



Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023

Summary TEF 2023 panel statement

Northern College of Acupuncture

Summary of outcomes

Overall: Bronze

Typically, the experience students have at Northern College of Acupuncture and the outcomes it leads to are high quality, and there are some very high quality features.

Student experience: Silver

The student academic experience is typically very high quality.

Very high quality features include:

- teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are effective in supporting its students' learning, progression, and attainment
- course content and delivery effectively encourage students to engage in their learning, and stretch students to develop their knowledge and skills
- a supportive learning environment, and students have access to a readily available range of very high quality academic support
- physical and virtual learning resources are used effectively to support very high quality teaching and learning
- effectively engaging with students, leading to improvements to the experiences and outcomes of its students.

Student outcomes: Bronze

Student outcomes are typically high quality and there are some very high quality features.

Very high quality features include:

- support for students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies
- very high rates of successful progression for the provider's students and courses
- articulation of the educational gains the provider intends its students to achieve, and why these are relevant to its 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

Founded in 1988, Northern College of Acupuncture, is a small independent provider based in York, with around 200 students. The provider had 110 full-time undergraduate students in 2020-21 reflecting a steady growth in numbers since 2017-18 (80 students). The provider introduced part-time provision in 2020, though there is no student experience or student outcomes data available for part-time students for the period covered by the TEF assessment.

It sets out its aim 'to be a leading and pioneering establishment of educational excellence in the fields of traditional Chinese and Oriental medicine (acupuncture, herbal medicine and tuina massage) and nutrition, with a reputation for significant research activity'. It is a registered charity and has a series of charitable objectives, which are supported by its values to be 'a person-centred, progressive, sustainable community embodying integrity and quality'.

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/.

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/.

Student experience: Silver

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.

The panel found the quality of the student academic experience is very high quality for the provider's mix of students and courses.

The panel found:

- five features are very high quality
- two features did not reach the level of very high quality
- no features of the student experience that it considered may be of concern.

The panel found 'Silver' to be a better fit rather than 'Bronze' because the evidence demonstrates that 'most' rather than 'some' of the student experience features are of very high quality and the very high quality features apply to 'all' rather than 'most' students.

There was compelling evidence in the provider and student submissions and the indicators that the very high quality features apply to all the provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups. Therefore, the panel judged that the evidence shows that the aspect is very high quality for almost all groups of students and the overall rating of 'Silver' was the best fit.

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

Teaching, assessment, and feedback

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

The 'teaching on my course' indicator provides initial evidence of an outstanding quality feature for all the provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups.

The 'assessment and feedback' indicator provides initial evidence of an outstanding quality feature for all the provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups.

The provider submission provided further evidence of a very high quality approach to teaching, assessment and feedback, including:

- a flexible blended delivery approach enabling students to align their learning to their individual capacity to study
- vocational teaching practices using a Teaching Clinic system placing students in a clinical environment initially in an observational capacity to independently manage patient cases
- assessment practices that demonstrate a wide range of assessments that include role-playing to support clinical practice and an extended case study
- positive endorsement from the student voice of clinical experience.

Overall, the evidence in the submissions and the indicators show the provider has embedded very high quality teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are effective in supporting its students' learning, progression, and attainment. Therefore, the panel concluded that this is a very high quality feature.

Course content and delivery; student engagement in learning and stretch

The panel found this feature to be very high quality.

Evidence showed course content and delivery that effectively encouraged students to engage. This included the Teaching Clinic and the business planning classes, which incorporated the production of a personally relevant business plan. However, the panel felt there was limited evidence within the submission indicating 'stretch' outside of the above-mentioned modules and how the provider monitored and evaluated the engagement of students.

The student submission indicates that in-person teaching sessions are practical and of 'good quality' and 'a highlight for us as a cohort'. However, there was not enough evidence of how the e-learning engages students and supports their development of knowledge and skills.

Overall, the panel found there was enough evidence to show that content and delivery effectively encourage the provider's students to engage in their learning, and stretch students to develop their knowledge and skills. As a result, the panel considered this a very high quality feature.

Research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement

The panel did not consider this to be a very high quality feature.

The provider submission describes how it uses research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and/or employer engagement to contribute to the academic experience of its students, including:

- a commitment to nurturing high quality research, although the panel noted that there was not enough evidence of how these strategic aims are embedded to contribute to the academic experience
- professional accreditation of the course by the British Acupuncture Accreditation Board (BAAB) and student membership of the professional body, the British Acupuncture Council
- development of research skills and evidence based practice within the course aims and a curriculum that includes a series of Practitioner Observation Visits, but the panel found limited evidence of how this contributes to the student experience
- positive responses from students to 'how much research informs practice' in end of year evaluations, but there was limited evaluation of this.

Overall, the panel considered the context of the provider and concluded that although there is evidence of course content that supports the development of research skills and its vocational base, the provider did not articulate how research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and/or employer engagement contributes to the academic experience. Therefore, the panel did not consider this to be a very high quality feature.

Staff professional development and academic practice

The panel did not consider this to be a very high quality feature.

The evidence considered included:

- a commitment to staff development that supports professional development
- staff development in the areas of mental health
- planned staff training on diversity and inclusion.

Taking this evidence into account, the panel found the provider submission provided limited narrative relating to its support for staff professional development and how excellent academic practice is promoted. The panel, therefore, did not consider this to be a very high quality feature.

Learning environment and academic support

The panel found this feature to be very high quality.

The indicators for full-time students provide initial evidence of outstanding quality for 'academic support' for the majority of provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups.

The provider submission provided further evidence of a supportive learning environment and the range of very high quality academic support. This includes:

- access to 'tailored study support', in addition to a personal tutorial system through the Personal Access to Study Support (PASS) scheme
- adaptation measures in place to support students with health-related issues
- provision of proactive support through the 'Concerns about Students' scheme.

The student submission corroborates the responsiveness of tutors when students reach out, providing a positive learning experience.

The panel considered that there was not enough evidence of a strategic approach of tailored support and articulation of the effectiveness of the support offered by the provider to suggest an outstanding feature. Therefore, the panel concluded that the submissions and indicators evidence that the provider fosters a supportive learning environment and students have access to a readily available range of very high quality academic support. The panel concluded that this was a very high quality feature.

Learning resources

The panel found this feature to be very high quality.

The indicators for full-time students provide initial evidence of very high quality for 'learning resources' for the majority of provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups.

The provider submission provided further evidence of the effective use of physical and virtual learning resources to support very high quality of teaching and learning. This includes:

- details on the impact of the pandemic which restricted students' access to the library and to teaching clinics for substantial periods of time
- the implementation of a major new design for 2022-23 of the Virtual Learning Environment (VLE) based on an integration of SharePoint with Moodle in response to consistently lower scores for the VLE in student evaluations
- a limited description of physical resources, however, end of year student evaluations from 2018 – 19, indicate the library was rated highly
- practitioner observation visits for students to experience a range of different clinical settings to reflect the diversity of acupuncture practices.

The student submission provides further evidence of physical resources and indicates that there is a 'fantastic library which is well stocked with a variety of resources' and 'the librarian has a wealth of knowledge.' The submission also describes teaching rooms that are 'a fair size for our cohort to work comfortably'.

The panel noted limited evidence of physical and virtual resources that are effectively used to support very high quality teaching and learning. However, the panel considered the learning resources indicator to provide initial evidence of very high quality learning resources. Considering the evidence in the round, and within the context of the provider, the panel concluded that the evidence demonstrates this is a very high quality feature.

Student engagement in improvement

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

The indicators provide strong initial evidence of very high quality 'student voice' for all the provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups.

The submissions provided evidence of how it effectively engages with students, leading to improvements in the student experience. This evidence includes:

- student representation and embedded mechanisms to gather feedback from students about their experience, such as the end of year Student Evaluation Questionnaires, module data and the clinical experience
- implementing enhancement in response to student feedback, such as the improvements made to the VLE and the Personal Development Plan process
- commendation from external examiners that the provider is 'open to feedback from both students and the external examiners' and 'they have strived to continue to improve standards of the student experience'.

The student submission provides further supporting evidence of effective engagement with students, in that, while there are still concerns relating to a blended learning approach, they are

‘generally very pleased with how we are being listened to and that they are trying to implement a better balance’.

The provider and student submissions include evidence of how the provider effectively engages with its students which has led to improvements to the experiences.

Overall, the panel concluded that the submissions and indicator evidence show that the provider effectively engages with its students leading to improvements to the experiences and outcomes of its students, and judge this to be a high very high quality feature.

Student outcomes: Bronze

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.

The panel found the quality of the student academic experience is high quality for the provider’s mix of students and courses.

The panel found:

- three features are very high quality
- three features where there is insufficient evidence of very high quality.

The panel found ‘Bronze’ to be a better fit because the evidence demonstrates typically high quality provision across most groups of students, with some features of the aspect being very high quality for most groups of students.

The panel did not think that ‘Silver’ would be the best fit because the evidence demonstrates that ‘some’ rather than ‘most’ of the student outcomes features are of very high quality. Therefore, the panel judged that the evidence shows that the aspect is high quality for almost all groups of students and the overall rating of ‘Bronze’ was the best fit.

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

Approaches to supporting student success

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

The provider submission describes its approaches to supporting students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies, including:

- measurements put in place in response to the pandemic, such as rescheduling of the mandatory clinic skills classes, teaching remotely, flexibility in assessment dates and the support of students

- learning from the 'Access and Participation Plan' submission, indicating identification of future support needs of underrepresented groups
- student's development of a comprehensive skillset within modules with reference to PSRB requirements meaning graduates are trained to professional standards and the professional support opportunities within the 'Personal and Practitioner Development Stream'
- a teaching clinic system that develops clinical practice over the course of studies with final year students independently managing patient cases
- a scheme to identify, track, discuss and evaluate student support and for personal development planning.

The student submission indicates that students are positive about how the provider sets the foundations they need to progress beyond their studies. The teaching clinics are identified as a 'valuable part of the course.'

The panel considered that the provider submission describes its approaches to supporting students to succeed, with limited evidence of how these approaches are tailored to its students, the range of students supported, or the effectiveness of the approaches. Therefore, the panel concluded this feature is very high quality.

Continuation and completion rates

The panel considered there was not enough evidence to judge this feature as very high quality.

The panel interpreted both the 'continuation' and 'completion' indicators to show initial evidence that this feature is not very high quality.

The provider submission describes the additional financial pressure on students due to the provider's current 'Approved Provider' status as a contributing factor to the low continuation and completion rates. The submission also describes the substantial time commitment in relation to clinic hours and study, which can be demanding for its students.

Further evidence in the provider submission included:

- an evaluation of withdrawal and interruption of studies data providing evidence indicating finance and health-related reasons
- identification and implementation of a need for earlier intervention to support certain groups of students.

The panel concluded that there was not enough evidence in the submission to judge the feature as very high quality, and that the provider offers limited description of an effective approach to support students to succeed in their studies.

Progression rates

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

The 'progression' indicator demonstrated that close to 100 per cent of respondents had positive outcomes after qualifying from their course.

Evidence in the provider submission includes:

- a description of the provider's Graduate Outcomes webpage including video accounts from thirteen graduates demonstrating positive career outcomes
- a statement that 'final year students who are already in clinical practice and adding acupuncture to their skill set intend to continue in practice'
- development of a model for multi-bed clinic provision which provides low-cost treatments to support graduates who are working to establish clinical practices in areas of socio-economic disadvantage.

The student submission also provides a limited personal account about graduates' progression.

The panel considered that the evidence in the indicators and submissions did not provide enough evidence for this feature to be outstanding. Considering the context of the provider and the evidence holistically the panel concluded this feature to be very high quality.

Intended educational gains

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

The provider submission articulates the educational gains and outcomes that it intends its students to achieve.

The provider submission also recognises the 'need to develop ways of looking at students' different starting points in relation to the learning outcomes for them by the end of their course'.

The panel considered the provider to have articulated the educational gains it intended its students to achieve and why these are relevant to its students. The panel concluded this feature to be very high quality.

Approaches to supporting educational gains

The panel considered there was insufficient evidence of very high quality for this feature.

The panel examined the evidence in the provider and student submissions and judged that the provider does not provide enough explanation of how it supports its students to achieve its educational gains.

Evaluation and demonstration of educational gains

The panel considered there was insufficient evidence of very high quality for this feature.

The panel found that there was an absence of developed educational gain measures within the submission.

Overall, the panel considered that there was not enough evidence for this feature to be judged as very high quality.

Overall: Bronze

The panel considered the overall 'best fit' rating to be 'Bronze.' The panel considered the student experience aspect rating to be 'Silver' and the student outcomes aspect rating to be 'Bronze'.

The panel found most student experience features to be of very high quality for all groups of students and some student outcomes features to be of very high quality for most of the provider's groups of students, including some students from underrepresented groups.

When determining whether the overall rating should be 'Silver' or 'Bronze', the panel considered all the evidence across all the features and judged there is not enough evidence that the student experience and student outcomes are typically very high quality. Therefore, it judged the best fit to be 'Bronze' as the student experience and student outcomes features are typically high quality with some very high quality features.