



Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023

Summary TEF 2023 panel statement

The University of Cumbria

Summary of outcomes

Overall: Silver

Typically, the experience students have at The University of Cumbria and the outcomes it leads to are very high quality.

Student experience: Bronze

The student academic experience is typically very high quality.

Very high quality features include:

- the provider has embedded very high quality teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are effective in supporting its students' learning, progression, and attainment
- course content and delivery effectively encourage the provider's students to engage in their learning and stretch students to develop their knowledge and skills
- there is very high quality support for staff professional development and promotion of excellent academic practice
- the provider fosters a supportive learning environment, and its 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.

Student outcomes: Silver

Student outcomes are typically very high quality.

Very high quality features include:

- the provider effectively supports its students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies
- very high rates of continuation and completion for the provider's students and courses
- very high rates of successful progression for the provider's students and courses
- the provider articulates the educational gains it intends its students to achieve, and why these are relevant to its students
- the provider effectively supports its students to achieve the intended educational gains.

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

The University of Cumbria ('the provider') was established in 2007 to be 'for and of the county', an area with low population size, and 'cold spots' of higher-level skills and labour supply, with a mission 'to inspire and equip our graduates, communities, economy and environment to thrive'.

The provider has a 'dispersed campus model' with campuses in Carlisle, Lancaster, Ambleside and London, and teaching sites in Barrow-in-Furness and Workington. It has strategies for student achievement and learning, teaching and assessment, implemented and monitored through an integrated annual action plan.

It is a relatively small university, with around 4,120 full-time and 1,580 part-time undergraduate students in 2020-21. Part-time student numbers have increased by 36 per cent since 2017-18. The number of undergraduate apprenticeships has increased from 80 in 2017-18 to 800 in 2020-21 but this optional group of students was not included in this TEF exercise.

Most undergraduates study for a first degree (96 per cent of full-time students and 84 per cent of part-time students) with the remainder at 'other undergraduate' level.

The provider offers a wide range of subject areas, notably: nursing and midwifery; education and teaching; business and management; and engineering (11.2 per cent).

Most full-time students are white, young (under 21 years), and female. More part-time students are over 21.

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 weighed up all the evidence in the indicators and the submissions relating to the student experience aspect as a whole and determined the student experience aspect rating to be 'Bronze'.

In accordance with the guidance, the panel identified very high quality and outstanding features. It then considered the extent to which there are very high quality and outstanding features across the aspect as a whole.

It found:

- five of the features to be very high quality
- insufficient evidence of very high quality for two features
- the very high quality features apply to most of the provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups.

The panel considered the best fit rating to be 'Bronze', because most features of the aspect are very high quality for most groups of students. The panel did not think that 'Silver' would be the best fit because there is not enough evidence of very high quality in all features for most students, nor is there evidence of very high quality in most features for all students.

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 panel considered that the 'teaching on my course' and 'assessment and feedback' indicators broadly provide initial evidence of very high quality for most students/courses, considering some varied performance across the available data. The provider explains that business and management (where the indicator suggested weaker performance) includes some courses in project management and outdoor studies that were disproportionately affected by the coronavirus pandemic, as was performing arts.

The panel placed limited weight on this argument as the provider did not offer evidence to substantiate the additional impact claimed.

Additional evidence in the provider submission includes:

- university-wide projects to improve assessment literacy, establishment of the centre for academic practice enhancement, a personal tutor toolkit and a student engagement dashboard
- curriculum design framework using the principles of Universal Design for Learning

- 2021-22 module evaluation survey data – 87.6 per cent of respondents agreed ‘taught sessions are enhancing learning and understanding’
- external examiner feedback on assessment practice.

The student submission is generally supportive and reiterates evidence from the provider submission, supplemented with results from a survey of around 300 academic representatives (but there were only 13 responses).

Considering all the evidence the panel judged the provider has embedded very high quality teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are effective in supporting its students' learning, progression, and attainment.

Course content and delivery; student engagement in learning and stretch

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

Evidence in the provider submission includes:

- a curriculum design framework and support for academic teams that ‘enables and encourages learning across modules’
- the curriculum is co-created with employers to reflect contemporary disciplinary practices (five case studies given to evidence this)
- use of structured inquiry and an approach that considers different learning needs and preferences
- opportunities to further develop knowledge and skills using LinkedIn Learning embedded in many modules. The student submission confirms this practice.

Further evidence in the student submission includes the following statement:

‘The university works hard to design a curriculum that meets the needs of the students, the community, and the students’ prospective employers. They have expert practitioners and experienced tutors who deliver the curriculum to the students. The students develop strong working relationships with their tutors, and this is reflected in student staff forums and module feedback forms’.

The panel concluded that both submissions evidence that course content and delivery effectively encourage the provider’s students to engage in their learning and stretch students to develop their knowledge and skills.

Research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement

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

Evidence in the provider submission includes:

- a statement that ‘teaching is designed to be led by practice, industry and research-informed academics’

- academic staff engage in research and scholarly activity supported by 'research and scholarly activity leave' of up to 25 days
- students on large professional programmes take work-based learning placements, for example teaching, nursing and allied health professions
- the provider is working with a total of 33 professional statutory and regulatory bodies
- engagement with major employers to deliver education and training in project management.

The curriculum is co-created with employers to reflect contemporary disciplinary practices (five case studies are given to evidence this).

The student submission reiterates evidence from the provider submission.

The panel considered that these examples, while helpful, do not evidence how research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and/or employer engagement is used systematically to contribute to a very high quality academic experience for all students.

This meant that the panel concluded that there is insufficient evidence of very high quality in relation to the provider's use of 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:

- support for staff professional development is provided by the 'centre for academic practice enhancement'. In 2021-22, 215 events were delivered, with a total of 1,283 registrations
- the provider engages with the Advance Higher Education Professional Standards Framework. All newly appointed staff must achieve fellowship within three years
- promotion pathways to associate professor and professor include general criteria and specific criteria for learning and teaching.

The student submission adds 'many of the tutors on campus are also students completing masters and doctorates.'

Overall, the panel concluded that there is sufficient evidence of very high quality support for staff professional development and promotion of excellent academic practice.

Learning environment and academic support

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

After considering the 'academic support' indicator evidence, the panel found that there is initial evidence of very high quality for most students and courses. The panel considered the small number of part-time students and placed more weight on the full-time indicators. The panel also

took account of the relatively small number of students in certain subject areas (business and management and performing arts) where performance is weaker.

Additional evidence in the provider submission includes:

- a student achievement strategy
- every student is allocated a personal tutor with scheduled group and individual sessions
- communities of practice are formed around subject disciplines to promote student belonging and engagement
- a student engagement dashboard and support for students from academic staff and student engagement coordinators
- a student peer support scheme is being piloted in 2022-23 for integrated foundation year students.

Additional evidence in the student submission includes:

- student support services and signposting to specialist support
- emergency financial support
- tutorials and one-to-one support sessions.

After considering the evidence, the panel concluded that the provider fosters a supportive learning environment, and its students have access to a readily available range of very high quality academic support.

Learning resources

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

The 'learning resources' indicator provides initial evidence of very high quality for most students and courses. The panel weighed up the differences between full-time and part-time according to the number of students in each mode of study.

Additional evidence in the provider submission includes:

- a guiding principle that 'students will learn in spaces that reflect the settings they will encounter in employment, including equipment that represents the range of technology current in their professions'
- in 2020-21 and 2022-22, the provider invested just under £6.4 million in buildings, IT and equipment
- the libraries are open 24/7 and have a 'digital first' strategy
- the use of 'Collaborate' to enable student groups on different campuses to study together and for core sessions on distance learning programmes.

Additional evidence in the student submission includes:

- the provider is constantly updating and adapting physical and virtual resources to meet the needs of students
- the campuses have excellent facilities to engage students in practical learning, such as up to date technology, equipment and laboratories.

The panel concluded that there is sufficient evidence that physical and virtual learning resources are used effectively to support very high quality teaching and learning.

Student engagement in improvement

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

The indicators for 'student voice' provide initial evidence of very high quality for most students and courses. The panel weighed the full-time and part-time indicators accordingly based on the numbers of students represented in each group.

Additional evidence in the student and provider submissions includes:

- a number of formal mechanisms in use to gather feedback from students
- a students' union representative on key, deliberative committees
- the students' union working with the provider to address low student engagement with these processes, and an increase in the number of academic representatives.

While the student and provider submissions describe the mechanisms that are in place, and the measures already underway to improve student engagement, there is insufficient evidence of specific improvements to the experiences or outcomes of students.

Although the panel considered the indicator to provide initial evidence of very high quality student engagement in improvement for most students and courses, the provider and student submissions provide insufficient additional evidence of specific improvements that have resulted from the provider's engagement with its students.

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 the rating to be 'Silver'.

In accordance with the guidance, the panel identified very high quality and outstanding features. It then considered the extent to which there are very high quality and outstanding features across the aspect as a whole.

It found:

- five of the features to be very high quality
- insufficient evidence of very high quality for one feature

The panel considered the best fit rating to be 'Silver' because all features of the aspect are very high quality for most groups of students. While there is insufficient evidence of very high quality for one feature (evaluation and demonstration of educational gain), the guidance states that a provider will not be prevented from being awarded higher TEF ratings solely based on an absence of developed educational gain measures, and so this feature was treated neutrally.

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.

Evidence in the provider submission includes:

- student success policies that 'seek to place the student, their self-direction and growing capability at the centre'
- subject areas where indicators provide strong evidence of effectiveness of 'fostering sense of community, identity and belonging' and currently being consolidated across all areas
- a curriculum designed in consultation with external stakeholders (e.g. forensic sciences), and a focus on professional competency and readiness for work embedded – a key element of intended educational gains
- placements, volunteering and internships contribute to high employability
- implementation of a career hub for students and recent graduates.

The student submission includes reference to work with external partners and agencies to offer student placements and practical learning.

The provider and student submissions include evidence about the approaches to supporting student success and the panel concluded that the provider effectively supports its students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies. The panel also noted the very high rates of continuation, completion and progression, as set out below.

Continuation and completion rates

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

The 'continuation' indicators provide compelling evidence of very high rates of continuation for most full-time students, although the panel noted that this was not the case for all groups of students and courses. The indicator for part-time students shows outstanding rates of continuation for most students.

The 'completion' indicators provide initial evidence of very high rates of completion for most full-time students, although with some variation between courses. The part-time indicator shows evidence of outstanding rates of completion though this also varied between courses.

The panel considered the numbers of full-time and part-time students and accordingly placed proportionally more weight on the full-time continuation and completion indicators. The panel also considered the numbers of students in different subject areas in weighing up the evidence. The panel concluded that, overall, there are very high rates of continuation and completion and therefore initial evidence of very high quality for this feature.

The provider submission provides some explanation for indicator performance in some areas that is below very high quality, although the panel considered that these explanations are generally not evidenced, for example by supporting quantitative data.

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

Progression rates

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

The indicators for 'progression' provide evidence of very high rates of progression for most full-time students, although with variation between student groups and courses.

The part-time indicator provides compelling evidence of outstanding rates of progression.

The panel weighed up the differences between full-time and part-time students (and considered the numbers of students in different subject areas) and concluded that overall, the 'progression' indicators provide initial evidence of very high rates of progression and therefore initial evidence of very high quality for this feature.

The panel concluded that overall there are 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 submission states that, 'the university's mission is to bring higher education to a geographical area which has historically been a 'cold spot' for higher education.

Educational gains are intended to be demonstrated through study (and placement learning, where included) and cover:

'the secure achievement of knowledge and skills in their discipline; personal skills of resilience, determination, professional behaviour and self-care; the insight, ambition and confidence to make informed choices about their careers and other contributions to community; and work-related skills in problem-solving, negotiation, presentation and teamworking which, alongside discipline-specific skills, make them an asset to employers and to community organisations'.

After considering all the evidence, the panel judged that the provider articulates the educational gains it intends its students to achieve, and why these are relevant to its students.

Approaches to supporting educational gains

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

Evidence in the provider submissions includes:

- reference to the access and participation plan as a 'key mechanism for monitoring the gains made by students from underrepresented groups'
- validation processes ensure that taught programmes support the development of graduate attributes. These graduate attributes are embedded in the curriculum design framework
- examples of the ways educational gains are promoted (foundation year, nursing and midwifery).

Evidence in the student submission includes:

- students provided with person-centred support, leading to improved experiences, academic outcomes and opportunities for graduate work and further study
- tailored, timely support to the students throughout their studies, recognising individual learning preferences.

Overall, the panel concluded that there is sufficient evidence to conclude that the provider effectively supports its students to achieve intended educational gains.

Evaluation and demonstration of educational gains

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

Evidence in the provider submission includes:

- consideration of the use of existing quantitative indicators, for example continuation, completion, progression
- qualitative measures are under development

- use of alumni association to gather qualitative data for those involved in volunteering or other community related ventures
- developing individual student profiles to include demographic and entry profiles to establish baselines at the start of their higher education journey, to support evaluation of educational gain. This is still in its early stages, so there is no evidence yet.

The panel concluded that the provider is still developing its approach and there is insufficient evidence that it evaluates the educational gains made by its students.

Overall: Silver

The panel noted the guidance that the overall rating should not be higher than the highest aspect rating and should be no more than one rating higher than the lowest aspect rating. The panel considered the student experience aspect rating to be 'Bronze' and the student outcomes aspect rating to be 'Silver'. The panel weighted 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 for the provider

The panel considered the best fit rating to be 'Silver'. This is because the panel judged that, across all the available evidence, the student experience and student outcomes are typically of very high quality. In reaching this judgement, the panel considered there was evidence of very high quality for most students and courses across the two aspects.