- adopting extensive methods to engage former students
- implementing university-wide initiatives like the Engineering for People Design Challenge'
- substantially investing in scholarships each year
- providing an initiative called 'The Talent Bank' to match students to placements and offer support
- using an institution-wide learner analytics system
- positive feedback from students on narrowing progression and continuation gaps between students from more and less deprived areas of the country. The panel noted the provider's commitment to widening participation
- students highlighted enhanced employability and better continuation rates for community leaders.

The panel noted that the provider takes a strategic approach to supporting student success which is tailored to students. Looking at all the evidence, the panel found the provider deploys and tailors approaches that are highly effective in ensuring its students succeed in and progress beyond their studies.

### **Continuation and completion rates**

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The indicators show:

- for full-time students there is compelling initial evidence that 'continuation' is very high quality, and probable evidence that 'completion' is very high to outstanding quality
- for part-time students there is initial evidence that both 'continuation' and 'completion' are outstanding.

The provider submission added further evidence of an outstanding quality feature including:

- an institution-wide learner analytics system

- a student-focused hub with records of high engagement
- the university's student wellbeing call back scheme, which contributed to the provider being shortlisted for The Times Higher Education University of the Year award.

Considering the evidence in the round, the panel found that there are outstanding rates of continuation and completion for the provider's students and courses.

## **Progression rates**

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The indicators show that, for full-time students, there is compelling evidence that 'progression' is outstanding for most courses. For part-time students, there is also compelling evidence of outstanding performance.

The provider submission adds further evidence of an outstanding quality feature including:

- 61 per cent of undergraduate programmes are accredited by industry-recognised professional, statutory and regulatory bodies
- work experience or placement opportunities in all programmes, with 63.3 per cent having compulsory placements
- implementing measures for progression support including library resources, tutoring, financial aid, and a student health hub
- statements based on Longitudinal Education Outcomes data to indicate that graduates have the 16th largest median salary after five years at £34,800, with 15 out of 18 subject areas in the top half or upper 25 percent for salary rankings.

Considering all the evidence, the panel concluded that there are outstanding rates of successful progression for the provider's students and courses.

## **Intended educational gains**

The panel considered this an outstanding quality feature.

The provider submission shows evidence of outstanding quality, including:

- clearly conceptualising educational gains around a Student as Partner culture, work-based learning and preparing students for the world of work
- offering opportunities for students to engage with industry and employers across many subject areas
- including career development in the curriculum of 80 per cent of programmes
- receiving awards for employer engagement
- starting to plan student career and personal development in the first year, and in year two students source a placement which meets their future ambitions

- integrating work experience and placements into all programmes, backed by the provider's research showing this has improved student attainment and employment.

The panel noted there was evidence of an outstanding feature, including how the provider embeds intended educational gains into its culture. Considering all the evidence, the panel judged that the provider clearly articulates the range educational gains it intends its students to achieve, and why these are highly relevant to its students and their future ambitions.

### **Approaches to supporting educational gains**

The panel considered this an outstanding quality feature.

The provider submission demonstrates a number of approaches to supporting educational gain, including:

- collaborating with over 1,000 employers and advertising over 25,000 graduate and placement opportunities globally
- offering extensive placement opportunities, with 1,600 students supported to complete placements
- inviting former students to play a role in supporting the employability of current students and graduates

The panel noted that educational gains are aligned with industry needs and social mobility, with evidence from the indicators reflecting the provider's success in supporting all students to achieve their potential.

Looking at all the evidence together the panel found that the provider's approaches to supporting its students to achieve these gains are evidence-based, highly effective and tailored to its students and their different starting points.

### **Evaluation and demonstration of educational gains**

The panel considered this an outstanding quality feature.

The provider submission provides evidence of how it evaluates and demonstrates educational gain through:

- evaluating educational progress by conducting surveys
- using learning analytics to monitor and track student progress throughout their academic journey, ensuring early intervention when needed
- achieving high completion rates of courses, indicating positive impact

In addition, student feedback praises the strong employability prospects of students, highlighting the value of the placement year and opportunities to attend careers and placement events.

The panel considered all the evidence and found this feature to be outstanding. Overall, the panel concluded the provider evaluates the gains made by its students, and demonstrates its students are succeeding in achieving the intended gains.

## **Overall: Gold**

Based on the guidance and the expert judgement of panel members, the panel found the 'best fit' rating to be 'Gold'.

The panel considered both the student experience and student outcomes aspects to be 'Gold' with most student experience features of outstanding quality for all groups of students and courses and all student outcomes features of outstanding quality for all groups of students and courses.

The panel concluded that, across all the available evidence, the student experience and student outcomes are typically of outstanding quality, consistent with an overall rating of 'Gold'.