



Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023

Summary TEF 2023 panel statement

The University of Northampton

Summary of outcomes

Overall: Silver

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

Student experience: Silver

The student academic experience is typically very high quality.

Very high quality features include:

- teaching, feedback and assessment practices that effectively support students' learning, progression and attainment
- course content and delivery that effectively encourage students to engage in learning and stretch them to develop their knowledge and skills
- use of research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and/or employer engagement, contributing to a very high quality academic experience
- a supportive learning environment where students have access to a range of very high quality academic support
- support for staff professional development with excellent academic practice promoted
- effective engagement with students, leading to improvements.

Student outcomes: Silver

Student outcomes are typically very high quality.

Very high quality features include:

- rates of continuation and completion
- rates of successful progression
- effective support of students to achieve educational gains
- evaluation of the educational gains made by students.

There are also two outstanding quality features:

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

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 Northampton is a medium-sized provider with around 9,570 full-time, 410 part-time and 110 apprenticeship undergraduates students in 2020-21. It also has 1,560 transnational educational (TNE) students studying at undergraduate level.

The provider sets out its institutional mission as: 'Transforming Lives and Inspiring Change'. It goes on to say that, 'Our education is relevant to the world of work and values social impact for the betterment of individuals and society, and it is underpinned by personal and holistic support.'

Courses with the highest numbers of students include Business and Management (25.2 per cent) for full-time students; Engineering (37.9 per cent) for part-time; and Law (43.2 per cent) and Health and Social Care (23.4 per cent) for apprenticeship students.

The panel took account of evidence with regard to the coronavirus pandemic, including a delayed move of some courses to its Waterside Campus in 2019-20 and a major cyber attack in 2021, both of which had significant impacts on the provider and its students.

The assessment considered information about the provider's undergraduate courses and students on those courses. While some data was available for TNE provision, there were only general references in the provider submission and so the panel did not consider TNE provision as being in scope of the assessment. This was also the case for apprenticeship provision, where there was limited indicator data and no formal reference in either submission.

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: Silver

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 student experience is typically very high quality for the provider's mix of students and courses. Across the student experience aspect, the panel found:

- six very high quality features
- one feature where there is insufficient evidence of very high quality.

The panel determined the student experience aspect rating to be 'Silver', judging that the 'best fit' descriptor is that all features of this aspect are 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 this to be a very high quality feature.

The 'teaching on my course' indicator for full-time students provides initial evidence of a very high quality feature. There is however some variation across subjects.

The 'assessment and feedback' indicator for full-time students provides initial evidence of a very high quality feature for the majority of student groups and courses. However, there is evidence of not very high quality for some groups including mature students, black students and 'other undergraduate' students.

The indicators for both 'teaching on my course' and 'assessment and feedback' for part-time students were below the level of very high quality. However, the panel noted the low number of students, giving less weight to this evidence.

The provider submission showed further evidence of a very high quality feature, including:

- interventions in teaching, assessment and feedback tailored to support students, with emphasis on some groups most impacted by campus restrictions during the coronavirus pandemic and cyber attack
- embedding realistic scenarios in to programmes to enhance teaching, learning and the application of theory to practice e.g. simulated car crash experiences for Paramedic Science students
- the implementation of improvement plans for subjects where student survey indicators are low
- changes to academic requirements for assessment to 'no detriment' during the coronavirus pandemic
- offering additional support to students, including pastoral support, during the coronavirus pandemic.

The student submission noted that students were positive about the provider's response to the coronavirus pandemic and valued the 'no detriment' approach. Students were positive about their experiences of teaching, learning and assessments.

It also commented on delays in awards, where students could not complete essential work experience or placements required by accrediting bodies or could not access specialist on campus resources.

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

Course content and delivery; student engagement in learning and stretch

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

The provider submission offered evidence to support this, including:

- a provider-wide modular curriculum framework
- mandatory co-production events where students collaborate with other university stakeholders, e.g. employers, to shape course, content and delivery
- engagement with and accreditation by professional bodies to inform and assure course content and delivery
- a strong focus on developing student digital skills and small group teaching.

The student submission cited evidence where 82 per cent of respondents were satisfied with their course content, showing a trend of improvement from 78 per cent in 2020-21 and 80 per cent in 2019-20.

Students were also positive about an inclusive and supportive learning environment with substantive contact time, student-tutor engagement and smaller groups.

Overall, the panel concluded that course content and delivery effectively encourage students to engage in their learning and stretch and challenge 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 panel noted how the provider submission describes learning through an evidence-based and research-informed curriculum which is embedded into the ABL (active blended learning) model. It also provides good evidence of employer engagement in both course design and delivery.

Evidence in the provider's submission includes:

- an annual teaching and learning conference, with students and staff co-presenting
- a commitment to funding innovations in teaching through projects often using student as partners
- employer engagement in curriculum design, assessment and delivery which is embedded as part of the provider's strategy.

The student submission noted that the provider offers opportunities for students to engage in research. It included positive comments regarding opportunities for and experience of research, course content, the mix of practical, skills based and theory and the relevance of course content and applied learning to their career.

Overall, the panel found sufficient evidence to conclude that the provider uses research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and/or employer engagement to contribute to a very high quality academic experience for students.

Staff professional development and academic practice

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

The provider submission offers evidence of very high quality, including:

- an institutional commitment to career progression via learning and teaching, with support for and routes to professorship, with input from an external visiting professor
- support for Personal Academic Tutors which is based on the UK Advisory and Tutoring Association
- a Continuing Professional Development framework with evidence of its scope, activities and level of staff engagement.

The student submission noted that students' union officers are involved in staff development. For example, a student-led 'Carers' Champion' training programme which is compulsory for some professional service staff.

Considering the evidence in the round, the panel concluded that there is very high quality support for staff professional development with excellent academic practice is promoted.

Learning environment and academic support

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

The 'academic support' indicator for full-time students provides initial evidence of a very high quality feature for the majority of student groups and courses.

For part-time students the indicator provides evidence of not very high quality, but the panel noted the low number of students.

The provider submission offers further evidence of a very high quality feature, including:

- students as Learning Development Mentors. Participants have increased grades by between two to four sub-grades and there are greater impact outcomes for black undergraduate students
- specialist support teams with regard to finance, mental health, disability and other areas
- academic support including study skills workshops and one-to-one support, with evidence of high levels of student engagement.

The student submission referenced students' feedback on personal academic tutors where 74 per cent reported tutorials were 'very' or 'extremely' effective. The student submission also noted students were positive about the support they receive.

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

Learning resources

The panel considered that there was insufficient evidence of a very high quality feature.

The 'learning resources' indicator for full-time students provides initial evidence of not very high quality for the majority of student groups and courses.

For part-time students, there is evidence of very high quality for the indicator, and across student groups and courses. However, the panel noted the low number of students.

Evidence offered in the provider submission includes:

- tailored resources and support for students with disabilities or learning difficulties
- a response to the indicators showing evidence of not very high quality for some subjects, citing the impact of its decision to delay Creative Arts and Design and Performing Arts programmes moving to the new campus with the rest of the University in 2018, resulting in students experiencing a sense of isolation and lack of community and resources. Planned responses to this were delayed by the coronavirus pandemic.
- an investment of more than £1.1 million in resources for Computing and Engineering in 2021-2022, with fundamental changes made to courses and the curriculum, and further changes planned
- programmes including Architecture, Building and Planning and Geography suffering from a combination of the coronavirus pandemic and the cyber attack, with students unable to access specialist resources and software. The provider has since invested in new hardware and software, which will be rolled out in 2022/23.

The student submission cited:

- digital resources e.g. loaned laptops, with 70 per cent student satisfaction with IT services in 2021-22
- the eSports Suite, sports science laboratories and simulation wards with a reference to 'lots of opportunity to apply learning'
- some concerns regarding timetabling and the demand on student time vs placements.

In both submissions, there are positive reference to initiatives for some marginalised groups, but overall the panel felt that the submissions did not fully respond to or mitigate the low indicator scores for this feature.

The panel noted some very high quality practices for this feature but overall judged that there was insufficient evidence of a very high quality feature.

Student engagement in improvement

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

The 'student voice' indicator for full-time students provides initial evidence of not very high quality, but this had low statistical certainty. For student groups including 'other undergraduate', mature students and black students, there is evidence of not very high quality. There is also variation across courses with a majority showing evidence of not very high quality.

For the part-time students, the 'student voice' indicator provides initial evidence of not very high quality. However, the panel noted the low number of students.

The panel noted how the provider submission describes how it works in partnership with students in the development and evaluation of programmes. The submission offers evidence of very high quality, including:

- working with the students' union to develop the 'Black Advocates Scheme'
- use of student survey results to inform its institutional strategy
- student-staff liaison committees which engage students in dialogue through a student representative scheme.

The student submission referenced a collaborative ethos and effort between the provider and students' union, quoting the provider's 'transparency and willingness to listen and action students' feedback.'

The student submission also commented positively on how students had worked with the provider to introduce anonymous marking in 2020, aiming, in part, to address the attainment gaps of ethnic minority students.

Taking the indicators and submission evidence into account, the panel concluded that the provider effectively engages with its students, leading to improvements to experiences and outcomes.

Student outcomes: Silver

Throughout this section, we refer to indicators. The indicators for continuation, completion and progression rates are based on national data about higher education students. The indicators are 'benchmarked' to show how well the provider performs for its particular mix of students and courses.

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

- four very high quality features
- two outstanding quality features
- that the outstanding and very high quality features applied to most student groups.

The panel considered the best fit rating to be 'Silver' because all features of this aspect are very high quality for most groups of students.

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 provider submission describes how it supports its students holistically, based on evidence and informed by the student voice. There is a package of financial and other support based on the

provider's Access and Participation Plan. The panel noted substantive evidence presented on closing gaps in student outcomes, including support targeted to specific groups.

The provider submission offers evidence of outstanding quality, including:

- the 'Student Experience Forum' which monitors student outcomes
- initiatives to enhance continuation and completion, including induction, financial and wellbeing support
- extensive placement and work-based learning opportunities embedded in programmes with high levels of student engagement
- the 'Northampton Employment Promise', whereby if students are not in a job they want one year after graduation, they can enrol for free on a Postgraduate Certificate and are supported in their job search.

The provider submission recognises the low indicators for foundation year students and discusses redesigning the curriculum in response.

The student submission was positive about the support students receive and recognises the approach to widening participation. They value the Stepping in to University transition programme, the Changemaker Hub and the Employability Plus Award, as well as the wide range of activities which promote employability and progression.

Based on the evidence provided, the panel concluded that the provider deploys and tailors approaches that are highly effective in ensuring that students succeed in and progress beyond their studies.

Continuation and completion rates

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

For full-time students, the 'continuation' and 'completion' indicators provide initial evidence of a very high quality feature.

For part-time students, the 'continuation' indicator provides initial evidence of an outstanding quality feature and the 'completion' indicator provides evidence of not very high quality. The 'completion' indicator for part-time students improved in year four, providing evidence of outstanding quality.

The provider submission offers further evidence of a very high quality feature, including:

- improvements in student outcomes across the assessment period. The continuation gap for ethnic minority and white students narrowed from 11.4 per cent in 2017-18 to 1.5 per cent in 2019-20
- tracking of missed assignment submissions as early warning signs for students at risk of failure or withdrawal, with evidence of positive impact
- monitoring continuation, completion and graduate outcomes via an online platform, with reporting at board level on student outcome key performance indicators.

The student submission states key reasons given by students for considering leaving university prematurely in survey responses as mental health, financial difficulties, social experience and other competing responsibilities, including feeling unprepared for the increased workload.

Overall, the panel concluded that there are very high rates of continuation and completion for the provider's mix of students and courses. The panel also noted some evidence to address some groups falling below very high quality.

Progression rates

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

The 'progression' indicator for full-time students provides evidence of a very high quality feature. This is the case for most student groups and courses although some are not very high quality including integrated foundation year students, Asian and black students and Business and Management and Psychology students, both of which are courses with significant student populations.

The provider submission offers details of some mitigation for these low performing courses and students, including a new institution-wide employability strategy, and the redesign of the integrated foundation year curriculum.

The provider submission offers evidence of a very high quality feature, including:

- graduates earn on average £20,900 one year after graduation, four per cent above sector average
- embedded work-based learning providing overarching direction and guidance to inform placements
- the 'Northampton Employment Promise', referenced above in the 'approaches to supporting student success' feature.

The student submission offers further evidence of a very high quality feature and highlights the same evidence described under the 'approaches to supporting student success' feature above.

Taking all the available evidence and mitigations into account, including some student groups and subjects falling below very high quality, the panel concluded that there are very high rates of progression for most of the provider's students and courses.

Intended educational gains

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The provider submission sets out educational gains in the context of its overall mission to transform lives and inspire change. It articulates three educational gains; 'academic development', 'personal development' and 'work readiness' and offers information about their evaluation and current overall status, including:

- how 63.4 per cent of graduates have moved up one 'Standard Occupational Classification', for 'academic development'
- a graduate outcomes survey score of 72.9 per cent to a statement on 'utilising what I learnt during my studies' (ranking 45 out of 189 universities), for 'personal development'

- the quality of CVs submitted to 'CV360' (a digital service to rate student CV's) and general self-efficacy based on the provider's Employability Award, for 'work readiness'. Although, the panel noted that this evaluation is in the early days of development.

The provider submission emphasises its approach to supporting students to achieve intended educational gains through students becoming the 'changemakers of the future,' and how this ethos is embedded into students' education and extracurricular opportunities.

Within the student submission there is consensus that educational gains are core to the provider's mission and ethos as a sense of adding value. The submission also notes that the provider supports students in understanding what they want to do and how to make positive steps towards achieving their goals after graduation. It cites a survey where 72 per cent of students reported they knew their career plans.

Overall, the panel concluded that the provider clearly articulates the range of 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 provider considered this to be a very high quality feature.

The provider submission outlines various strategies and some future interventions it seeks to implement to effectively support its students to achieve educational gains. Some of these include:

- academic and personal development support
- work readiness support, through embedding employability activities and skills into its curriculum
- an extra-curricular employability programme, with evidence of increasing uptake and volunteering opportunities including paid internships
- targeted interventions to improve student continuation and completion, particularly in support of protected groups including disabled students and those from socioeconomically deprived backgrounds.

The student submission outlined that students were supportive of the work being done by the provider, including progress made in enhancing students' outcomes, the provider's demonstration of transparency and its willingness to listen and act on students' feedback.

Overall, the panel concluded that the provider effectively supports its students to achieve the educational gains, and that this is a very high quality feature.

Evaluation and demonstration of educational gains

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

The provider identifies four measures of the educational gains that it intends for students. It acknowledges that two are well established and that two are more recent, with just a single year of data. These measures are:

- the Standard Occupational Classification detailing the number of students moving socio-economic group following graduation. 63.4 per cent of graduates have moved up one group

- the Graduate Outcomes Survey monitoring whether graduates consider themselves to be on-track in their careers and using the skills they gained and employed in meaningful activity.
- 'CV360' quality scores, a new measure with reporting too early to show trends
- general self-efficacy scores, a new measure with reporting too early to show trends.

The student submission noted data from a 2021-22 survey that 73 per cent of respondents agreed their current activities at the provider were preparing them for their future careers.

Overall, taking the evidence into account, the panel concluded that the provider evaluates the educational gains made by its students.

Overall: Silver

The panel arrived at a rating of 'Silver' for the student experience aspect and a 'Silver' rating for the student outcomes aspect and concluded the overall rating to be 'Silver'.

Accordingly, the panel judges that across all the available evidence the student experience and student outcomes are typically of very high quality.

In reaching this decision, the panel considered there to be evidence that the very high quality features apply to most of the provider's groups of students, including those students from a widening participation background and those from areas of multiple deprivation.