



Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023

Summary TEF 2023 panel statement

Royal Northern College of Music

Summary of outcomes

Overall: Gold

Typically, the experience students have at the Royal Northern College of Music and the outcomes it leads to are outstanding.

Student experience: Gold

The student academic experience is typically outstanding.

Outstanding quality features include:

- embedding of outstanding teaching, feedback and assessment practices
- course content and delivery inspire the provider's students to actively engage in and commit to their learning, and they stretch students to develop knowledge and skills to their fullest potential
- use of research in relevant disciplines, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement to contribute to an outstanding academic experience
- a supportive learning environment is ensured, with a wide range of outstanding quality academic support tailored to their needs
- effective use of physical and virtual learning resources.

There is also one very high quality feature:

- effective engagement with students, leading to improvements to their experiences and outcomes.

Student outcomes: Gold

Student outcomes are typically outstanding.

Outstanding quality features include:

- tailoring approaches that are highly effective in ensuring its students succeed in and progress beyond their studies
- outstanding rates of progression
- clear articulation of the range educational gains the provider intends its students to achieve, and why these are highly relevant to their future ambitions.

There is also one very high quality feature:

- effective support for students to achieve educational gains.

There is also one feature which is between very high quality and outstanding:

- rates of completion (very high quality) and rates of continuation (outstanding).

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 Royal Northern College of Music is a specialist musical institution: a conservatoire. The provider's mission is to educate and train musicians to the highest level in an environment that is both stimulating and rich in opportunity, for the benefit of individuals and society at large.

Each year, there are around 900 students, with around 600 undergraduates. All undergraduate students take a four-year honours course. There are courses in classical as well as pop music.

The vast majority of students are under 21, a majority do not declare a disability, and most students are white. The gender balance is nearly even. There are around 23 per cent international (EU and overseas) students. Most students have A-levels as entry qualifications, with around 20 per cent coming from access courses. Most students are not local to the provider (90 per cent).

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: 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.

The panel weighed up all the evidence relating to the student experience aspect as a whole and determined its rating to be 'Gold'.

The panel considered the extent to which there are very high quality and outstanding quality features across all the provider's student groups and the range of its courses and subjects.

It found:

- five features to be outstanding
- one feature to be very high quality
- one feature to have insufficient evidence to be very high quality.

The panel judged there to be compelling evidence that the very high quality and outstanding features apply to all the provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups.

It could not place much weight on the student submission, which did not provide a clear approach to evidence gathering.

It considered the best fit rating to be 'Gold' because most features are outstanding for all groups of students and courses.

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

Teaching, assessment, and feedback

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The overall indicator for assessment and feedback provides initial evidence of very high quality, and that this applies to all the provider's groups of students where data was available.

Other evidence includes:

- curriculum at the provider presents a typical conservatoire model with core principal study lessons with an expert teacher, and a flexible number of academic modules
- learning side by side with professional musicians or students of other programmes and levels, which presents an interesting opportunity to cross genres between pop and classical
- co-curricular music making stood out for the panel as the submission suggests it is measured with numerical data and credit-bearing modules to make sure it is effective and reaching to all students
- students are encouraged to create their own learning pathway through a number of choices available in their programmes and co-curricular activities.

Student assessments made by the provider are reflective of industry – they are public performances, auditions or portfolio submissions in a variety of settings. There are opportunities to be assessed by external judges as well and the student submission suggests that students focus on their collective development rather than individual rivalry.

The provider submission describes an excellent moderation process for final year recitals. Students also gain informal feedback, for example through attending weekly performance classes and in their one-to-one lessons. Also, screened auditions provide external feedback from professionals and industry partners.

Weighing up all the evidence, the panel considered 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. The panel decided to put greater weight on evidence given in the submissions which is more reflective of student experience.

Course content and delivery; student engagement in learning and stretch

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The overall indicator for 'teaching on my course' provides probable evidence of very high quality, and shows that this applies to all the provider's groups of students, where data was available.

The provider's curriculum is designed to build knowledge, skills, and understanding through a balance of principal and academic study modules, with opportunities for students to tailor their programme to accommodate emerging specialisms. These are recognised positively in the student submission. Study time is balanced to stretch and challenge students, allowing time for independent practice and reflection.

The curriculum is meant to inspire students to develop their ideas into projects that have societal and cultural impact, such as a spotlight concert on International Women's Day 2022.

The provider submission states 'inspirational staff' is one of the main reasons students have an excellent experience at this college – 100 per cent of performance or composition teaching staff are active in their respective fields.

The panel judged overall that course content and delivery inspire the provider's students to actively engage in and commit to their learning, and they stretch students to develop knowledge and skills to their fullest potential. The panel put greater weight on evidence given in the submissions, which provide more detail about the student experience.

Research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

Staff are active performers or researchers and feed their expertise directly into students' learning using one-to-one teaching. The provider submission describes the engagement and consultation the provider undertakes with the music industry to inform design and content, which includes organisations such as the BBC, Sony, and Virgin EMI.

Other evidence includes:

- the provider has also developed its curriculum with a focus on equality, diversity and inclusion and AI (artificial intelligence) through two funded projects

- the student submission details a third-year work placement for all students, which is a great opportunity to bring students closer to professional work
- the industry-relevant practice of the provider is further evidenced by receiving OfS world-leading specialists funding
- the provider's submission gives examples of a number of prominent professional partners. As a conservatoire, the provider is actively attuned to professional practice and is strictly focused on the music industry and employability within it.

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

Staff professional development and academic practice

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

The provider submission refers to its Advance HE accredited Conservatoire Professional in Practice Scheme. This scheme provides various events and opportunities, such as an annual staff conference, a teaching award scheme, a learning and teaching conference, and a staff development fund whose outcomes are shared with other colleagues. Staff peer-learning is also built into curriculum activities such as masterclasses with external musicians.

The panel found some evidence of very high quality in this feature. However, there was insufficient evidence of how excellent academic practice is promoted among each member of staff, and there was no detail about how widespread or impactful development of academic practice is among all staff.

Learning environment and academic support

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The overall indicator for 'academic support' provides probable evidence of very high quality for full-time students.

Other evidence includes:

- the provider describes the opportunity for applicants in transitioning into the college which means they can get an initial understanding of the institution's approach to learning and be matched with the appropriate teacher
- once students are enrolled, year tutors provide structured academic support at a programme level with additional one-to-one support for final year students
- the student health and wellbeing hub is a newly redesigned academic and wellbeing service, embedded into the programme via music and health modules
- the hardship fund was doubled during the period of the coronavirus pandemic and this funding was retained post-pandemic
- the student submission comments on the high quality of coaching sessions and the exceptional health and wellbeing services provided for students.

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.

Learning resources

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The overall indicator for 'learning resources' provides compelling evidence of outstanding quality for full-time students.

Other evidence includes:

- the performance facilities of the provider are outstanding – both its concert hall and opera theatre are bigger than other similar providers
- there is also a recital room, pop music studios, and large ensemble rehearsal spaces
- the Meyer Constellation system is a flexible acoustic setting, which allows users to tailor the properties of a space digitally
- response to the coronavirus pandemic and digitalisation of learning has been successful, with an award and an OfS case study
- the library of the provider is an award-winning facility with access provided both to current students and to graduates for a year after graduation. The panel noted that this shows that the provider recognises how important access to sheet music is to performing musicians. The library focuses on widening the collection.

The panel saw evidence that physical and virtual learning resources are tailored and used effectively to support outstanding teaching and learning.

Student engagement in improvement

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

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

The provider submission describes how the students are involved in curriculum design and development and how students work with staff in partnership on equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives. There are also the 'more usual' avenues for feedback such as student representation at committees.

Other evidence in the provider submission includes:

- that students are actively involved in the design and development of their course through focus groups
- examples of the changes made in response to their feedback, including the development of alternative assessments as a result of the coronavirus pandemic
- that students engage with equality, diversity and inclusion work at the provider, with student-led concerts and collaborations with staff.

The panel found evidence that the provider effectively engages with its students, leading to improvements to the experiences and outcomes of its students.

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

It found:

- most features to be outstanding
- one feature (continuation and completion) to be a mixture of very high quality and outstanding
- one very high quality feature.

The panel considered the best fit rating to be 'Gold' 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 feature to be outstanding quality.

The provider submission describes how it takes a personalised approach to supporting students to achieve and progress.

Other evidence includes:

- there is a robust reflection on feedback from students delivered via the National Student Survey
- the assessment practices reflect musical professional life (as usual within a conservatoire) and there are opportunities to extend the curriculum past the provider's walls with professional placements or funded projects
- the student support hub monitors students and manages the risk of disengagement
- all courses include a placement, making sure that students gain additional professional practice and employability skills. Students have excellent opportunities to build up professional networks to support future success – many of these are embedded in the courses.

The panel saw overall evidence that the provider deploys and tailors approaches that are highly effective in ensuring its students succeed in and progress beyond their studies.

Continuation and completion rates

The panel considered this feature to be a mix of outstanding (continuation) and very high quality (completion).

The overall indicator for 'continuation' provides strong evidence of outstanding quality for full-time students, and that this evidence applies to all the provider's groups of students where data was available.

For 'completion', the indicator provides evidence of very high quality for full-time students, and that this evidence applies to all the provider's groups of students where data was available.

Progression rates

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The overall indicator for 'progression' provides compelling evidence of outstanding quality for full-time students, and that this applies to all the provider's groups of students.

Intended educational gains

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The provider articulates graduate attributes that it wishes its students to gain. These have been developed in partnership with its students and with a view to their differing educational starting points and prior experience.

Musicians with skills of leadership, entrepreneurialism and innovation emerged from the consultation with students as the relevant outcomes of their courses. The graduate attributes are fully aligned to the overall institutional strategic plan.

The panel judged that the provider clearly articulates the range educational gains it intends its students to achieve, and why these are highly relevant to its students and their future ambitions.

Approaches to supporting educational gains

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

The support the provider gives to students to develop educational gains is embedded in the curriculum and through the nature of the collaborative projects that they carry out.

The provider describes how it has mapped learning gains against modules and how its approach to side-by-side learning and all the activities involved leads to deep learning of the educational gains it wishes students to achieve. Students are encouraged to take their learning beyond their degrees to achieve the intended educational gains. Cross-fertilisation of programmes boost this further and lets students build leadership skills and widen their horizons. The principle of a spiral curriculum is used to deepen the learning.

Overall, the panel judged that the provider effectively supports its students to achieve these gains, which is a very high quality feature. The panel did not find the provider's approach to fully meet the outstanding feature description, as it did not find the support to be 'evidence-based, highly effective and tailored to the students'.

Evaluation and demonstration of educational gains

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

Although it hasn't been implemented yet, the submission discussed a framework for mapping and measuring educational gains using data sets that are already available, and some that are being used already from the academic year 2022-23.

The provider presents evidence (without numerical details) which includes mapping of educational gains in modules, data captured by the StART project from first years and then later in the academic cycle, and feedback from renowned artists captured in the OfS specialist funding submission.

The panel noted future improvements, but they are outside the scope of assessment. It considered there is insufficient evidence that this is a very high quality feature, but it noted that this should not prevent a provider from being awarded higher TEF ratings solely based on an absence of its own developed measures of educational gains.

Overall: Gold

Applying the guidance and the panel members' expert judgement, the panel considered the overall 'best fit' rating to be 'Gold'. The panel noted that if both aspects are rated the same, the overall rating is also the same. The panel considered the student experience aspect rating to be 'Gold' and the student outcomes aspect rating to be 'Gold'.

In reaching this decision, the panel considered there to be compelling evidence that the outstanding and very high quality features apply to all the provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups.