



Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023

Summary TEF 2023 panel statement

University of Exeter

Summary of outcomes

Overall: Gold

Typically, the experience students have at the University of Exeter and the outcomes it leads to are outstanding.

Student experience: Gold

The student academic experience is typically outstanding.

Outstanding quality features include:

- the course content and delivery inspire the provider's students to actively engage in and commit to their learning, and stretch students to develop knowledge and skills to their fullest potential
- the provider uses research in relevant disciplines, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement to contribute to an outstanding academic experience
- outstanding support for staff professional development and excellent academic practice is embedded across the provider
- the provider has embedded engagement with its students, leading to continuous improvement to their experiences and outcomes.

There are also some very high quality features including:

- the provider has embedded very high quality teaching, assessment and feedback practices that are effective in supporting its students' learning, progression and attainment
- the provider fosters a supportive learning environment and its students have access to a readily available range of very high quality academic support
- physical and virtual learning resources are used effectively to support very high quality teaching and learning.

Student outcomes: Gold

Student outcomes are typically outstanding.

Outstanding quality features include:

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

There are also some very high quality features including:

- the provider articulates the range of educational gains it intends its students to achieve, and why these are relevant to its students
- the provider effectively supports its students to achieve the gains it has articulated.

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 Exeter describes its education strategy as having five characteristics of excellence: success for all students, valuing educators, global 21st century education, learning reimagined and graduates of distinction. It describes itself as being pivotal to the educational development of the south-west region of the country.

The provider has had an average of around 19,650 full-time undergraduate students over the past four years, with a significant increase in the number over the TEF period. There are negligible numbers of part-time undergraduates.

Apprenticeship provision has grown, with undergraduate apprentices going from 150 to 610 over the TEF period.

The largest subject area is business and economics, followed by English and history, and then law.

Most undergraduates are young – under 21 years of age on entry – and around 1,100 are mature, aged 21 to 30 years on entry. There are slightly more students identifying as female than male, and the vast majority of students are not local prior to entry.

Most students enter with A-levels, with grades ABB or higher. Others enter through access courses, foundation courses or other courses.

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

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 the rating to be 'Gold'.

Across the student experience aspect, the panel found:

- four of the features to be outstanding, and three of the features to be very high quality
- evidence across the aspect that the provider embeds effective approaches and tailors its approaches to its students
- typically outstanding quality across the aspect as a whole
- compelling evidence that the very high quality and outstanding features apply to all the provider's groups of students, including some very positive indicators for students from underrepresented groups.

The panel observed some differences in indicators for students on some larger subject areas, and it recognised the relatively small numbers of undergraduate apprenticeships in relation to the overall provision.

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 experience features is set out below.

Teaching, assessment, and feedback

The panel considered this to be a very high quality feature, with some elements which were outstanding.

The indicator for 'teaching on my course' provides evidence of very high quality overall for full-time students, and this applies to almost all the provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups.

The 'assessment and feedback' indicator overall shows evidence of either below very high quality or very high quality, and this varies for different student groups and courses.

The indicators for 'teaching on my course' and 'assessment and feedback' for the apprenticeship provision show some evidence of outstanding quality, but this represents only a small number of students.

The provider and student submissions supplement the indicator evidence by providing further evidence of a very high quality feature. For example, there are effective measures in place to monitor and enhance teaching and learning practices such as:

- the governance structures set up for education, which include annual action planning and teaching excellence monitoring processes
- a comprehensive, data-driven management approach to teaching and learning
- evidence of a strategic expert-informed approach to learning, demonstrated by responses to the coronavirus pandemic and the 'institutional design principles for blended and online learning' described in the provider submission
- a 'Transformative Education Framework' to support departments to embed inclusive education, racial and social justice, and sustainability into the curriculum.

There is also evidence in the provider submission concerning its approach to assessment:

- a major project called 'rebalancing assessment' to address some of the issues reported, such as bunching of deadlines, and feedback turnaround times
- examples of excellent practice at discipline level, which have led to improvements
- the launch of a new programme, 'assessment reimaged', which is taking the positive learnings from coronavirus.

The student submission is generally very positive about the efforts made and the upward trajectory, but it indicates that there is still work to do.

Taking all the evidence into consideration, the panel concluded that the provider has embedded very high quality teaching, assessment and feedback practices that are effective in supporting its students' learning, progression and attainment.

Course content and delivery; student engagement in learning and stretch

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

It found evidence in the provider submission that includes:

- the 'degree apprenticeship' provision has grown substantially over the period
- the growth of interdisciplinary opportunities beyond an existing allowance with new credit pathways focused on skills: leadership, entrepreneurship, modern languages, and the development of data science, AI and sustainability
- embedding of the sustainable development goals in the curriculum and a 'transformative education framework' to embed inclusion, racial and social justice and sustainability
- the use of virtual field trips during the coronavirus pandemic.

The student submission evidenced outstanding practice through the analysis of teaching excellence award nominations which demonstrates that students are being stretched academically to develop their skills and knowledge to their fullest potential (with 54 positive references).

Overall, the panel concluded that course content and delivery inspire the provider's students to actively engage in and commit to their learning, and stretch students to develop knowledge and skills to their fullest potential.

Research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The information in the provider submission about this feature focused on the role of their research-education ecosystem, linked to their strong Research Excellence Framework 2021 performance. The following provided evidence of outstanding practice:

- there are opportunities for students to participate in research in the curriculum and through paid internships. There are also good examples of how research is embedded
- the education incubator is used to stimulate innovation in the curriculum, with a number of projects winning national awards
- it is the norm that students are taught by research-informed academics
- there are 65 programmes which are accredited by professional statutory and regulatory bodies (which collectively represent 2,000 graduating students per year), including the triple crown accreditation in the business school
- employers and other stakeholders are engaged in the development and delivery of programmes, 'embedding perspectives that support students to become agents of change', with many examples provided across different subject groups.

Looking at the evidence overall, the panel considered that it is sufficient to suggest 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 considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

Evidence in the provider submission includes:

- clear progression pathways through all career stages to professor, with evidence of promotions
- accreditation for routes to get higher education fellowships. In 2021-22 the percentage of academic staff with any fellowship was 56 per cent, well ahead of the sector average of 46.7 per cent
- new academic staff follow an academic apprenticeship route which has been highly regarded externally, with others asking to share best practice
- evidence of national recognition, and six new national teaching fellows

- dissemination of practice via an annual conference, publication of case studies and the 'excellence in education' weekly blog
- annual teaching awards in partnership with the students' guild.

The student submission states that there were 369 nominations from undergraduate students for staff in the 'outstanding teaching' category.

Overall, the panel considered that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that there is outstanding support for staff professional development and that excellent academic practice is embedded across the provider.

Learning environment and academic support

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

The indicator for 'academic support' shows evidence of very high quality for full-time students. The panel noted a high level of consistency across different student groups and courses – although this did vary for some subjects.

The indicator for 'academic support' provides evidence of outstanding quality for the apprenticeship provision, but this represents only a small number of students.

The provider and the student submissions supplement the indicator evidence by providing further evidence of a very high quality feature, which includes:

- the 'success for all strategy group' which provides in depth scrutiny of academic experience and outcomes for all with a range of working groups to support underrepresented groups
- the work of the Provost Commission (set up to recommend and implement new approaches) in facilitating inclusion and cultural change
- there is good practice in providing students with support for key transition points
- the study zone and student zone digital, which offer resources and in-curricular workshops to support skills development.

The provider submission explains that they have set consistent standards in personal tutoring (five meetings per year) and that they are aware from the student submission of further areas of enhancement needed in terms of advice, resulting in the establishment of a 'task and finish' group.

The student submission indicates that feedback analysed from the 'staff student liaison committee' highlights recurring difficulties about the personal tutor system. The student guild and student union are currently working in partnership with the university to review this area.

On balance, the panel considered the evidence to demonstrate that the provider fosters a supportive learning environment, and its students have access to a readily available range of very high quality academic support.

Learning resources

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

The indicator for 'learning resources' shows evidence of very high quality for full-time students, and there is a high degree of consistency across almost all the provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups.

The indicator for 'learning resources' shows some evidence of outstanding quality for apprenticeships, although the panel noted that this applies to only a small number of students.

The provider and the student submissions supplement the indicator evidence by providing further evidence of a very high quality feature. For example, the provider submission details significant investment in both physical (£22 million) and digital (£10 million) learning resources. The physical spaces include student-facing information hubs, maker spaces and high-performance computing for student projects, investment in engineering and the physical sciences, and study and social spaces. The digital investments were part of the coronavirus pandemic response and subsequent enhancements. Evaluation of the impact from these initiatives was not presented in the provider submission.

Overall, the panel concluded that there is sufficient evidence to suggest that physical and virtual learning resources are used effectively to support very high quality teaching and learning, but it did not consider that there was sufficient evidence to show that the resources are fully tailored to support outstanding teaching and learning.

Student engagement in improvement

The panel considered this to be an outstanding feature.

The indicator for 'student voice' provides initial evidence of very high quality for full-time students, and this applies to almost all the provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups.

The indicator provides some evidence of outstanding quality for apprenticeships, but the panel noted that this represents only a small number of students.

The provider submission explains that partnership with students is the hallmark of the university, which is also corroborated in the student submission. Examples of student engagement in the provider submission include:

- the student experience partnership board, with a view to empowering all students. In its first year of operation, this board guided the collaborative response to the cost of living crisis, which was strongly supported in the student submission
- the student library champion scheme, which has a budget for resources and provides student insights
- proactive engagement with staff to address issues
- the student guild and student union advocating on behalf of students and working in partnership with the provider to continually enhance teaching provision

- evidence that feedback has been acted on around how the provider can improve communication and transparency.

Taking all of the evidence into consideration, the panel concluded that the provider has embedded engagement with its students, leading to continuous improvement to their experiences and outcomes.

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 relating to the student outcomes aspect as a whole and determined the rating to be 'Gold'.

Across the student outcomes aspect, the panel found:

- three of the features to be outstanding
- two of the features to be very high quality
- one feature with insufficient evidence to suggest what quality level is appropriate
- evidence of typically outstanding student outcomes across the aspect as a whole.

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.

The panel considered the evidence in the provider submission to be important to the panel's assessment of the indicator evidence and features, such as contextual evidence.

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 to be an outstanding quality feature.

There is substantial evidence in the provider submission that it provides tailored careers support, including a range of bespoke support for students through paid internships, the Global Leaders Experience programme, and the Access to Hidden Professional Pathways scheme.

Further evidence in the provider submission of outstanding support for student success includes:

- there is comprehensive, data-informed and in-depth scrutiny of the student lifecycle and the experience of each demographic group

- the 'centre for social mobility' is dedicated to improving access, success and progression in higher education through research, evaluation and evidence-informed practice and policy
- the wrap-around support for student outcomes as evidenced by the Stand Alone Pledge award 'for general, financial and graduation support', followed by a second award in 2022 for 'innovation and creativity in supporting estranged students' emotional wellbeing'
- there is an emphasis on embedding employability skills, and the career support platform has 15,466 undergraduate users.

There is also evidence in the provider submission of outstanding quality specific to students with different characteristics or groups underrepresented in higher education, including:

- the identification of at risk students by monitoring assignment submissions and changing assessment practices to support early engagement
- a peer support programme for mature students
- evidence of closing awarding gaps.

The student submission commends the employability support and the approach taken to student outcomes which is focused on 'success for all' and embeds belonging and inclusion through vibrant co-curricular opportunities and campus environments.

Overall, the panel considered that there is sufficient evidence of outstanding practice and 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 to be an outstanding quality feature.

Both the indicators for 'continuation' and 'completion' provide initial evidence of outstanding quality for full-time students, and there is a high degree of consistency across most students and courses.

The panel noted that there was no 'completion' data for the undergraduate apprenticeship provision, and the 'continuation' data for this provision was described in the provider submission as being subject to erroneous reporting of 'successful completers on level 4 programmes as non-continuers on level 6'.

Overall, the panel considered there to be sufficient evidence of 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 indicator for 'progression' provides initial evidence of very high quality for full-time students, with compelling certainty.

There is a high degree of consistency across the provider's students and courses, and evidence of outstanding progression for underrepresented groups. The panel noted some variation for students aged 31 and over, but this represented only a small number of students.

The panel also noted that there is no progression data reported for the undergraduate apprenticeship provision.

Overall, the panel considered that there is sufficient evidence from the indicators and the submissions that there are outstanding rates of progression for the provider's students and courses, particularly considering its specific context.

Intended educational gains

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

The provider submission articulates the provider's commitment to educational gain, which is focused on the development of core graduate attributes, both in curriculum design and enhancement and in the co- and extra-curricular opportunities provided.

The key messages are emphasised that through education and research, students and staff can 'create the possible'. Educational gain, and the target attributes, are embedded within the University Strategy 2030.

Overall, the panel considered there is sufficient evidence that the provider articulates the range of educational gains it intends its students to achieve, and why these are relevant to its students.

Approaches to supporting educational gains

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

Educational gain is focused on the development of core graduate attributes: curiosity, creativity, critical thinking and global understanding. These are explored in some detail in the provider submission.

There are some very high quality examples included in the submission such as the 'grand challenges', which involve team working with international partners to address topical areas such as the climate emergency, and racial and social justice.

The provider submission also states that 'at an individual level, attention to education gains underpins our engagement with students, not least through assessment feedback and personal tutoring'. Further initiatives aim to extend and consolidate educational gains and the provider's Transformative Education Framework, co-created in 2021-22, will provide strategic direction for future work in this area.

Overall, the panel considered that the provider effectively supports its students to achieve the gains it has articulated.

Evaluation and demonstration of educational gains

The panel considered that there was insufficient evidence for this feature to be judged as very high quality.

The provider submission contains limited information about the detailed evaluation of educational gains, although provides some examples of relevant smaller projects.

The provider also carried out a research project in 2021-22 to identify the data and analysis needs of its educators and student facing professional services teams, and a new data strategy is currently being developed to support capturing educational gains over time.

This feature was treated as neutral by the panel when considering the student outcomes aspect rating, in line with the guidance that a provider will not be prevented from being awarded higher TEF ratings solely based on an absence of developed educational gains measures.

Overall: Gold

The panel considered the overall 'best fit' rating to be 'Gold'.

The panel noted the guidance, and that it had considered the student experience aspect rating to be 'Gold' and the student outcomes aspect rating to be 'Gold'. 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 an overall rating decision of 'Gold'.

The panel found most student experience features to be of outstanding quality for all groups of students and courses and most student outcomes features to be of outstanding quality for all the provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups, and courses.

Across the aspects, compelling evidence was presented to show that approaches are embedded across the provider, as well as evidence demonstrating that the provider tailors its approaches to its students, including those from underrepresented groups.