



Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023

Summary TEF 2023 panel statement

South Devon College

Summary of outcomes

Overall: Gold

Typically, the experience students have at South Devon College and the outcomes it leads to are outstanding.

Student experience: Gold

The student academic experience is typically outstanding.

Outstanding quality features include:

- highly effective teaching, feedback and assessment practices that support students' learning, progression, and attainment
- a supportive learning environment in which students have access to a wide range of outstanding quality academic support tailored to their needs
- physical and virtual learning resources are tailored and used effectively to support outstanding teaching and learning
- engagement with students that is embedded and leads to continuous improvement to students' experiences and outcomes.

There are also some very high quality features including:

- course content and delivery that encourages students to engage in their learning, and stretches them to develop their knowledge and skills
- the use of research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement to contribute to a very high quality academic experience
- support for staff professional development and the promotion of excellent academic practice.

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
- a clear articulation of the educational gains the provider intends its students to achieve, and why these are highly relevant to its students
- approaches to supporting students to achieve these gains which are evidence-based, highly effective and tailored to students' different starting points.

There are also some very high quality features including:

- 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.

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

South Devon College is a medium-sized general further education college, which was awarded foundation degree awarding powers in 2019. In 2020-21 there were 430 full-time and 100 part-time undergraduate students. The provider also has 350 apprenticeship students, but these are not in scope for this assessment.

The provider's mission is 'inspiring our community through learning for all', and is underpinned by five values of aspiration, inclusion, innovation, progress and support, which are designed to 'evoke the necessary behaviours for an inclusive and progressive ethos to support every student to fulfil their potential'.

Of the full-time students in 2020-21, 66 per cent are mature, almost 30 per cent have a reported disability, 70 per cent are local students, and 40 per cent have caring responsibilities. The profile of part-time students is broadly similar.

A wide range of subjects are studied, with the largest proportions of students studying Business and Management (14.4 per cent), and Education and Teaching (18.8 per cent). Other subjects include Creative Arts and Design, Sport and Exercise Sciences, and Allied Health.

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 including their focus on career enhancement.

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 found the quality of the student academic experience is typically outstanding and there was compelling evidence in the provider and student submissions and the indicators that the very high quality and outstanding features apply to all the provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups.

The panel found:

- four of the features are outstanding
- three of the features are very high quality
- the provider submission demonstrated a consistent sense of a culture of accountability and self-assessment driving continuous improvement to enhance the academic experience.

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 an outstanding quality feature.

The full-time 'teaching on my course' indicator provided initial evidence of very high quality for all groups of students. The panel considered whether there was some variation for students on Creative Arts courses but noted the numbers were small and uncertain.

The full-time 'assessment and feedback' indicator provided initial evidence of outstanding quality for all groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups.

The provider and student submissions provided further evidence of an outstanding feature, for example:

- a focus on effective questioning and feedback
- widely embedded tutorial structures with tutors meeting students regularly both individually and in small groups. The student submission corroborates the effectiveness of the tutorial model
- externally funded research projects to effectively review assessment practices to maintain 'outstanding performance'.

The evidence included policy frameworks and guidance and external examiner feedback which suggest the approaches are consistently applied across the provider to all student groups.

Considering the evidence overall, the panel considered the provider has embedded outstanding teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are highly effective in supporting its students' learning, progression, and attainment. This led the panel to conclude that this is an outstanding feature.

Course content and delivery; student engagement in learning and stretch

The panel considered this a very high quality feature.

The panel noted how the provider submission gives many examples and sets out a documented approach to curriculum design and delivery with the principles being tested as part of the validation process. Evidence of very high quality includes:

- an alignment of programme design to external standards
- an employability framework that is embedded within programmes designed to support students within the context of becoming a 'South Devon graduate'. The student submission confirms that tutors discuss study and employability skills during tutorials on a regular basis
- employer endorsement ensures courses are vocationally relevant, and they are aligned with Higher Technical Qualifications (HTQ) where possible. There are eight HTQs approved, of which 18% of higher education students are engaged
- evidence from the National Student Survey confirms that students actively engage and commit to their learning and students are stretched to develop their knowledge and skills.

Further evidence in the student submission includes that the professional practice modules encourage active engagement with developing employability skills and placements.

Overall, the panel judged 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. Therefore, the panel concluded that this is 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 how it is part of the organisational culture that staff are engaged in learning and development to enhance their teaching. The evidence of very high quality in the provider submission includes:

- details of how action research is embedded in academic practice as staff maintain professional links with industry, resulting in courses being vocationally focused and enabling teaching teams to bring 'lived experience' to make the subject engaging
- reference to the Higher Education Research and Scholarly Activity policy which includes the Annual Research Showcase which enables staff/student research outputs to 'celebrate the research and scholarly activity of students and staff'

- staff record activity on a Research and Scholarly Activity Tracker, which shows that in 2021-22 568 individual activities were undertaken by around 100 staff, although the panel did not find further detail of the impact.

The student submission adds further evidence that guest speakers from relevant sectors are particularly valued in relation to encouraging them to reflect on employability. The submission also notes how writing retreats for staff and students contribute towards a very high quality experience. There is limited evidence, however, to demonstrate the scale of these activities.

Overall, the panel concluded the provider uses research, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement to contribute to a very high quality academic experience for its students, and that this is a very high quality feature.

Staff professional development and academic practice

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

The provider submission shows that all staff have a recognised teaching qualification or are required to complete one within three years of appointment. The provider also offers capacity building through professional development to support the Level 6 provision in Social Science and Education, which has resulted in 80% of the teaching team holding at least Level 7 subject-related qualifications.

Other evidence includes:

- workload time is allocated for staff to engage in professional development and 10 days are allocated annually for CPD
- staff receive two-thirds funding to undertake higher level qualifications which a quarter of academic staff have undertaken since 2020
- HEA Fellowships have increased from 12 to 44 since 2017-18. Applicants are supported with writing retreats and a buddy system

Overall, the panel concluded that the provider ensures very high quality support for staff professional development and excellent academic practice is promoted. Considering the evidence in the round, the panel considered the evidence to demonstrate a very high quality feature.

Learning environment and academic support

The panel found this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The 'academic support' indicator for full-time students provided initial evidence of outstanding quality for all the provider's groups of students, including those from underrepresented groups. The panel noted less strong performance in Year 4.

The provider and student submissions provided further evidence of an outstanding feature, including:

- a personal tutoring model, which has an impact on the high continuation and completion indicators

- the 'Stepping up to HE' programme prepares applicants, many of whom come from underrepresented groups, through building confidence levels to enter higher education
- use of internal survey data to target interventions to improve the academic experience
- tailored academic support for students, as set out in the Student Development Policy.

The student submission describes the support from all staff, tutors, management, and the wellbeing team as 'irreplaceable'. It states that students chose to study with the provider because of the level of support from all staff and the accessibility of wider student support services.

Overall, the panel considered that the provider ensures a supportive learning environment, and its students have access to a wide range of outstanding quality academic support tailored to their needs. The panel concluded that this demonstrates an outstanding quality feature.

Learning resources

The panel found this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The overall 'learning resources' indicator for full-time students provided very strong initial evidence of outstanding quality.

The provider and student submissions provided further evidence of outstanding quality, such as:

- details of how the provider has been successful in competitive funding bids and has invested significantly in specialist practical facilities across a range of subject areas
- how the provider has enhanced the student experience in engineering, digital and creative programmes with a visionary facility
- how ongoing and sustained investments have directly impacted the provider's resourcing decisions which are consistently reflected in the outstanding National Student Survey satisfaction indicators
- how the University of Plymouth's Periodic Review report commended the physical infrastructure and IT facilities in enhancing the student experience.
- the student submission confirms how effective the virtual learning environment and its resources are, in particular the accessibility of lecture recordings.

Overall, the panel concluded that the submissions and indicator evidence show that the provider has a clear understanding of its students and ensures that resources are tailored to their needs and used effectively to support outstanding teaching and learning. The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

Student engagement in improvement

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The overall 'student voice' indicator for full-time students provided strong initial evidence of an outstanding quality feature for most groups of students.

The provider and student submissions provided further evidence of an outstanding feature.

The provider submission sets out its 'commitment to engaging students in continuously improving the student and academic experience' and that regular engagement with its students is embedded. The student submission corroborates this stating that there is a 'range of community feel across a number of student groups'.

The panel noted several examples provided as evidence of improvements made because of consultation with students. The student submission provides evidence that the student voice is heard and acted upon, with several examples of how things work well which confirm that the provider embeds engagement with its students. The submission concludes that 'it feels like all the academic staff are just as happy to be there as the students'.

Overall, the panel concluded that the evidence shows the provider embeds engagement with its students, leading to continuous improvement to the experiences and outcomes of its students, and that this is an outstanding quality feature.

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.

Across the student outcomes aspect, the panel found:

- three outstanding quality features
- two very high quality features
- one feature where there was insufficient evidence to reach a judgement of very high quality
- that the very high quality and outstanding features apply to most of the provider's groups of students and most courses and subjects.

There was strong evidence of an effective approach throughout the assessment period to supporting progression, and to supporting educational gains relating to employability and careers. There was also evidence to explain some of the lower indicator performance across some subjects.

The panel applied the ratings criteria and considered the best fit rating to be 'Gold'. This is because on balance the panel considered most of the student outcomes features to be of outstanding quality. The panel noted the guidance that a provider should not be prevented from being awarded a higher TEF rating solely based on an absence of developed measures of educational gain.

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 panel noted that the provider submission demonstrates an understanding of its student population and illustrates actions taken to support students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies. The evidence includes details on:

- a deliberate step to strengthen a strategic approach towards continually improving student success with the introduction of the Student Development Policy
- a new study skills initiative with personalised support for students from areas of low participation in higher education to reduce the risk of withdrawal which had been identified as a potential risk
- a personal tutoring model to provide group and individual tutorial sessions on a regular basis which enables close monitoring of student progress throughout the life cycle. The student submission corroborates the provider evidence stating that ‘tutors give students the very best chance to succeed’
- how the provider embeds the Employability Framework within the curricula to develop evidence based learners. The student submission corroborates that employability skills are frequently discussed during tutorials.

The panel considered the characteristics of the student body and the high numbers of students from underrepresented groups to be relevant when considering this evidence and how far the provider tailors its support for students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies.

Overall, 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, which demonstrates an outstanding quality feature.

Continuation and completion rates

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

The ‘continuation’ indicator provided compelling evidence of very high quality for full-time students, with some variation across courses and groups of students.

The provider submission attributes the lower performance in ‘Education and Teaching’ to the impact of the coronavirus pandemic. The panel noted that the provider has acknowledged an issue and taken positive action to improve the performance in the subject of Biosciences.

The ‘completion’ indicator provided initial evidence of very high quality for full-time students, and this was consistent across all groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups. The one exception was Architecture, Building and Planning, where there was evidence of not very high quality, although the numbers of students were low and so the panel placed less weight on this.

Overall, the panel considered that there are very high rates of continuation and completion for the provider’s students and courses. The panel concluded that this is a very high quality feature.

Progression rates

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

The 'progression' indicator provided initial evidence of very high or outstanding quality for full-time students.

The panel noted some evidence of variation by level of study, for example there was evidence of not very high quality for 'first degree' students, while there was evidence of outstanding quality for 'other undergraduate' students.

The provider submission offered explanatory evidence to demonstrate the underlying issues affecting progression to highly skilled employment for some students from areas of high economic deprivation. This includes:

- performance is attributed to the availability of local employment opportunities which applies to all the provider's groups of students
- the provider's aim is to 'work closely with employers to ensure the programmes are fit for purpose and creating graduates that possess the knowledge, skills and behaviours for high skilled employment locally'.

The panel noted that the majority of foundation degree students progress to Level 6 degree study which is reflected in the indicator evidence, but that subsequent performance for first degree students is lower. The panel noted that the provider has taken action to increase progression opportunities for foundation degree students to degrees locally in Animal Science and Engineering working with the University of Plymouth.

Overall, taking the indicator and submission evidence into account, the panel considered there are very high rates of successful progression for the provider's students and courses, and the panel concluded that this is a very high quality feature.

Intended educational gains

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The provider submission states that it conceives educational gains as 'the academic, personal and professional enhancements students make'. The gains are for students to have an educational experience that develops graduates who are secure in their academic skills, possess positive personal attributes and are work-ready in terms of knowledge skills and behaviours.

The provider submission evidence includes:

- how the theory of change approach is relevant to its students and expected impacts
- ongoing research to clearly identify barriers, interventions and impacts
- information on how each programme is developed to map against the University Centre employability and enterprise framework to develop work-ready knowledge, skills and behaviours.

The student submission acknowledges that students often lack confidence and soft skills, with financial barriers and poor physical and mental wellbeing, and that the provider aims to provide them with the skills and confidence to be work-ready.

Overall, the panel concluded that the provider clearly articulates the range educational gains it intends its students to achieve, and why these are highly relevant to its students. This demonstrates an outstanding quality feature.

Approaches to supporting educational gains

The panel considered this to be an outstanding feature.

The provider submission describes the approaches to supporting its students to achieve educational gains. The evidence includes:

- an integrated tutorial model identifies and addresses gaps in academic knowledge, skills and behaviour
- the 'Student Profile' which is designed for each individual student reflecting their starting point, continuously records student confidence in a range of academic skills, representing an individualised approach
- student feedback after the 'Stepping Up' programme shows, on average, a 20% increase in confidence
- high level academic knowledge and work-ready knowledge and skills through completion of the degree programme
- positive personal attributes are developed starting with the 'Stepping Up to HE' programme, followed through the tutorial curriculum, to provide an educational experience that is much wider than the academic programme of study with the focus on 'South Devon Graduates'.

The panel considered that the provider submission demonstrates a clear understanding of its students and its 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. The panel concluded that the evidence demonstrates an outstanding quality feature.

Evaluation and demonstration of educational gains

The provider submission states that it intends to adopt a survey completed by students when they join a programme as the mechanism to evaluate educational gains, and that a version of this will be administered as a qualification exit survey to allow the evaluation of educational gains.

Overall, the panel considered that the provider has set out a suitable approach to evaluate the educational gains made by students. This has the potential to be of very high quality in the future, but there is not enough evidence at this stage to judge this a very high quality feature.

Overall: Gold

Applying the guidance and the panel members' expert judgment, the panel considered the overall best fit rating to be 'Gold'.

The panel judged the student experience aspect to be 'Gold' and the student outcomes aspect to be 'Gold', and noted the guidance that where each aspect is awarded the same rating the overall rating should be the same.

The panel considered the evidence to show, on the whole, there to be typically outstanding quality provision for most groups of students and courses.