



Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023

Summary TEF 2023 panel statement

The University of Essex

Summary of outcomes

Overall: Silver

Typically, the experience students have at The University of Essex 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 are effective in supporting students' learning, progression, and attainment
- course content and delivery effectively encourage students to engage in their learning, and stretch students to develop their knowledge and skills
- research in relevant disciplines, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and/or employer engagement is used to contribute to the student experience
- support for staff professional development, and excellent academic practice is promoted
- physical and virtual learning resources are used effectively to support the student experience
- a supportive learning environment, in which students have access to a wide and readily available range of very high quality academic support tailored to their needs.

Student outcomes: Silver

Student outcomes are typically very high quality.

Very high quality features include:

- effective support for students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies
- very high rates of continuation and completion for courses and students
- very high rates of successful progression for students and courses
- clearly articulated educational gains students are expected to achieve, and explanations as to why these are relevant to students
- effective support for students to achieve educational gains.

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 Essex is a large higher education provider with campuses in Colchester, Southend, and Loughton. Its vision is to 'put student success at the heart of its mission'. It sets out three themes which are fundamental to its 'strategic approach to excellence in education:

- a commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion, to support every student from every background to achieve their full potential
- an approach that is data-informed and enhancement-led, underpinning its mission to deliver a transformational experience for all its students
- enhancing students' ability to articulate and apply their creative and analytical research mind-set, enabling them to thrive in their future lives'.

There are three faculties: Arts and Humanities; Science and Health; and Social Sciences. The majority of undergraduate provision is offered full-time on the Colchester campus. Loughton is home to its acting school, whilst Southend offers business, nursing and performing arts.

There were 13,280 undergraduate students in 2020-21 - almost all of whom were on three-year programmes. There were very low numbers of students on part time programmes and 40 apprentices in 2020-21. The provider has chosen to include apprentices in its submission. The largest subject area for full and part-time students was Business and Management, whilst for apprentices it was Nursing and Midwifery.

The majority (85.6 per cent) of full-time students were under 21, whilst for part-time students and apprentices the majority of students are aged 31 and over. Just over 12 per cent of full-time students declared a disability or learning difference. Just over 17 per cent of full-time students were black, 8.8 per cent of asian heritage, 4.8 per cent mixed heritage, and 38.4 per cent were white. There is a balance of female and male full-time students.

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: 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 determined the student experience aspect to be very high quality.

The panel considered:

- six features to be very high quality
- one feature to have insufficient evidence of very high quality
- no features were below the level of very high quality or of concern.

The panel judged there to be strong evidence that this aspect is very high quality for most of its groups of students. It adopts a strategic approach and describes in detail the activities and initiatives that sustain its provision, and provides evidence of the impact of these for substantial portions of its mix of students and courses.

The student submission corroborates many of these claims and demonstrates a positive and effective partnership exists between the students' union and provider.

The panel therefore considered the best fit rating to be 'Silver'.

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

Teaching, assessment, and feedback

The panel considered this a very high quality feature.

Taken together, the full-time indicators for 'teaching on my course' and 'assessment and feedback' both provide initial evidence of very high quality.

The provider references a fund of £100K in 2022-23 which supports progress towards achievement of the provider's education strategy. The fund supported the establishment of a collection of high-scoring student exams and coursework examples, for students to use in their own work and exam preparation. The provider also notes that 'Technology Enhanced Learning' is continually developed to enable distinctive approaches to teaching and assessment to benefit students, such as staff training to support students during coronavirus.

The student submission includes data from a survey undertaken in June 2022 with 1,097 students to measure how effectively the provider's teaching, learning and assessment practices support student confidence in their academic skills. 74.8 per cent of respondents felt either 'confident' or 'very confident' about their academic skills.

The panel considered that provider has embedded very high quality teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are effective in supporting its students' learning, progression and attainment. It therefore concluded that this is a very high quality feature.

Course content and delivery; student engagement in learning and stretch

The panel considered this a very high-quality feature.

The provider submission states that course content and delivery inspire and engage students. It includes examples of this such as:

- several modules across different levels help students to apply their learning to specific issues, coupled with experiential learning through live briefs, placements and advocacy work
- a project where businesses deliver real-world challenges to student teams, giving an opportunity to tackle real business problems and gain commercial experience
- direct research experience opportunities are facilitated through an on-campus internships scheme, and the Essex Student Journal, which is published by the library and with editorship, peer review and article authorship by students
- connections to scholarship and professional practice, including the Essex Law Clinic, which gives over 100 students a year the chance to work alongside qualified lawyers and clinical teaching staff to advise real clients.

The panel notes the provider's well-established links with employers across the public, private and not-for-profit sectors.

The provider cites that on average across the TEF period, 77 per cent of respondents to the National Student Survey 'agreed that their course had challenged them to achieve their best work'.

Taking all of the evidence into account, the panel considered 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. The panel therefore assessed this feature as very high quality.

Research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement

The panel considered this a very high quality feature.

The provider submission notes that its 'combination of teaching and research excellence produces the ideal learning environment, creating analytic and creative mind-sets'. The provider's strategic approach is detailed in its education strategy, which embeds research in the curriculum.

The panel noted that all applicants for academic posts must detail their record of contribution to the development of teaching and professional practices, and a reflective statement on their approach to research-led education.

There are also several programmes to boost employability with employer co-production, but the panel noted that these do not seem to run across every course which potentially limits their benefit.

Students with no work experience can gain direct research experience via an on-campus internship scheme, undertaking fixed term projects in a supported environment. The student submission demonstrates some student satisfaction in 'thought provoking modules' that are

informed by research. Additionally, when asked 'What was the best thing about the University of Essex?' they noted that 'a number of students referenced research-led education as a factor that contributed to their overall satisfaction'.

Overall, the panel considered this feature to be very high quality as the provider uses research in relevant disciplines, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and/or employer engagement to contribute to the student experience.

Staff professional development and academic practice

The panel considered this a very high quality feature.

The provider supports continuous professional development and academic practice through its professional development framework. The provider states that 10 per cent of teaching staff hold Senior and Principal Fellowships, and adds that it is also embedded in institutional processes for recruitment, induction, and career development, and includes peer contribution and the role of peer mentors and assessors to support the practitioner community.

The student submission notes the work to recognise and promote best practice and help to drive professional development. The provider further outlines practices of reward and recognition for excellent teaching. The provider cites examples of other staff professional development opportunities such as staff being trained by the dedicated Technology Enhanced Learning team in software to support learning and teaching.

The panel notes evidence from the provider that the impact of its embedded approach is clear through sustained staff engagement and completion of qualification or recognition, such as an increase in HESA eligible teaching qualifications. The provider also measures impact annually including levels of engagement and interaction, which it says are increasing.

Based on the evidence provided, the panel judged that there is very high quality support for staff professional development and excellent academic practice is promoted.

Learning environment and academic support

The panel considered this a very high quality feature.

The 'academic support' indicator provides initial evidence of very high quality.

The provider submission refers to an online programme to help applicants and new students build the skills and confidence to be successful in their studies. In 2021/22, it had 1,539 registered students, with positive impacts on 'engagement rates' reported.

A dedicated team provides support with academic study skills, researching, assignment writing, mathematics and statistics, digital skills, and English language. This is integrated into departmental modules, with all first-year undergraduates receiving at least five hours of contextualised small-group teaching. The Skills@Library service also provides digital guides for students and academic staff, open workshops, a librarian appointments service, and an in-curriculum teaching offer.

Personal tutors provide academic support. The student submission included data indicating that 14 per cent more students than the previous year had engaged with their personal tutor, though it is unclear what the previous level of engagement was.

There is clear support for wellbeing, with a dedicated student wellbeing and inclusivity service and a new student accessibility enhancements manager role. Students can make a wellbeing referral, and the wellbeing team cross-check engagement data in relation to those students supported by a caseworker and follow-up where engagement is low.

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

The panel therefore judged that there is sufficient evidence that this is a very high quality feature.

Learning resources

The panel considered this a very high quality feature.

The 'learning resources' indicator for full-time students provides initial evidence of a very high quality feature, although the panel noted variable performance for part-time and apprenticeship students, and for certain groups of students within the overall population.

Ongoing investment in physical and virtual learning resources includes:

- 200 Zoom-enabled teaching spaces in 2020
- the Causeway Teaching Centre opening in 2021, which has 15 new teaching rooms over three floors
- a digital creative collaborative studio and student start-up programme launched in 2021, containing state of the art AI/AR and 360 VR Video and animation studios
- expanded teaching space for the health provision in 2021/22, which now provides teaching capacity for 300+ students, including a replica nursing suite, occupational therapy teaching spaces, and consultation training spaces.

The student submission includes positive comments about the learning environment, noting that the students' union has been instrumental in securing improvements such as library opening hours, and that enhancements to the virtual learning environment have continued post-coronavirus. They do also note that they 'would encourage the University to continue to review its space management practices, particularly on our Southend campus, ensuring the teaching spaces continue to increase in line with the ever-growing student population on the campus'.

The panel considered that the provider clearly adopts a continuous enhancement approach to physical and virtual learning resources, using them effectively to support the student experience, judging this feature to be very high quality.

Student engagement in improvement

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

The indicator for student engagement for full-time students provides initial evidence of very high quality and, for the small number of part-time students, outstanding quality. The panel noted some variability across subjects for the full-time indicators.

A 'Student Experience Committee' maintains strategic oversight of extra-curricular elements of the student experience, and embeds the student voice and consideration of the student experience into formal governance arrangements. The provider states that there is 'strong student input' but it is unclear what this consists of.

The student submission notes that there are formal and informal methods of engaging with the provider, with the students' union responsible for the training, recruitment and support of student reps. Student Voice Groups are held each term, where student reps can share feedback and collaborate with departments. Last year over 100 student voice groups took place with 372 student reps attending meetings across the year.

The panel found that while there is clearly very positive engagement with the student voice, and a productive relationship with the students' union, there is some variability in the current impacts of this, based on the indicator distributions. There is evidence of improvements made as a result of feedback, and there are also clearly plans in place to further strengthen focus. However, the panel considered that at this point there is currently insufficient evidence that this is a very high quality feature.

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 judged there to be strong evidence that the provider delivers very high quality for all its groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups, across each feature of the student outcomes aspect.

The panel referred to guidance that states the outcomes indicators provide more direct measures for 'progression' and 'continuation and completion' rates, and that these features could be identified without necessarily requiring further evidence in the provider submission.

In this case, the panel considered the evidence in the provider submission to be important in confirming this through some detailed and well-evidenced explication of the activities that support and monitor student outcomes.

Therefore, the panel assessed that most features are very high quality for nearly all groups of students and courses. Very high quality continuation and completion rates were demonstrated across both submissions, and the provider clearly effectively supports its students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies. This means the best fit rating is 'Silver'.

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

Approaches to supporting student success

The panel considered this a very high quality feature.

The provider submission includes a number of examples, including:

- a pilot project designed to create 'leaps in aspiration and expectation that free participants to achieve what had previously seemed out of reach'
- a portal that acts as 'a powerful tool for monitoring student engagement and understanding barriers to continuation and success'. This has led to a continued reduction in the number of students withdrawing by the end of the academic year
- a pilot programme of targeted careers support for final year undergraduates and new graduates, designed to enhance students' success as they transition into the world of work or further study. 718 students attended at least one event offered between October 2019 and September 2020.

The student submission references the Student Futures Manifesto which aims to enhance students' experience of university moving beyond the coronavirus pandemic and provide a framework that supports students to develop during and beyond their studies. Student-led groups have been set up to monitor the work on each of the six manifesto points. The student submission notes that they welcome the further embedding of this approach and that 'all students are offered multiple ways to succeed in and progress beyond their studies', naming various opportunities and support mechanisms.

The panel considered that the provider has systems designed to support student career readiness and sense of belonging, using insights to target support. Overall, the panel judged that the provider effectively supports its students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies, and that this feature is very high quality.

Continuation and completion rates

The panel considered this a very high quality feature.

The 'continuation' and 'completion' indicators provide initial evidence of very high quality for full-time students, and outstanding quality for part-time students. There is some variation across different subjects.

The provider submission states it has a data-informed enhancement approach, and a commitment to supporting every student to succeed. Recent actions implemented include providing additional support for students undertaking reassessment, increased training for all staff involved in advising students, and ensuring an enhanced focus on key points in the academic year which may create a higher risk of withdrawal.

The student submission also states that continuation rates have been on an upward trajectory since 2020 and that completion has always been an area of strength for the provider. The panel considered that, taken collectively, the provider supports very high rates of continuation and completion for its courses and students, and therefore concluded that this feature is very high quality.

Progression rates

The panel considered this a very high quality feature.

The 'progression' indicator for full-time students provides evidence of outstanding quality. For part-time and apprenticeship students there is evidence of not very high quality but with statistical uncertainty due to low numbers.

The student submission references a number of targeted projects and workstreams explicitly designed to support student progression. These include support offered to graduates for up to 14 months following their graduation, and is embedded throughout at faculty, department and course level. It notes that progression data is also an area where Essex performs well in comparison to the sector average.

Weighing up the evidence provided, the panel judged that there are very high rates of successful progression for the provider's students and courses, and that this feature is very high quality.

Intended educational gains

The panel considered this a very high quality feature.

The panel noted that the provider references 'excellent levels of completion of study and success on rigorous programmes of study which are relevant to their personal needs and ambitions, and progression to graduate level employment or further study'.

Course and module aims and outcomes set out the knowledge and understanding, and the practical, cognitive and key skills, that students are expected to gain. These educational gains are embedded into the range of opportunities the provider offers and are relevant to its students and their future ambitions because they recognise the individual starting points of its student cohorts, and the specifics of their career pathways.

The student submission notes that students are asked each year, before they register, to indicate their current thoughts about their future employability plans and the skills they have/need. This data is then used to influence the provision for the upcoming academic year.

The panel considered that the provider clearly articulates the educational gains it expects students to achieve and explains why these are relevant to its students, and concluded that this feature is very high quality.

Approaches to supporting educational gains

The panel considered this a very high quality feature.

The provider states that its use of learner analytics to enable evidence-based decision making, culminated in the learner engagement activity portal (LEAP), a student-centred personalised engagement tool. LEAP enables staff to identify and support students more effectively and provides students with the opportunity to take control of their own learning and make more informed choices about their studies. There has been a year-on-year increase in student usage of LEAP, with 75 per cent of students accessing the system during 2021-22.

The panel noted that the provider recognises and prioritises the broader range of ways that students can achieve these gains and be supported to do so. It enables its students to develop confidence in preparing for the workplace by enhancing and expanding their opportunities to apply their learning, including the integration of experiential, work-related and entrepreneurial learning in the curriculum.

The provider states that it systematically monitors departmental performance and identifies areas of good practice in order to ensure that procedures are evidence-based and effective. The provider uses an interactive dashboard to interrogate degree outcomes data, which enables it to better understand performance at an institutional level and within the departmental context, including across demographic groups of age, gender, ethnicity.

The panel considered all the evidence and concluded that the provider effectively supports its students to achieve educational gains, and the panel considered this a very high quality feature.

Evaluation and demonstration of educational gains

The panel considered this a very high quality feature.

The provider submission notes that their holistic approach from the outset is 'to build confidence, resilience and experience' with a focus on transition to the next stage of their students' lives. It does this 'by maintaining, evaluating and innovating in the development of skills and wider personal development opportunities'.

The provider submission notes that educational gains embedded into course and module aims and outcomes are assessed by both summative assessment, and through formative teaching, learning and assessment methods. It also cites an example of external recognition for the organisation in a 'Value added score' based on qualifications on entry and distance travelled by students, as evidence of impact.

The panel considered all the evidence and concluded that the provider evaluates the gains made by its students, and as such judged this feature to be very high quality.

Overall: Silver

The panel judges that overall 'Silver' was the best fit rating for this provider. The guidance specifically notes that where each aspect is awarded the same rating, the overall rating should also be the same. In this case, both the student experience aspect and the student outcomes aspect are 'Silver', hence the decision to rate the provider as 'Silver' overall.

In reaching this decision, the panel considered that there was strong evidence of typically very high quality features overall. The panel judged very high quality to apply to all the provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups.