



Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023

Summary TEF 2023 panel statement

Blackburn College

Summary of outcomes

Overall: Bronze

Typically, the experience students have at Blackburn College 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 students' learning, progression, and attainment
- course content and delivery that effectively encourages the provider's students to engage in their learning and stretches students to develop their knowledge and skills
- innovation, employer engagement and professional practice that contribute to a very high quality academic experience
- a supportive learning environment, where students have access to a readily available range of very high quality academic support
- how the provider effectively engages with its 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:

- very high rates of successful progression for the provider's students and courses
- how the provider articulates the educational gains it 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

Blackburn College is a further education college in Blackburn in Lancashire, which has been a higher education provider for around 40 years.

The local population is significantly more diverse than the population of England overall, with almost 70 per cent of the local population identifying as White British, compared to a national average of 90 per cent. The 2019 Indices of Deprivation revealed that Blackburn was ranked as the 15th most deprived area in England. There are high levels of social deprivation, and low basic skills levels across the borough and the provider defines itself as 'impacting upon and influencing the broader economic prosperity and social cohesion by addressing many of the Higher Education needs of the population from the wider surrounding area'.

In 2020-21 there were 1,650 higher education students. Numbers have been declining steadily over the four-year period.

The current portfolio includes a range of full degrees, foundation degrees, and a small number of higher technical qualifications. There are long-established partnerships with Lancaster University, the University of South Wales and the University of Central Lancashire who validate the undergraduate programmes. The provider also offers Pearson Higher National programmes.

A wide range of subjects are studied, with the largest groups of students taking Business and Management, Engineering, Education, Sports, Law, Health and Social Care, and Creative Industries.

The student population is diverse, with a high number of students from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Most students are mature and around a quarter have a reported disability. The assessment has taken account of the context of the provider and the characteristics of its students and courses. For example, the panel has considered the evidence in the submissions as relevant to the characteristics of students noted above, and to the mix of courses.

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 student experience is typically very high quality for the provider's mix of students and courses. Across the student experience aspect, the panel found:

- most features are very high quality
- two features where there is not enough evidence of very high quality
- evidence of at least very high quality across all groups of students and for all courses and subjects, including students from underrepresented groups.

The panel applied the criteria and found the best fit rating to be 'Silver'. This is because most features were very high quality for most groups of students.

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

Teaching, assessment, and feedback

The panel considered this a very high quality feature.

The indicators provided initial evidence of very high quality 'teaching on my course' and 'assessment and feedback' for full-time students.

The provider and student submissions provided further evidence on approaches to teaching, assessment and feedback practices. Evidence includes:

- how a higher education teaching, learning and assessment strategy is based on an 'academic experience shaped by a cycle of teaching, learning and assessment excellence informed by research informed practice and practice-led research' within a context of high expectations and continuous improvement.
- that there are high student satisfaction levels over the past three years annual monitoring reviews and programme evaluation questionnaires which provide internal survey data that show high levels of student satisfaction with their teaching and assessment experiences. This is confirmed in the student submission
- that there is an emphasis on inclusive assessment. The panel noted, however, this is described through individual programmes rather than being systematically embedded
- how academic coaches play a key role in supporting students through the assessment process
- details of the Disability and Inclusive Practice degree which is cited as evidence of outstanding approaches to teaching and supporting students who are also in employment. This includes one-to-one live formative feedback on work-related tasks. This was confirmed by the external examiner and during a Lancaster University revalidation event.

Furthermore, the student submission states that the approach to assessment feedback 'means that we always have factors/pointers to improve and help the students keep motivated...tailors to the need of the student'.

The panel considered that the evidence in the provider and student submissions build on the evidence in the indicators. The evidence demonstrates that the provider's approaches are effective in supporting students' learning progression and attainment. The panel noted that there is limited evidence of strategic focus and how these approaches are systematically embedded.

Overall, the panel judged that the provider has embedded very high quality teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are effective in supporting students' learning, progression, and attainment. Considering the evidence in the round, the panel judged this to be a very high quality feature.

Course content and delivery; student engagement in learning and stretch

The panel considered this a very high quality feature.

The provider submission demonstrates a strategic approach to course content and delivery and programme development, which incorporates the skills needs of local employers which is relevant to the provider's context. This is shaped by the provider's mission to 'transform students' lives and our community through excellent education, training and support'.

The evidence in the provider submission includes:

- some examples of how students input into course design. For example, student engagement in the Psychology degree resulted in a specific module of Forensic Psychology. It is not clear whether there is a systematic approach to this across all courses.
- that the provider's active partnership with Lancashire Local Skills Improvement Plan enabled practitioners and professionals to enrich course content and curriculum development initiatives
- that engineering courses have been reviewed using employer input and have been with linked to the Lancashire Local Skills Improvement Plan
- how innovative and engaging methods of delivery support students to make progress and feel valued as part of their learning. This was evidenced for Psychology, but consistent practice across various subjects was not evidenced.

Evidence from the student submission includes:

- that the provider is clearly preparing graduates for the roles they want to go into or to consider roles they had not even thought about before
- that the knowledge and skills embedded in the curriculum builds our confidence for the 'real world'.

The panel considered the evidence and concluded that the provider's approaches to course content and delivery effectively encourage the provider's students to engage in their learning and

stretch students to develop their knowledge and skills. The panel therefore considered this a very high quality feature.

Research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement

The panel considered this a very high quality feature.

The provider submission sets out its approaches towards innovation, employer and professional practice engagement which contributes to a very high quality experience for its students.

The evidence includes:

- that the higher education teaching, learning and assessment strategy ensures the embedding of research and scholarship in teaching and shaping the design and delivery of courses
- the scholarship framework which was developed collaboratively with the Association of Colleges and the national scholarship framework. This has resulted in the publication of practical research cases
- examples of current work in four areas that illustrate research-based practice and cross disciplinary research which is community based. These include Disability and Inclusion, Education Studies, Art and Design, and Counselling using on-going research to inform course content and delivery.

The student submission confirms the evidence, including:

- comments that 'research, up-to-date knowledge and knowing that employers have been involved in our courses is so valuable for our education'
- several examples of practitioners as guest lecturers across subject areas
- that some staff engage students in their research activity for published work.

The panel considered the evidence and concluded that the provider uses innovation, employer engagement and professional practice which are implemented to ensure industry informed provision to contribute to a very high quality academic experience for its students. Overall, the panel judged this to be a very high quality feature.

Staff professional development and academic practice

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

The provider submission describes its approaches towards staff professional development and academic practice. The evidence includes:

- the organisational development plan which 'drives improvement and innovation' and develops staff competencies through continued professional development. Three examples demonstrate the impact of staff development at individual course level. The panel noted, however, that there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate a systematic approach towards staff development across the provider

- that targeted professional development workshops and the annual conference focus on higher education pedagogy. Although there is limited evidence of how this is promoted across the institution and what improvements are achieved resulting improvements
- that the annual monitoring report process is used to show the quality of professional development. There are some references to this in specific subject areas and how this has improved the quality of work as a result. The evidence does not show, however, whether there is any systematic impact of this work and how that enhances practice.

The panel noted that the provider submission largely refers to staff development. Whilst there is some description of sharing academic practice, this is not sufficiently detailed as to how excellent academic practice is promoted systematically across the provider.

The student submission states, 'knowing that teachers are currently completing higher level education within the discipline they teach gives students the confidence that the teachers are passionate and up to date within the area they are teaching'.

Considering the evidence in the round, the panel considered there is not enough evidence to demonstrate that there is very high quality support for staff professional development nor that excellent academic practice is promoted.

Learning environment and academic support

The panel considered this a very high quality feature.

The indicator provides strong initial evidence of very high quality 'academic support' for full-time students. This varies across some groups of students and courses, with not very high quality 'academic support' for male students, Allied Health and Architecture students.

The provider submission offers further evidence of very high quality. Evidence includes:

- academic coaches who provide tailored academic support to students working on such issues as time management, reflective writing and research skills. It is not clear whether these operate across all student groups
- that attention is placed on student wellbeing which is supported at dedicated points throughout the academic year. Mental health week supports all students who are taken off timetable to enjoy a range of wider activities. There is no further evidence on the impact of these arrangements
- that targeted additional academic support was provided through recorded sessions to maintain student engagement in their learning during the coronavirus pandemic
- planned interventions that improve assessment practices are cited in response to student feedback.

The student submission contains positive comments on the support received and highlights the teaching model of smaller sizes which enables them to receive the right level of support to meet their needs. Evidence includes that there is academic support from the day of enrolment and that the provider offers a disability advice service. They accept self-referrals making the service accessible to all.

The student submission concludes that there is an 'outstandingly supportive environment that meets the needs of the students'.

The panel considered the evidence and found that the provider fosters a supportive learning environment and that its students have access to a readily available range of very high quality academic support. There is limited evidence, however, of how outstanding academic support is achieved nor of tailoring to student needs.

Overall, the panel concluded this feature is very high quality.

Learning resources

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

The indicator provides initial evidence of not very high quality 'learning resources' for full-time students.

The provider submission sets out its approach to learning resources which the panel considered in reaching its judgement. Evidence includes:

- a bespoke higher education centre which accommodates around 1,100 full time students and includes specialist resource provision for courses such as Art and Design and Law
- that the library facilities are well-stocked and there were more digital resource purchases during coronavirus. There is very little information on how virtual learning resources have developed across the provision There is no attempt to quantify the level of investment nor evidence of a strategic approach towards how learning resources are used effectively to support very high quality teaching and learning.

The evidence in the student submission includes:

- that there are many journals and books which are easily accessible and appreciated by students
- that students value the large range of subject specific resources, such as software for psychology
- students reporting to have high levels of service from the library and digital teams through one-to-one support
- that there are sector standard resources that are discipline specific including an engineering workshop, a mock court set up, and an observation lab for Psychology and Counselling students.

The panel considered that the evidence in the provider submission describes the range of learning resources that are in place. The physical resources suggest some elements of very high quality, however, much of the evidence is historic. There is limited evidence of ongoing investment during the TEF assessment period to demonstrate the continued enhancement of facilities. The panel acknowledged that the indicator has improved over the time series. The panel noted limited evidence of how physical and virtual learning resources are used effectively to support very high quality teaching and learning.

Considering the evidence in this round, the panel judged that there is insufficient evidence that physical and virtual learning resources are used effectively to support very high quality teaching and learning.

Student engagement in improvement

The panel considered this a very high quality feature.

The indicator gives initial evidence of very high quality 'student voice' for full-time students.

The panel noted, however, that there is initial evidence of not very high quality 'student voice' for male students and that this group comprises 25 per cent of the student population. This was not addressed in the student submission. The panel was, therefore, unable to confirm whether there are any plans for improvement in relation to this group of students.

The provider submission provides further evidence of very high quality. The evidence includes:

- that the student engagement team works within a 'framework of collaborative commitment and partnership with students'. There is limited evidence, however, of actions and improvements nor of how consistency is assured across all courses
- that the students' union has an active role in supporting higher education students. The team noted some examples of funded activities which have enable students to participate in external events
- that some factors which were addressed in response to student feedback which led to change being implemented promptly, such as more lockers for disabled students and better signage for lifts; adjustments to dietary requirements and new/more private study spaces
- how the student voice, participation and enrichment coordinator reviews and acts on student feedback. There is, however, no further evidence provided on outcomes or impact.

Students comments in their submission includes:

- 'our student voice is embedded throughout university life, using both formal and informal avenues'
- how student feedback has led to improvements, such as a change to dissertation arrangements on a course and the provision of new furniture for social spaces
- examples of positive impact that include the changing of the academic coach offer, the bursary payment options, library opening time, targeted mental health and wellbeing guest session with the alumni, down to smaller changes such as social space furniture following the return to on-campus teaching after the pandemic.

The panel considered that the student submission confirms that students feel involved in making changes but does not directly address the various mechanisms in place, particularly through the more formal representation structures to engage with the student voice.

The panel considered that the evidence in the provider submission describes the mechanisms which engage the student voice work, but does not demonstrate sufficiently a strategic approach to change in order to rate the feature as outstanding.

The panel considered the evidence and overall found that the provider effectively engages with its students, leading to improvements to the experiences and outcomes of its students. The panel concluded this to be a 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 student outcomes are typically high quality for the provider's mix of students and courses. Across the student outcomes aspect, the panel found:

- two features are very high quality
- three features with insufficient evidence of very high quality
- no features which are cause for concern.

The panel applied the criteria and found the best fit rating to be 'Bronze'. This is because some features of the aspect are of very high quality for most groups of students.

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

Approaches to supporting student success

The panel considered there to be insufficient evidence that this is a very high quality feature.

The provider submission outlines the following evidence:

- a 'carefully and deliberately designed personal tutor system' which supports students with a range of material covered from induction to other areas such as employability. There is little evidence, however, of how the provider supports its students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies or into employment
- a personal tutor system which is refined annually as part of a review process and has been 'refreshed and enhanced for the 2022/23 academic year'. There is, however, no accompanying evidence to show the improvements made
- that learning walks lead to actions to improve the consistency of tutorials. There is, however, no detail provided of actions or improvements made.

Evidence in the student submission includes:

- that assignment feedback enables students to improve their marks and identify a 'path of progression and ownership of our own academic journey and skills development'
- that the Careers Education and employability experiences are highly effective, for example Education students shared examples of research groups and communities of practice to ready them for post graduate study.

The panel concluded that the provider's arrangements for ensuring student success and for progression into employment are not clearly demonstrated. There is limited information to illustrate how its approaches reflect the characteristics of the student body or of how the provider evaluates effectiveness of resulting outcomes, particularly as reflected in the indicators for continuation, completion and progression.

Overall, the panel judged there to be insufficient evidence 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 not very high quality.

The indicators provide initial evidence of:

- not very high quality 'continuation' and 'completion' for full-time students
- very high quality 'continuation' and 'completion' for part-time students

The panel noted that full-time students make up most of the student population and weighted the indicator evidence accordingly.

The provider submission has limited information to supplement the indicators evidence of not very high quality. The provider highlights that demographics of the local area provide important context for the provider's continuation and completion data. It states that the college has a much higher proportion of its student cohort who are over 21, from an ethnic minority background, from households with low educational qualifications and/or from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The panel notes that the provider does not, however, present any evidence of how it is addressing the indicators to realise any improvements targeted at these groups of students.

The student submission notes that the 'challenges across home schooling, key worker expectations, furlough and study space challenges was incredibly hard for many students' during the coronavirus pandemic which may have adversely impacted on student outcomes.

The panel concluded that the evidence in the provider submission does not articulate sufficiently a comprehensive strategic-level action plan to address the below performance levels in the continuation and completion data sets. Whilst the provider describes its demographic data, it does not evidence how it is seeking a more systematic comprehensive approach to targeting improvements in continuation and completion rates for its students and courses.

The panel considered this feature to be below the level of very high quality, due to concerns relating to full-time students. It considered whether this concern was sufficiently serious or widespread to prevent the award of an aspect rating of 'Bronze' or above. It noted the provider's attempt to mitigate the indicators comparing to the OfS baseline data which would translate to 'high

quality' rather than to the TEF definitions of very high quality and above. The continuation rate showed a slight improvement in Year 4. Considering the evidence in the round within the provider demographic context, the panel concluded this does not represent a concern that was sufficiently serious or widespread enough to prevent the award of an aspect rating.

Overall, the panel judged that the evidence provided through the indicators and supplemented by the evidence in the provider submission shows that there is insufficient evidence of very high quality for this feature.

Progression rates

The panel considered this feature to be very high quality.

The indicators provide initial evidence of very high quality 'progression' for full-time students. The performance is variable across student groups with evidence of not very high quality 'progression' for students reporting a disability, Health and Social Care students and black students. Some larger subject groups have evidence of outstanding 'progression' including Business and Management, and Law.

There is not very high quality 'progression' for part-time students, but as the denominator is very small, the panel did not place as much weight on this indicator.

The panel noted that the provider submission offers little evidence to supplement the indicator evidence. It states that there are high levels of unemployment in the local area and that this context supports the progression data for this provider.

The student submission evidence includes:

- that students have opportunities to meet with professionals in their chosen fields and to interact with employers. For example, the Young Enterprise competition enables Business and Management students to showcase their talents to potential employers. There are some individual examples but no evidence to show the impact on progression rates into employment
- that 'the biggest challenge we see is the local availability of graduate level jobs and due to the student demographic make-up we have shared, there is a greater need for many of us to stay local in employment choices'
- that graduates moving into employment or further studies is high and 'the University Centre has succeeded in supporting us to achieve that'.

Considering the evidence in the round, the panel concluded that, overall, there are very high rates of successful progression for the majority of the provider's students and courses. The panel judged that this is a very high quality feature.

Intended educational gains

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

The provider submission describes its approach to intended educational gains which it states, 'is embedded in everything we do...as a key purpose of our HE curriculum generally'. The evidence includes:

- details of a model of educational gains that is largely rooted in academic theoretical evidence, which is based on equipping students for life and understanding how they transform and gain intellectually, socially and professionally during their studies to make valuable contributions to the economic and social priorities of their communities
- that a focus on the personal development of skills and competencies reflect the students' characteristics within the local context.

The student submission includes evidence that 'the University Centre allows students the ability to develop personal and professionally during their time here. Students have a wealth of opportunity to gain practical and academic knowledge, social experiences, gain independence and confidence through interaction and exchange of knowledge and information with peers, employers and tutors...This gives us the self-confidence to go into the professional world and gain employment within jobs which they are more than capable of doing but may not have thought they were before'.

The panel considered that the provider submission demonstrates how it articulates the educational gain it intends its students to achieve and why these are relevant to its students. Considering the evidence in the round, the panel judged that this is a very high quality feature.

Approaches to supporting educational gains

The panel considered this feature to have insufficient evidence of very high quality.

The provider submission evidence includes:

- that a model is used to provide a framework around educational gain with the guiding aim of employability. The provider submission describes how it seeks to support students to make gains and embed this into curricula. However, the panel noted that there is little specific evidence of how this is implemented to effectively support students or how it has been applied to students and their courses
- individual examples which are given through case studies which illustrate enterprise in job development and practice. There is, however, limited evidence to demonstrate systematised approaches to supporting educational gains through the application of the framework.

The panel noted that the approaches to supporting educational gain do not evidence sufficient insight into how the provider effectively supports students to achieve these gains. Considering the evidence in the round, the panel judged there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate very high quality.

Evaluation and demonstration of educational gains

The panel considered there is insufficient evidence to reach a view on the quality of this feature.

The provider submission states that it seeks to monitor progress on educational gain using performance indicators around work related activity such as careers and employability activities,

work experience and to achieve at least 60 per cent progression into graduate level employment or further study. However, there are no developed measures of educational gains yet.

Overall: Bronze

Applying the guidance and the panel members' expert judgment, 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 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.

When determining whether the overall rating criteria is the best fit for 'Bronze' or 'Silver', the panel judged the evidence to show that overall, the student experience and student outcomes are typically high quality and that there are some very high quality features. The panel therefore judged the overall best fit rating was 'Bronze', as across all the available evidence there is not enough evidence that the student experience and student outcomes are typically of very high quality.