



Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023

Summary TEF 2023 panel statement

The University of Birmingham

Summary of outcomes

Overall: Silver

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

Student experience: Bronze

The student academic experience is typically high quality.

Very high quality features include:

- course content and delivery that encourage students to engage in their learning, and stretch them to develop
- use of research in relevant disciplines, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and/or employer engagement to contribute to a very high quality academic experience
- support for staff professional development, with excellent academic practice promoted
- physical and virtual learning resources that are used effectively to support very high quality teaching and learning.

Student outcomes: Gold

Student outcomes are typically outstanding.

Outstanding quality features include:

- tailored approaches that are highly effective in ensuring students succeed in and progress beyond their studies
- rates of continuation and completion for the provider's students and courses
- rates of successful progression for the provider's students and courses.

There are also some very high quality features including:

- clear articulation of the educational gains the provider intends students to achieve and why these are highly relevant
- effective support of students to achieve educational gains
- evaluation of the gains made by 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

The University of Birmingham is a large, research-intensive, Russell Group institution offering a broad range of undergraduate degree subjects. In 2020-2021, the provider had 23,730 full-time undergraduate students.

The provider states that 'we nurture and challenge our students to achieve strong academic outcomes, but we also want them to have developed the wider attributes that will help them to lead fulfilling lives, and inspire them to become the leaders, innovators, and global citizens of tomorrow'.

Although a wide range of subjects is offered, there are some particularly large student cohorts, including Business and Management (2,080 students), Engineering (2,020 students) and Medicine and Dentistry (2,380 students).

Around 80 per cent of undergraduate students are from the UK, and 20 per cent are international. The provider's analysis suggests that it has one of the most diverse student populations in the Russell Group. The provider explains that the four years covered by the assessment were particularly challenging for students due to periods of national industrial action and the coronavirus pandemic.

The assessment considered information about the provider's undergraduate courses and students on those courses. The panel considered both apprenticeship and transnational students to be out of scope.

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 (NSS). 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 high quality for the provider's mix of students and courses and there are some very high quality features. Across the student experience aspect, the panel found:

- four features that are very high quality
- three features that are below very high quality
- that the experiences of some student groups, particularly of some subject groups, were notably less positive than others and showed evidence of below very high quality.

The panel noted that indicators for different student demographic groups typically provided evidence of very high quality. However, for students with a disability, the 'assessment and feedback', 'academic support' and 'student voice' indicators provided evidence of quality below that experienced by students without a disability, and that further evidence on this was found in both the provider and student submissions.

The panel looked for evidence in the submissions that steps were being taken to address the issues raised by students in some subject areas and found the extent to which this evidence was persuasive to be variable. Considering the evidence holistically, the panel considered there to be evidence of a mix of very high quality features, and features below the level of very high quality.

The panel considered 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 experience features is set out below.

Teaching, assessment, and feedback

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

The 'teaching on my course' indicator for full-time students shows initial evidence of very high quality. The exception is the year 2020-21 when there is evidence of not very high quality. In this case, the provider suggested that periods of national industrial action and the coronavirus pandemic 'necessitated changes to teaching delivery and assessment'.

The 'assessment and feedback' indicator for full-time students shows that there is insufficient evidence of very high quality. This is also the case for most groups of students, including those with a declared disability. The student submission references a report where of 138 respondents, only 44 per cent of students with specific learning difficulties and 45 per cent of students with other disabilities had their learning needs catered for within assessments and learning. Courses including Performing Arts, Health and Social Care and Sport and Exercise Sciences all show evidence of not very high quality. The exceptions include international students, and Medicine and

Mathematical Sciences, where there is evidence of very high quality, and Chemistry, where there is evidence of outstanding quality.

The provider submission outlines its ideals for education that 'will help students to thrive in their lives and careers' as well as a range of approaches to teaching. The panel found sufficient evidence that approaches to teaching are of very high quality for most groups of students.

The provider submission outlines its policy for providing constructive and timely feedback to students, aiming to return all marks and feedback on summative assessment within 15 days, and how for online coursework assignments students receive 'digital on-script annotations and a formal feedback sheet, detailing areas of excellence, areas for improvement, and advice for future work'.

It also refers to a provider-wide enhancement project engaging 1,300 students in reflection on their expectations and experience of assessment and feedback and an agreement with the Guild 'to agree targeted interventions to improve students' experience in this area'.

However, strategic steps for ensuring that very high quality practices for assessment and feedback are consistently implemented across all parts of the university are not clearly outlined.

The student submission states that 'assessment and feedback is an area that remains a challenge for students at the University of Birmingham. Over successive years of the NSS, results have shown that this is one area that students regularly report having a poorer experience.

The panel found that the provider has embedded some very high quality teaching practices that are effective in supporting its students' learning, progression, and attainment, but that there is insufficient evidence to show that assessment and feedback are of very high quality for all or most students.

Overall, the panel concluded that there is insufficient evidence of a very high quality feature.

Course content and delivery; student engagement in learning and stretch

This was considered to be a very high quality feature.

The provider's research expertise and connections with industry combine to stretch students and enable them to deliver the kinds of skills that give them strong opportunities for student employment. This is further evidenced in the outstanding 'progression' indicators in the student outcomes aspect below.

The provider and student submissions offer evidence including:

- how students' intellectual potential is stretched through 'comprehensive subject expertise', and the rich opportunities this affords
- that students complete a capstone research project in their final year
- that there are a range of 'co-curricular research-intensive opportunities, including field-trips and residentials, and summer research intern schemes' where students work on a research project with a member of academic staff'

- how industry research collaborations enable some students, including those studying Biomedical Science and from the College of Arts and Law, to benefit from being at the forefront of developing technologies.

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

The provider articulates its commitment to providing a combination of research-informed teaching and research-active learning.

Evidence that students benefit from this include results from a 2022 survey of around 2,000 respondents showing that that 91 per cent of students 'develop an understanding of research methods and analysis' for 'much, quite a bit or some of the time' on their programme, 86 per cent engage with the outcomes of current research in their discipline, and 85 per cent formulate research questions, problems and scenarios as part of their learning.

The provider submission describes a range of initiatives designed to enhance students' learning experiences and employability skills, including:

- placement and professional engagement modules in each of the colleges
- a student volunteering scheme enabling students to gain hands-on experience in field-based research, laboratory, or public engagement with research
- partnerships with relevant companies, and guidance for staff on how to embed graduate attributes in their teaching.

Panel members did not consider that there was sufficient evidence of reach and impact across all subject areas to judge this feature to be outstanding, but they judged this feature to be very high quality.

Overall, the panel concluded 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.

The provider submission states that the provider promotes an academic culture that values and rewards outstanding and inspiring teaching.

The provider submission offers evidence including:

- that the provider's 'Professional Recognition' scheme has provided an opportunity for 500 staff to become a Fellow of the Higher Education Academy (HEA) in the last four years

- how teaching is evaluated and enhanced through the provider's 'Student Evaluation of Learning and Teaching' and that there is an annual teaching peer review scheme
- how staff professional and academic development is supported through the providers' HE Futures Institute, with over 300 members of staff completing their PGCE in the last three years
- that the 'Inclusive Educator' and 'Student EDI' modules were shortlisted for both the Times Higher Education Awards and the Pearson Innovate Awards in 2021-2022 for outstanding contribution to equality, diversity and inclusion in education.

The panel considered that evidence of the scope of these initiatives and their impact on staff who teach and support students is limited and as a result they did not deem this feature to be outstanding. However, they did conclude that there is very high quality support for staff professional development and excellent academic practice is promoted and that, therefore, this is a very high quality feature.

Learning environment and academic support

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

The 'academic support' indicator shows initial evidence of not very high quality. This includes variability in performance across student groups and courses. For black students, those eligible for free school meals and students with declared disabilities there is evidence of not very high quality. However, for non-UK students the indicator shows evidence of very high quality. Law, Geography, Earth and Environmental Sciences, Sport and Exercise Sciences and Psychology show insufficient evidence of very high quality. By contrast, Pharmacology, Toxicology and Pharmacy and Education and Teaching show initial evidence of outstanding quality support.

However, the student submission does note some positive interventions for students with disabilities, including improved lecture recordings and the general introduction of accurate subtitles.

The provider submission offers additional evidence including:

- that there is a Personal Academic Tutor system
- how teams for Student Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), Student Support, Student Experience and Student Wellbeing 'work together to support the education environment'
- the Birmingham Scholars scheme, launched in 2020, which 'provides targeted support to students from underrepresented backgrounds to help them achieve their full academic potential'. This cohort, made up Asian (excluding British Chinese), black, disabled, care-experienced and students from the lowest participation local areas, amounted to 1,777 scholars in 2020-2021. The panel judged this to be a very high quality example of commitment to student support.

Despite these examples, the panel found that there is insufficient evidence that the learning environment and academic support are of very high quality for all or most groups of students.

Learning resources

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

The 'learning resources' indicator for full-time students shows initial evidence of very high quality. This was also the case across the vast majority of student groups and for the duration of the coronavirus pandemic. For a few subjects, including Performing Arts and Medical Sciences there is evidence of outstanding quality.

The provider submission offers evidence that students benefit from excellent physical and digital resources across the university campus, including:

- how resources housed across the University Library, Cadbury Research Library, Barber Institute for Fine Art and Lapworth Museum of Geology exceed 1.5 million print and 866,000 online books, and more than 124,000 print and online journals
- multiple investments in developing physical resources and campus, including a teaching and learning building, an engineering building and a collaborative teaching laboratory
- how students benefit from access to exceptional research facilities, such as the National Buried Infrastructure Facility and Institute of Biomedical Research, and partnerships with diverse organisations including Rolls-Royce, major pharmaceutical companies, the NHS and the Royal Shakespeare Company, and a world-class research library.

Overall, the panel judged this feature to be of very high quality with some outstanding practices. 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 considered this to be a not very high quality feature.

The panel found that the provider does engage with its students, leading to improvements to the experiences and outcomes of its students. However a significant number of students and student groups do not experience this engagement.

The 'student voice' indicator for full-time students shows initial evidence of not very high quality. In particular, this includes students reporting disabilities and mixed ethnicity students. There is also variability across subject groups, where Business and Management, Engineering and Psychology show evidence of not very high quality. These indicator scores suggest that some of the provider's very large student cohorts do not feel that their voices are sufficiently heard and/or acted upon.

The provider submission offers additional evidence, including:

- how improvements have been made to the process of recruiting student representatives following a review in 2018-2019
- how the provider works in partnership with the Guild to ensure that the student population is represented at every level across the provider, and is fully involved in decision-making processes

- how recommendations have been addressed including an extenuating circumstances approach, development of an ethnic minority teaching and learning framework and related Inclusive Educator and Equality Diversity and Inclusion training, and the development of a student communications panel
- how student feedback is gathered through various surveys and then reviewed in consultation with students. Actions are then taken and communicated to students via a Making it Happen campaign.

Overall, the panel found that although the provider appears to be taking appropriate steps to address dissatisfaction in this area, there is not yet evidence of the impact of these activities and interventions and that significant numbers of students throughout the assessment period did not feel that they were effectively engaged in improvement. Therefore the panel considered this feature to be below the level of very high quality.

Student outcomes: Gold

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 that student outcomes are typically outstanding for the provider's mix of students and courses and that there are some very high quality features. Across the student outcomes aspect, the panel found:

- three outstanding quality features
- three very high quality features
- elements of outstanding practice within very high quality features
- that the very high quality and outstanding features apply to all the provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups.

The panel considered the best fit rating to be 'Gold'. This is because most features are outstanding 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 an outstanding quality feature.

The 'continuation' and 'completion' indicators show evidence of outstanding quality and the 'progression' indicator shows evidence of at least very high quality. The panel also noted that for

the vast majority of student groups and subjects there is evidence of outstanding quality for these indicators.

The panel noted that the indicator evidence is backed up by persuasive accounts of support through a comprehensive Careers Network, which provides a provider-wide service, 'working collaboratively with academic staff and business partners and ensures employability is embedded across the student journey'.

The provider submission offers further evidence of an outstanding quality feature, including:

- how Careers Registration data is collected when students enrol and then again at the start of each year to inform strategic and operational service planning and shape programme and event design and delivery
- that there is a suite of enterprise, employability and placement opportunities, enterprise-focused modules engaging with briefs designed by employers and external organisations, and multiple opportunities for students to engage with employers and external organisations
- how in 2020-21, 'positive engagement with the Academic Skills Centre led to a 13 per cent point improvement in 'Good Honours' for Birmingham Scholar students, rising to a 14 per cent point improvement for black Birmingham Scholar students'.

The panel noted how the provider has also embedded enterprise, employability and placement opportunities into the curriculum.

Taking all the evidence into account, the panel concluded that the provider deploys and tailors approaches that are highly effective in ensuring its students succeed in and progress beyond their studies and considers this feature to be outstanding.

Continuation and completion rates

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The 'continuation' indicator for full-time students shows initial evidence of outstanding quality. This is the case across all key groups e.g. black and Asian students, those with a disability reported and for students from the most deprived areas.

The 'completion' indicator for full-time students also shows initial evidence of outstanding quality across student groups and subjects.

The provider offers persuasive evidence that students from all backgrounds are offered support to continue and complete. For example, mentoring appears to be one of the most impactful areas of provision that enable students to progress through their studies and into their chosen career.

With over 700 mentoring relationships, growing from 430 in 2018-19 and 450 in 2019-20, the provider has introduced a new mentoring platform, UoB Mentoring Connect.

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

Progression rates

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The panel judges that there is a mix of very high quality and outstanding rates of successful progression for the provider's students and courses.

The 'progression' indicator for full-time students shows initial evidence of very high quality. For key groups including disability, ethnicity and students from deprived areas, there is evidence of at least very high quality and in some cases by a greater margin than for other students, which the provider claims 'demonstrates the strongly positive impact of our targeted interventions'.

For most courses there is evidence of very high quality. For Computing, Materials and Technology, Philosophy and Religious Studies, Economics, Health and Social Care, Geography, Earth and Environmental Studies, Medical Sciences and Pharmacology, Toxicology and Pharmacy there is evidence of outstanding quality.

Indicators for the small group of part-time students show evidence of very high quality 'progression' for all groups of students.

There is evidence that students have access to a highly diverse extra-curricular internship and work experience programme.

In 2020, the provider launched its UoB and Beyond graduate support programme to support recent graduates facing challenges securing employment after graduating, particularly given the coronavirus pandemic.

The Birmingham Personal Skills Award gives students opportunities to develop skills in relation to their future careers and engages employer partners in programme design and delivery including Capgemini, Enterprise Rent-a-Car, Jaguar Land Rover, PwC, Sanctuary Housing and Teach First.

The panel concluded that there are outstanding 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 defines educational gains in terms of 'the competencies and behaviours that our students develop during their time with us: their knowledge and skills acquisition, but also the broader intellectual, ethical, and civic/global attributes that we believe are part of a holistic university education, and that are increasingly recognised as supporting personal success, career readiness, and wider societal gain'.

The provider has identified a set of graduate attributes, developed in consultation with employers and students. Evidence from the submissions includes guidance for staff on ways of embedding one or more of the graduate attributes in their teaching, and for students on how to identify the graduate attributes as forming part of the broader learning gains of their university experience. The panel considered this provision of guidance for both staff and students to be an example of excellent practice.

The panel concluded that the provider clearly articulates the educational gains it intends its students to achieve and why these are highly relevant to its students and their future ambitions. Overall, the panel considered this feature to be of very high quality with some outstanding practices.

Approaches to supporting educational gains

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

The student submission includes examples of how employability is embedded within courses and extra-curricular activities, including specific modules and assessments that are focused on developing employability skills and the Personal Skills Award and student societies.

Students can receive an enhanced transcript providing a record of the achievements and skills they have developed through co-curricular and extra-curricular activities.

The provider submission explains that a mixed-method evaluative approach is adopted to account for the complexity and richness of educational gains, broadly understood to be academic, personal, and professional growth. Institutional evaluation of practice is conducted via an annual review of programme results, graduate employment and further study data, and student reflections via student surveys.

The panel noted that work on 'gains' defined more widely than learning is in development but the very high quality and outstanding quality student outcomes for different student groups suggest that the approaches being taken already are highly effective and appropriately tailored to its students. The panel therefore considers this to be of very high quality with some outstanding practices.

Overall, the panel concluded that the provider effectively supports its students to achieve these educational gains.

Evaluation and demonstration of educational gains

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

The provider uses a comprehensive range of approaches to evaluate students' experiences and progress.

The panel found that it is less clear how these evaluative approaches address evaluation of educational gains explicitly, beyond standard assessment of student learning outcomes and evaluation of student experience, but it judges this to be typically the case for higher education providers at present.

However, looking forward, the provider is drawing on research by the Jubilee Centre to 'evaluate the development of graduate attributes and qualities that contribute to individual and wider human flourishing'. It has also launched a new learning analytics database for evaluation purposes.

Overall, the panel concluded that the provider evaluates the gains made by its students and that this is a very high quality feature.

Overall: Silver

For the student experience aspect, the panel judged that some features are of very high quality for most groups of students, but that in the round there is insufficient evidence that the student experience is very high quality for the mix of students and courses. This resulted in a 'Bronze' award for this aspect.

By contrast, student outcomes at the provider are typically outstanding for all groups of students, leading to a 'Gold' award for the aspect.

The panel was mindful of guidance that the overall rating cannot be more than one level higher than the lowest aspect rating.

Having awarded a 'Gold' rating to one aspect and a 'Bronze' rating to the other aspect, the panel found that across all of the available evidence, the student experience and student outcomes are typically of very high quality and recommended the 'best fit' for the overall rating is 'Silver'.