



Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023

Summary TEF 2023 panel statement

Birmingham City University

Summary of outcomes

Overall: Silver

Typically, the experience students have at Birmingham City University and the outcomes it leads to are very high quality.

Student experience: Gold

The student academic experience is typically outstanding.

Outstanding quality features include:

- highly effective teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are tailored to supporting students' learning, progression, and attainment
- an embedded, strategic approach to course content and delivery that inspires students to engage in their learning and stretches them to develop knowledge and skills
- the use of research in relevant disciplines, innovation, professional practice and extensive employer engagement to contribute to an outstanding academic experience
- a supportive learning environment with a wide and readily available range of outstanding quality academic support tailored to students' needs.

There are also some very high quality features, including:

- very high quality support for staff professional development, and the promotion of excellent academic practice across the provider's staff
- physical and virtual learning resources are used effectively to support very high quality teaching and learning
- effective engagement with students, leading to improvements to their experiences and outcomes.

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
- very high rates of successful progression for the provider's students and courses.

Outstanding quality features include:

- a clear articulation of the range of educational gains the provider intends its students to achieve and why these are relevant to students and their future ambitions
- the provider's approaches to supporting students to achieve the intended educational gains are embedded, highly effective, and tailored 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

Birmingham City University's mission is to be 'the university for the city, enabling students to transform their lives'. The provider highlights the importance of its diverse student body, a culture of academic improvement in partnership with students, and 'embedding enterprise and innovation into their curriculum to give students practical learning experiences'.

The provider is located across two campuses – a city centre and south city campus. It is a medium-sized university with 19,960 full-time undergraduate students, 360 part-time undergraduate students and 800 apprenticeship undergraduate students in 2020-21.

For full-time students the most popular subjects are Business and Management, with 15.9 per cent of students studying this, closely followed by Nursing and Midwifery (13.9 per cent) and Creative Arts and Design (12.2 per cent). A large proportion (40.1 per cent) of part-time students study Architecture, while the major subject for apprenticeships is Nursing and Midwifery (67.6 per cent).

A high proportion of full-time students are from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds (52.8 per cent), with 29.4 per cent having been eligible for free school meals. The proportion of part-time students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds is 38.2 per cent, and for apprenticeships it is 61.4 per cent.

The assessment considered information about the provider's undergraduate courses and students on those courses. This included apprenticeships at undergraduate level.

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: Gold

Throughout this section, we refer to indicators. These indicators are based on students' responses to the National Student Survey. The indicators are 'benchmarked' to show how well the provider performs for its particular mix of students and courses.

Across the student experience aspect, the panel found:

- four features are outstanding
- three features are very high quality.

The panel found that the outstanding and very high quality features apply to the majority of the provider's groups of students. This includes students from underrepresented groups, who make up a high proportion of the provider's students. The panel considered this context throughout the assessment.

The panel applied the ratings criteria and considered the best fit rating to be 'Gold'. This is because the evidence best fits the description: 'most features of the aspect are outstanding quality for all groups of students'.

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

Teaching, assessment, and feedback

The panel considered this feature to be outstanding.

The indicators showed:

- for full-time students there was compelling evidence of very high quality 'teaching on my course', with some elements of outstanding quality, and compelling evidence of outstanding quality 'assessment and feedback' for part-time students there was some initial evidence that 'teaching on my course' was very high quality, and no initial evidence of very high quality 'assessment and feedback'
- for apprenticeships there was initial evidence of a mixture of very high and outstanding quality 'teaching on my course' and 'assessment and feedback',

The evidence in the provider and student submissions included:

- the development of a digital assessment centre to transition to online assessments, which promote inclusivity and keep academic integrity
- a provider wide focus on inclusive assessment practice, in collaboration with an external regulator and other providers. Students are given tailored training on 'readiness for assessment' and digital assessment literacy, including peer marking
- flexible online assessments and proactive support for resources has resulted in a significant decrease in students delaying assessments due to an accident or illness

- in the student submission, 89 per cent of focus group participants were satisfied with assessment and feedback, highlighting well-structured and understandable coursework, support from staff, and positive and constructive feedback
- student feedback also highlighted that lectures were well explained, and extra activities like Q&A sessions improved engagement and interest.

Across the submissions and indicators, the panel found evidence of teaching, assessment and feedback practices that are research informed, professional and practice led. There was also a coherent set of embedded strategies, particularly around inclusive assessment and feedback, tailored to the provider's mix of students, many of whom are from underrepresented groups.

Considering the evidence in the round, the panel concluded that the provider has embedded outstanding teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are highly effective and tailored to supporting its students' learning, progression, and attainment – making this an outstanding quality feature.

Course content and delivery; student engagement in learning and stretch

The panel considered this an outstanding quality feature.

Along with considering the 'teaching on my course' indicator, the panel looked at the provider and student submissions and found evidence of outstanding quality. This included:

- implementing a project that ensures the curriculum promotes excellence, is practice led, applies knowledge, enables research, fosters interdisciplinary learning, and prioritises employability
- emphasising a practice led curriculum with strong employer engagement and a focus on applying research and/or practice elements to enhance student engagement
- positive student feedback that shows they feel engaged by their course.

The panel considered the indicator to show typically very high quality with some elements of outstanding quality. This was supported by evidence in the provider submission of a strategic and rational approach to curriculum design that is embedded across the provider.

Considering the evidence overall, the panel found that course content and delivery inspire the provider's students to actively engage in and commit to their learning, and stretch students to develop their knowledge and skills.

Research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement

The panel found this feature to be of outstanding quality.

Evidence in the provider and student submissions included:

- innovations such as a law clinic, architecture superstudio, the Inspired Festival, and InnovationFest, which offer tailored opportunities for students to develop skills and engage with employers

- facilitating students' engagement with business through mentoring, projects, and internships, with evidence of student success
- professional accreditation for successful graduates which is valued by students
- collaboration with local and national employers, which is supported by industrial advisory boards and enhances student opportunities and practice based learning
- student feedback highlighted the value of practice based teaching and employer input, increasing student engagement and helping them relate theory to practice.

The panel noted the provider's focus on applying research in education and fostering students' sense of belonging to the research community. There was also strong evidence of engagement with employers to inform the curriculum and develop authentic assessments.

Considering the evidence holistically, the panel judged that the provider uses research in relevant disciplines, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and extensive employer engagement to contribute to an outstanding academic experience for its students.

Staff professional development and academic practice

The panel found this feature to be very high quality.

The provider submission outlined evidence including:

- a requirement for all academics to achieve a PGCert within the first two years in their post, which is also open to technical staff
- around 64 per cent of staff are accredited by the UK professional standards framework, including significant numbers at senior level
- internal opportunities for sharing good practice, such as an annual learning and teaching conference and a forum for apprenticeship course leaders. However, the level of engagement was not specified
- staff are recognised externally including receiving grant funding for projects, and teaching awards for a number of staff members
- staff are also developed as researchers, although specific details were not given.

The panel noted that the submission contained evidence of how the provider promotes excellent academic practice across its staff, but considered there was not enough information to show how widely excellent academic practice is adopted and embedded across the provider. For this reason the panel considered the feature to be very high quality rather than outstanding quality, concluding that there is very high quality support for staff professional development and that excellent academic practice is promoted.

Learning environment and academic support

The panel found this feature to be of outstanding quality.

The 'academic support' indicator showed:

- compelling initial evidence of very high quality for full-time students, with some elements of outstanding quality
- no initial evidence of very high quality for part-time students
- some initial evidence of outstanding quality for apprenticeship students, although the data did not provide certainty.

The evidence in the provider and student submissions included:

- a transitions project that provides orientation sessions and initiatives during the first term to boost mental health access, digital literacy, and safety skills. This has had successful engagement with digital tools and improved first time pass rates for students
- centrally provided holistic support, delivered through life coaches, and student support advisors, with evidence of good student engagement and positive impact on international students continuing their studies
- tailored support for students with disabilities which starts pre-entry, including support for those waiting for formal diagnosis. The numbers of disabled students continuing their studies are higher than for those reporting no disability
- a digital support fund in partnership with the students' union, providing laptops to students with a low household income.

The panel noted an approach to the learning environment and academic support that is student-centric, understands the needs of students, and delivers targeted activity. There was significant evidence of students recognising and benefiting from these support activities.

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

Learning resources

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

The 'learning resources' indicator showed:

- compelling initial evidence of very high quality for full-time students
- no initial evidence of very high quality for part-time students
- initial evidence of very high quality for apprenticeship students.

The evidence in the provider and student submissions included:

- making significant financial investment in the estate, although the timeframe was not stated
- teaching facilities that meet professional practitioners' and students' needs for real world experiences. These are often hired out professionally, which demonstrates that they meet industry standards
- providing access to various digital resources, including virtual desktops, specialist software, and virtual learning environments. Student survey results show positive responses on content delivery and access to resources during the coronavirus pandemic
- offering strong digital support for students, including library services, which align to the digital assessment strategy and the needs of the provider's mix of students.

Student comments show a high level of satisfaction (88 per cent of a focus group) with the virtual learning environment, library, online resource access, and increased digital learning materials. However, some course specific online resource gaps were noted.

The panel considered that the provider submission set out a strategic focus on specialised practice-based facilities, aligning well with its overall professional and practice led approach. However, the panel did not find strong evidence overall from the indicators and submissions that the physical and virtual resources are tailored to student needs and support an outstanding experience.

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

Student engagement in improvement

The panel found this feature to be very high quality.

The 'student voice' indicator showed:

- compelling initial evidence of very high quality for full-time students
- initial evidence of very high quality for part-time students
- initial evidence of very high quality for apprenticeship students.

The provider and student submissions provided further evidence of a very high quality feature including:

- student voice councils for course and school representatives to feed back on their experiences, with increased engagement over the last year
- running an internal annual survey for all non-finalists to gather wider feedback
- students' union officers contribute to the quality assurance process by feeding into reviews

- specific student partnership initiatives such as student digital champions and student library mentors, although their scope, reach, and impacts were not detailed.

The student submission included comments on collaborating with the provider on key areas such as improving assessment feedback, mental health support, and the digital poverty campaign. Students noted that they have opportunities to feedback and that the provider values their views and works to improve experiences, although changes are not always visible.

The panel considered the evidence from the submissions and indicators to show that students are effectively engaged, but there was not enough evidence that this engagement is embedded across the provider and leads to continuous improvements.

Overall, the panel therefore concluded that this is a very high rather than an outstanding quality feature, and that the provider effectively engages with its students, leading to improvements to their experiences and outcomes.

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.

Across the student outcomes aspect, the panel found:

- three features are very high quality
- two features are outstanding
- there was not enough evidence to judge one feature as very high quality.

The panel found that the very high and outstanding quality features apply to most of the provider's groups of students. This includes students from underrepresented groups, who make up a high proportion of the provider's students. The panel considered this context throughout its assessment.

The panel applied the ratings criteria and considered the best fit rating to be 'Silver'. This is because the evidence best fits the description: 'all features of the aspect are very high quality for most groups of students'.

The panel did not think that 'Gold' would be the best fit because the evidence did not demonstrate that the aspect is typically outstanding, with only 'some' rather than 'most' of the student outcomes features found to be of outstanding quality.

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 and student submissions described approaches to supporting students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies. This included:

- the Centre for Academic Success offers both generic and subject specific support, with excellent engagement of 14,000 students attending in 2021-22
- life coaches provide personalised one to one support, targeting students retaking first year modules, with over half of students taking up the service. However, direct impact was not demonstrated
- strategic initiatives to improve completion rates, such as enabling inclusive assessments in the subject of economics for a predominantly ethnic minority student cohort
- embedding graduate and employability skills through a curriculum transformation project, along with the graduate+ scheme which has had positive engagement and impact
- strategic projects focusing on both subject specific activities and particular student groups. This includes an initiative which offers industrial experience through placements and mentoring among others
- a careers team offers support for students, including a career readiness survey taken periodically. This led to 500 final year students finding mentoring opportunities with employers, positively impacting their confidence, networking and job searching skills
- positive student feedback on opportunities for personal and skills development, employment and further study.

The panel noted that the submissions outlined various approaches to fostering student success and progression, which are integrated into the curriculum. However, while some support has been tailored to student groups or subject areas, the panel did not find strong evidence that the provider's approaches are highly effective at improving outcomes for the majority of students.

Looking at the evidence overall, including the indicators for continuation and completion outlined below, the panel concluded that the provider effectively supports its students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies. This is consistent with a very high quality feature.

Continuation and completion rates

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

The indicators showed:

- for full-time students, there was initial evidence that 'continuation' and 'completion' are very high quality, with outstanding 'completion' rates for some underrepresented groups of students
- for part-time students there was little evidence that 'continuation' is very high quality, while there was initial evidence that 'completion' is outstanding quality

- for apprenticeship students there was initial evidence that 'continuation' is very high quality, but initial evidence that 'completion' is not very high quality.

The panel noted the provider submission acknowledged efforts to address indicators that are below very high quality for some subjects and students. The panel judged this to address some of the areas where the rates are lower and found some of this evidence to be strong.

Considering the evidence in the round, the panel concluded that there are very high rates of continuation and completion for the provider's students and courses, demonstrating a very high quality feature.

Progression rates

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

The 'progression' indicator showed:

- for full-time students there was initial evidence of very high quality
- for part-time students there was initial evidence of a mixture of very high and outstanding quality
- for apprenticeship students there was initial evidence of not very high quality.

The provider submission outlined reasons why the progression indicator for apprenticeship students might not accurately represent their employability. It also highlighted a reduction of gaps in progression rates between different students groups, although the panel placed less weight on this evidence compared to the benchmarked data for the indicators.

The panel found the indicators to evidence generally very high progression rates across most students, with the provider submission partially addressing areas with lower rates. Overall, the panel concluded there are very high rates of successful progression for the provider's students and courses, making this a very high quality feature.

Intended educational gains

The panel considered this an outstanding quality feature.

The evidence in the provider and student submissions included:

- a clear articulation of educational gains, focusing on 'nurturing ambition, building aspiration, and developing confidence, knowledge, and competence' so graduates gain social capital.
- the intended educational gains show a clear understanding of the provider's high numbers of students from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds and those who are the first in their family to go to university
- a strategic approach to education, focusing on research backed, practice based, and real world learning

- establishing provider-wide projects like curriculum transformation and the graduate+ scheme to achieve educational gains, along with subject specific initiatives
- positive feedback from students on the provider working in partnership with the students' union to define and understand educational gains, and how they are relevant to students.

The panel considered the evidence from both submissions to show a clear articulation of the range of educational gains the provider intends its students to achieve. These are based on evidence of enabling students to gain social capital, and students agree that the intended gains are relevant to their future aspirations. The panel concluded that this demonstrates an outstanding quality feature.

Approaches to supporting educational gains

The panel considered this an outstanding quality feature.

The provider and student submissions demonstrated a commitment to supporting students' educational gains which included:

- taking a holistic approach to student support, spanning from pre-entry to post graduation, with specific attention to first-generation and underrepresented students
- integrating support into and beyond the curriculum through strategic initiatives such as life coaches
- emphasising practical and real world knowledge within the curriculum and assessments
- engaging with local stakeholders to create opportunities for students to gain practical experience and fulfil their ambitions
- positive student comments on the provider's commitment to fulfilling students' aspirations, both during and after university. This nurtures personal and professional confidence, knowledge, and competence.

The student submission was also supportive of international volunteering opportunities which improve academic engagement, employability, and help students stand out from the crowd.

The panel considered that the evidence shows a strategic approach to supporting students to develop educational gains. Many methods are tailored to students, especially those who are the first in their family to attend university, helping them to build the skills, aspirations, knowledge and confidence they need to be successful graduates. The panel noted many approaches will have a wide reach as they are embedded in the curriculum or underpin the provider's strategy.

Considering all the evidence, the panel concluded that the provider's approaches to supporting its students to achieve the intended educational gains are evidence-based, highly effective and tailored to its students and their different starting points.

Evaluation and demonstration of educational gains

The panel found there was not enough evidence to reach a judgement on the quality of this feature. In accordance with the TEF guidance, this did not negatively affect the ratings awarded.

Overall: Silver

Applying the guidance and the expert judgement of panel members, the panel found the overall 'best fit' rating to be 'Silver'.

The panel considered the student experience aspect to be 'Gold', and the student outcomes aspect 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 there was strong evidence that the outstanding and very high quality features apply to the majority of provider's groups of students. This includes students from underrepresented groups who make up a high proportion of the provider's students. The panel considered this contextual factor throughout its assessment of all of the evidence.

In judging 'Silver' to be a better fit than 'Gold', the panel noted it found four of the student experience features and two of the student outcomes features to be of outstanding quality for most groups of students and courses. The panel considered that while two of the very high quality features in the student experience aspect contained some outstanding elements, this was not the case for the very high quality features in the student outcomes aspect.

Looking across both aspects holistically, the panel judged the evidence to show, on the whole, that there is typically very high quality provision rather than typically outstanding quality provision, which is consistent with an overall rating of 'Silver'.