



Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023

Summary TEF 2023 panel statement

RNN Group

Summary of outcomes

Overall: Silver

Typically, the experience students have at the RNN Group and the outcomes it leads to are very high quality.

Student experience: Bronze

The student academic experience is typically high quality, and there are some very high quality features.

Very high quality features include:

- research in relevant disciplines, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and/or employer engagement is used to contribute to a very high-quality academic experience for its students
- support for staff professional development and promotion of excellent academic practice
- physical and virtual learning resources are used effectively to support very high quality teaching and learning.

Student outcomes: Silver

Student outcomes are typically very high quality.

Very high quality features include:

- effective support for students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies
- very high rates of continuation and completion for the provider's students and courses for most students
- very high rates of successful progression
- clear articulation of the educational gains the provider intends its students to achieve.

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.

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

RNN Group is a large general further education college and with a presence across South Yorkshire and north Nottinghamshire, operating a specialised university centre in Rotherham. Higher education is available at all campuses across the group (including Dearne Valley, Rotherham, and Worksop).

The provider states that higher level skills and higher education form a key part of its strategic plan to meet the needs of the local community – highlighting the low level of attainment that its communities have around higher-level skills, as well as the higher than average levels of deprivation. Its strategy is based on five priorities. These are to:

- increase higher education and higher level skills opportunities within the region
- provide a high quality educational experience that meets the needs and aspiration of students, employers and the local community to support high levels of student success
- develop the management and governance of higher education
- provide opportunities for staff to take research-led scholarly activities, which inform curriculum planning and implementation
- increase student belonging, satisfaction and engagement, particularly among those from low participation areas, to successfully overcome disadvantage barriers to achieve positive outcomes.

There are collaborations with regional stakeholders (such as councils) to help to develop and enact strategy and to develop curriculum. Provision is validated by a range of university partners: University of Hull, Sheffield Hallam University and Huddersfield University, as well as a substantial volume of higher technical qualifications via Pearson.

Student numbers have remained steady for full-time students (at around 400 a year) for the duration of the TEF period, but part-time student numbers appear to be declining.

Most full-time students are white (90 per cent) and female (55 per cent). Around two-thirds of students are under the age of 21 at the start of their programme and around two-thirds are from deprived backgrounds.

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: Bronze

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 carefully considered the evidence available and determined the student experience aspect rating to be 'Bronze'.

The panel considered and weighed up the evidence across the provider, then considered the extent to which there are very high quality features across the aspect as a whole, and how far these features apply across the provider's student groups and the range of courses and subjects.

It found:

- three features to be very high quality
- insufficient evidence of very high quality for four features.

Due to the four features that were determined not to have the evidence to support a judgement of very high quality, the panel carefully considered a 'Requires improvement' rating. However, the panel agreed the best fit rating was 'Bronze' as there was sufficient evidence of a high quality student experience for all groups of students and there were some elements of very high quality for some students.

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

Teaching, assessment, and feedback

The panel found insufficient evidence of very high quality for this feature.

It noted that the indicators for full-time students provide better evidence than for part-time students.

Overall, the indicator for 'teaching on my course' provided very varied evidence for full-time students – there some evidence of very high quality provision, but evidence of a decline in quality during the TEF period. There was evidence of not very high quality for students in Computer Science, who appeared to lack access to suitably qualified staff and difficulty with access to the correct software during coronavirus pandemic lockdowns. The panel considered the rationale to be credible in the context of college higher education.

However, for part-time students the 'teaching on my course' indicator provides evidence of outstanding quality, while 'assessment and feedback' provides evidence of not very high quality. There was mitigation offered in the provider submission around the part-time indicators, citing the difficulty of female mature students in full-time employment adapting to online learning because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Evidence in the provider submission includes:

- a 20-working day turn around on assessments

- feedback from internal focus groups, which suggests students considered feedback provided to offer constructive advice on improvement
- external examiners commenting positively on feedback that was helpful in advising students on how to develop further vocational skills.

The panel reviewed this evidence and, while they confirmed it showed expected practice within the sector, it concluded that overall there was not enough evidence that these were effective in supporting students learning, progression and raising attainment. The panel noted, though, that for some students there was some evidence of very high quality.

Course content and delivery; student engagement in learning and stretch

The panel found insufficient evidence of very high quality for this feature.

The provider submission provides details of external examiners commenting favourably about assessment.

Other evidence includes:

- examples given of the industry links that teachers and individual programmes have
- how field trips and visits are used to enhance learning and offer the appropriate professional context with examples across a wide range of subject areas including animal management students visiting local wildlife parks
- some key partnerships are highlighted that have supported students over a number of years, including the use of industry placements to develop their industry related knowledge and skills
- the development of Google classroom during the coronavirus pandemic.

However, in conclusion, the panel could not find evidence of how course content and delivery effectively encourage the provider's students to engage in their learning and stretch students.

Research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement

The panel considered this feature to be very high quality.

Evidence in the provider submission includes:

- that all academic staff have links with professional practice in industry, with several examples of close collaboration with industry including placements and visits. For example, to pre-school and nurseries, and industry links with local theatres and radio stations
- academic staff are required to hold honours degrees or have a minimum of three years of relevant teaching experience and relevant professional qualifications/experience to be able to teach at higher education level
- recent engagement with the UK professional standards framework

- skills workshops that teachers have taken, and collaboration with another provider to improve academic practice are examples of the provider taking a systematic approach to having a very high quality academic experience.
- how employer forums are used to assist with the development of curriculum that meets the needs of the local economy.

The panel judged overall that the provider uses research in relevant disciplines, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and/or employer engagement to contribute to a very high-quality academic experience for its students.

Staff professional development and academic practice

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

Evidence in the provider submission includes:

- how all higher education teaching staff have dedicated development days (although the evidence did not set out what this entails or what the impact of these days have been on the experience students receive)
- the professional expertise of teaching staff, and evidence of further support for staff to access continuing professional development
- that 60 per cent of academic staff have a PGCE (or equivalent), and a further 30 per cent held other teaching qualifications. Financial support is provided to staff wanting to improve their teaching and learning practice through taking part in further teaching qualifications
- how peer observations allow for the identification of good practice. For example, there is an observation scheme which is bespoke to higher education.

Overall, the panel, when applying expert judgement, found evidence of very high quality support for staff professional development and excellent academic practice is promoted.

Learning environment and academic support

The panel found insufficient evidence of very high quality for this feature.

The overall indicator for 'academic support' provides evidence of very high quality for full-time students, and for part-time students it provides evidence of not very high quality, although both have limited statistical certainty.

Evidence in the provider submission includes:

- internal survey data that suggested very high levels of student satisfaction with study skill support. However, response rates for this survey are not provided, and nor is the target population
- how small classes (of 10-15) allow for students to receive more one-to-one contact as part of their learning

- a claim that students are supported by tutors and that they have access to a minimum of one hour of personal academic support each week
- additional support is provided to students at risk of non-completion who are identified through the provider's student progress review.

Summer tutorial support is also provided to help students successfully transition into higher education study, either from further education programmes or when returning to education as mature students. However, the panel did not find evidence of the impact of these activities to be able to determine if the support is of very high quality.

Learning resources

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

The overall indicator for 'learning resources' provides evidence of very high quality for full-time students, but with limited statistical certainty. The overall part-time indicator provides evidence of outstanding quality, but again with limited certainty in the data.

The provider submission details that a strategic approach has been made to investments.

Other evidence includes:

- capital investment being made to improve facilities, such as healthcare and for art studios
- dedicated study space, with design informed by student feedback integrated into dedicated higher education facilities
- a partnership with Google Education – tutors made use of Google technology to provide engaging educational opportunities
- several examples of subject specific facilities and technology in place to support students, such as high-end computing, an on-site theatre for performance students, and hydraulic engineering equipment. There was also evidence of access to a wide range of animals to animal management students.

Considering the evidence in the round, the panel concluded that there was sufficient evidence presented to judge that physical and virtual learning resources are used effectively to support very high quality teaching and learning.

Student engagement in improvement

The panel found insufficient evidence of very high quality.

The overall indicator for 'student engagement' provides evidence of very high quality for both full-time and part-time students, but with limited certainty. Evidence varies across the TEF time period, and the part-time indicators only relate to year 3 of this period.

Evidence in the provider submission includes:

- a termly 'student voice' forum, as well as surveys at provider and module level, but there was limited evidence of feedback being used to improve the student experience

- a very recent effort to improve opportunities for student engagement through a renewed students' union committee and student governors. This is described as a fairly new initiative so there is not much evidence of impact yet, but the panel noted it as it gave evidence of further improvement
- meaningful action taken retroactively in response to student feedback on the computing programme following poor indicators for the last year of the time series, but it was not clear that this was reflective of the provider's practice overall.

In conclusion, the panel found little evidence of improvement taken directly from student voice activity. Therefore, when reflecting on the indicator data and the provider submission, the panel found insufficient evidence of very high quality.

Student outcomes: Silver

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 weighed up all the evidence relating to the student outcomes aspect as a whole and determined its rating to be 'Silver'.

The panel considered the extent to which there are very high quality and outstanding quality features across the aspect as a whole, and how far these features apply across all the provider's student groups and the range of its courses and subjects.

It found:

- four features to be very high quality
- insufficient evidence of very high quality for two features.

The panel considered the best fit rating to be 'Silver'. This is because most features are very high quality for all groups of students and courses.

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 gives a clear narrative in relation to supporting those from low socio-economic backgrounds and in supporting the employability of students.

Other evidence in the provider submission includes:

- evidence of very high pass rates, showing students who remain on course perform well in achieving their qualification

- how a highly structured tutorial provision at the provider contributed positively to outcomes by supporting students at risk to continue with their studies
- remarks that are attributed to students (there was no separate student submission) which highlight satisfaction with their learning experience and the range of support that they receive. The panel found this to be compelling evidence
- attempts are made to allow students to develop a sense of belonging, for example through residential trips and dedicated higher education space
- assessment coaches are used to provide academic and pastoral support to students who are thought to be at risk of non-continuation.

The provider submission also outlined how the ability of students to juggle domestic, work, and academic commitments remained a challenge to continuation rates.

The strong continuation and completion rates are also further evidence of students being supported academically and pastorally to be successful in their studies.

Considering all the evidence (along with the information in other student outcome features), the panel found that the provider effectively supports its students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies.

Continuation and completion rates

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

The indicator for 'continuation' provides evidence of being broadly very high quality for full-time students. However, in the most recent TEF year there is evidence of not very high quality. For part-time students there is evidence of outstanding, although this varies for some student groups.

For 'completion' the indicator provides evidence of very high quality for both full-time and part-time students, with statistical certainty.

The panel found that first degree students and students with Asian heritage underperformed against their peers, but it did not weight this evidence because of the small numbers of students.

The provider submission explains how they have used flexible timetables to accommodate work of part-time students and how this has supported continuation rates. However, there is no recognition that this could also have been beneficial to full-time students if they had used the same approach.

The panel judged overall that there are very high rates of continuation and completion for the provider's students and courses for most students.

Progression rates

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

The overall indicator for 'progression' provides evidence of very high quality for full-time students, but there is limited statistical certainty. However, the time series shows positive progression rates

improving over the four-year period. For part-time students the indicator provides evidence of outstanding quality, with statistical certainty.

When considering the statistical certainty around the full-time indicators, the provider submission outlined how engagement with employers is something they consider to be a strength, highlighting the work of the employer academies as a way of engaging employers in the curriculum design and, as a result, the opportunities available to students. The provider has received national awards and recognition for this work.

The panel found evidence of very high rates of successful progression for the provider's students and courses.

Intended educational gains

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

The provider set out a model of educational gains and what its intention is. This is highly influenced by the high levels of deprivation locally and the lower-than-average higher level skill attainment rates found in the campus college towns.

There is a clear focus on improving its students' prospects through knowledge, skills, work-readiness and personal development. The provider details how it uses students' starting points to determine teaching and learning interventions and the support that students are offered. Teachers are supported to undertake this work through peer observation processes and through supportive policies around things like admissions.

Therefore, the panel judged that the provider is clear on the educational gains it has for its students.

Approaches to supporting educational gains

The panel considered that there was insufficient evidence that this feature is very high quality.

The provider submission provided evidence of how provision is adapted to the diverse needs of particular students. This includes the support for student parents, students experiencing menopause, and adaptation of programmes for students from religious backgrounds.

Tutors assess students' starting points and provide appropriate support to ensure progress. The submission outlined how support for academic writing is embedded into programmes to improve crucial academic skills.

However, the panel judged that it is not clear that the interventions made in support of educational gain are effective. Therefore it concluded that there was insufficient evidence of very high quality.

Evaluation and demonstration of educational gains

The panel considered that there was insufficient evidence that this feature is very high quality.

The panel applied the guidance that 'a provider will not be prevented from being awarded higher TEF ratings solely based on an absence of developed educational gain measures' in its overall assessment of the student outcomes aspect.

Overall: Silver

The panel considered the overall 'best fit' rating to be 'Silver'.

The panel considered the student experience aspect rating to be 'Bronze' and the student outcomes aspect rating to be 'Silver'. It weighed these two aspects equally and considered all the evidence across all features and across all the provider's student groups, subjects and courses to come to a 'best fit' decision regarding the overall rating.

The panel judged that across all the available evidence the student experience and student outcomes are typically of very high quality for all groups of students.

In reaching this judgement the panel considered the compelling evidence of employability and the socio-economic environment that the provider operates in, and noted the provider's performance evidenced by the indicators for students from deprived areas. Furthermore, the panel considered that interventions detailed in the provider submission showed impact through the student outcomes indicators, and therefore, found that the overall experience for students was typically very high quality. This is underpinned by a clear mission and vision for the provider's higher education offer.