

Optional student submission template for TEF 2023

1. Approach to evidence-gathering

Existing data

We used multiple sources when gathering evidence for our submission. Firstly, we analysed the many surveys we have conducted over the years with our students. These include Welcome and Arrivals surveys each year, our annual feedback survey 'All I want for Christmas', and end of year Active Members survey. These surveys gain between 100 and 500 responses each time. The first two draw on a wide range of students and the latter focuses on students who are engaged with the Union over that year. We also have run a series of one-off surveys. From the annual Teaching Awards, we were able to analyse the nominations for examples of excellence and to understand what students view as excellence. Our other large existing data sets were the minutes for Subject Committee meetings. We employed three student staff interns to help us in the process of analysing this data.

Collecting new data

We conducted two forums: one with Students' Union (SU) staff, and one with student faculty reps. In these forums we presented the TEF features on a Google Jamboard and asked our contributors to brainstorm where they have seen this in practice at the university. The forums allowed us to identify initiatives that have made the most impact on students and what students value most about their experience. From the forums we were able to interview staff from across the university who were involved with the initiatives mentioned.

Large data sets and data from the university

We have worked collaboratively with the university in terms of sharing useful data for our respective submissions. We looked at reports prepared specifically for TEF and previous reports (summaries of NSS data and reports on Access and Participation groups). This allowed us to supplement our own data and look for areas that we may have missed out on. We also used the annual Brookes Satisfaction Survey and found this to be a useful large data source to cross reference some of our qualitative data with. The university data team helped us learn how to effectively navigate the TEF dashboard and NSS results. This quantitative data allowed us to ensure our report is representative and provide wider context to the initiatives raised in our forums and interviews.

Diverse Provision

The University has around 700 students at associate partner colleges, and a number of students taught internationally. Whilst we have been able to incorporate their perspectives where this has been gathered through the NSS and in subject committee meetings, our ability to consult with those students is greatly impaired.

2. Student experience

Summary of Submission

Oxford Brookes University provides a diverse mix of learning, teaching and student experiences. There is a good understanding across the University of the factors which students value most, and courses across the University strive to incorporate those factors into their teaching and learning provision. This sometimes means that students will have varied experiences across the institution, resulting in a disparity of experience, but each subject can demonstrate its own examples of excellence.

Academic experience and assessment

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The annual Teaching Awards, held by the Union, allows us to evaluate what students value from their education and it gives us examples of excellence in teaching, feedback, and assessment. There have been hundreds of nominations from across all faculties each year. We have also used other sources in our evaluation of academic experience, including NSS results and minutes from Subject Committee meetings.

Our findings show that students value the following four aspects in their academic experience:

Real-life examples:

As a traditionally vocational institution, the use of real-life examples in teaching and assessment is both prevalent across the University and really valued by students. In our research, students frequently cited real-world examples as something they value in teaching. This took many forms; students in vocational fields praised lecturers who spoke openly about their personal experiences in the relevant fields. One such example from the Oxford Brookes Business School is:

"From day one it was clear that [Academic] wanted us to be successful in our professional lives, rather than just wanting us to pass the module. He has always complemented our regular theoretical lectures with real-life experiences and challenges, and organised, together with the Waves team, multiple meetings with hospitality professionals, including mock interviews, and worldwide-leading hotel chain presentations." (Teaching Awards)

Students from other subjects valued relevant and current case studies drawn from real world examples. These included simulations (Marketing) and live clients (Events Management). One such example from our teaching awards is from the Faculty of Health and Life Sciences:

"[Academic]'s professionalism and strategic teaching has guided my cohort to a stage in our education where we feel prepared for the wider World. Incorporating daily news feeds into every one of his lectures to give us up-to-date information on topics as they are occurring in real time. For a topic such as conservation this is extremely rewarding for students and stimulates interests that otherwise may not be covered in the lecture material.... Overall, I believe [Academic] has guided me to become the professional person I am today and given me the ability to utilise rigorous scientific techniques." (Teaching Awards)

Alongside this as a teaching method, students also really value the use of 'real-life' methods in assessment. Examples included the use of 'podcasting' as an assessment method in Criminology and students on Anthropology courses creating museum guides. Not only do these methods support students in their employability, but students also report that the use of these methods create a more inclusive and engaging learning environment.

Communication:

Within the SU we know students value communication as during the pandemic this was a recurring theme in complaints, where communication goes well students find it beneficial to their academic experience. Many students' nominations focused on lecturers being understanding and good communicators:

"[My lecturer] is communicative, responsive and always brings a positive energy to feedback sessions... [they] have been incredibly generous with her time outside teaching hours if I ever have any questions as well." (Teaching Awards)

"[My lecturer] has been extremely responsive and dedicated to providing support for the class." (Teaching Awards)

"Listening to our point of view and need to change re: COVID complications, communication is good and it's interesting" (NSS 2022)

This also plays out in NSS scores; in 2022 one course achieved 100% in Q12 'I have been able to contact staff when I needed to' (BSc Comp Sci Cyb Sec) and 3 in Q1 'Staff are good at explaining things' (Nutrition, Children's Nursing and Philosophy). On the whole it is clear that staff across the University communicate with students as colleagues and that this is valued by students.

Student feedback from the Teaching Awards indicated that students enjoyed their academic experience and felt their performance was supported when their teaching staff communicated regularly, were approachable to answer questions, and understanding about student worries and extenuating circumstances.

Students appreciated reassurance about their progress throughout their studies. A majority of teaching nominations and feedback on academic experience made reference to communication with students' academic staff. It is positive that many students have good communication with their lecturers at Oxford Brookes. However, the strong desire for reassurance indicates that students are anxious and worried about their abilities, this may have been exacerbated by Covid.

Feedback:

Students value feedback that is timely and constructive. Students particularly value when feedback allows them to develop the particular skill they were being assessed on, in time for any follow up assessment. For example, students valued staff that reiterated advice for academic writing in the feedback they gave, using an example in the student's work to explain why the student has followed academic writing guidelines and how they could change what they wrote to do so in the future. Students are keen to highlight areas of excellence in feedback and marking in the NSS, particularly in the Nursing courses (BSc Midwifery - 90.91% & BSc Nursing (Children's) - 92.19%), and Philosophy (95.31%).

Throughout our evaluation of student perceptions on excellence the theme of reassurance came up. The recurring pattern of students valuing timely feedback and communication indicates that these features reassure them about their progress and success.

Students regularly cite examples of useful and timely feedback as a key factor in their positive experience at the University. These experiences have come from a range of courses, showing that there is excellence in this area across the University. In the NSS 2022 comments section students have provided the following feedback:

"Some lecturers are very approachable, providing high-quality academic support and feedback"; "Some lecturers have gone above and beyond to provide support and feedback."; "They delivered teaching well during the pandemic. Consistently gave feedback timely with submissions. Good opportunity to discuss feedback with academic tutors. Interesting course modules."; "I'm thankful for the support some of my lecturers have offered. Overall, my feedback for my essays have always been clear and that has been helpful in building my learning" (NSS 2022).

This is reinforced by a new inclusive Assessment and Feedback Policy which: requires a programme-wide assessment and feedback schedule to ensure students have sufficient time to complete concurrent assessment tasks without being overburdened, specifies a maximum marking turnaround time, and identifies assessment rubrics as core mechanisms for feedback, feedforward, and student understanding of assessment criteria.

Assessment:

Students value opportunities for group work, no deadline clashes, and the opportunity to develop assessment skills.

As covered previously, students enjoy assessments that use real-life or current examples that emphasise why the assessment is relevant. They find innovative learning methods engaging eg. quizzes, riddles, guest lecturers, looking at real life examples (hypothetical and from personal experience).

Students appreciate useful feedback on their assessments that reassures them they can do better next time:

"The support we have gotten from [my lecturer] around assignments has had a hugely positive impact on how I have viewed coursework and essays and it means that I now look forward to doing them and writing drafts as I always want to know what feedback I will get and how I can improve upon what I've already done."

[My lecturer] has made me feel like I don't need to be so perfectionistic in my approach to learning and taught me that it is normal to make mistakes." (Teaching Awards)

Students also appreciate being taught skills as well as the content of their course. Nominations show that many staff do consider this in their planning with particular examples in the Business School being mentioned:

"[My lecturer] taught my Campaign Management class and I can confidently say that that was my favourite module. Not only did I learn how to present properly, but also gained insight to how to effectively create a campaign. In addition to this, [my lecturer] brought in guest speakers every other week from different industries." (Teaching Awards)

This shows that learning assessment skills is as important to students' enjoyment of their academic experience as engaging and relevant content.

It is positive to see a number of students praising lecturers for teaching assessment skills already. However, there are several institution wide initiatives that also provide students with this support:

1. Oxford Brookes University has developed the IDEAS framework to shape all curriculums in the university with student development at the forefront.

IDEAS is phrased as a set of questions being asked by students e.g. 'How will you get to know me and how will I get to know my peers?' All of the support for staff in using the model is built around the process of Design Thinking. This is a human-centred approach to problem solving that starts with understanding and empathising with students, challenging assumptions, and defining the 'problems' that we need to resolve to have the impact we want. This ensures that any solutions we put into practice are all grounded in what students need. Support includes workshops (known as Sprints) and the IDEAS toolkit, all of which emphasise that students should be partners in this process (i.e. students are paid participants in the workshops). As this framework continues to get rolled out further it will ensure staff have the resources necessary to provide students with the academic experience they are asking for.

During the development of the IDEAS Framework, the Brookes Union working group on racism and cultural competency worked collaboratively with the University to provide feedback on the framework. We presented research on the importance of not assuming background knowledge of canonical texts or assessment methods, especially when students start university. Students come to Brookes from a variety of educational backgrounds and assuming a certain level of knowledge

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on for example, how to reference academic essays, puts students from non-traditional backgrounds at a disadvantage. Part of our research was based on the research of Brookes academic in her paper,

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feedback has been acted on and this is an example of different aspects of the university coming together to improve the academic experience of our students.

The university is planning on working with students as Curriculum Consultants to evaluate the questions that are presented to staff in the framework. This is part of an ongoing collaboration with students to ensure the model does reflect their voice and the things they want/need from the curriculum.

2. Students have access to the Centre of Academic Development (CAD)

The roll out of the IDEAS Framework will improve parity of academic experience for all students, including access to developing assessment skills. However, the Centre of Academic Development is well established and is there for students seeking out additional academic support or who have been pointed in this direction by staff.

Tutorials and drop ins for guidance in study skills, mathematics and statistics, academic English courses to develop search, writing and language skills (also to help boost confidence of international students and help them to meet other students), a range of workshops on different study skills, online resources for anything from note-taking to formatting essays to concentration, and podcasts covering various topics supporting students with their academic experience.

The Centre for Academic Development offers 1:1 tutorials in study skills, mathematics and statistics, which are underpinned by principles of non-judgementalism and inclusivity. These are very popular with students and demand outstrips supply in the busiest weeks of the year. Feedback for tutorials has always been positive, but ratings improved significantly from 2018 when, partly in response to student feedback, student appointments were lengthened from 30 to up to 45 minutes, and they introduced written notes for tutorials that are shared with students. Between 2019 and 2022 CAD has had 4144 appointments with students. CAD also tracks the proportion of these students coming from each faculty at the university. This evaluation shows where students may be particularly struggling. To improve the parity of academic experience for students this data should be communicated with senior staff so that everyone is aware of where students are asking for more help. In the academic year 2021/2022 90.9% scored their appointment 5 (Very Good) in semester one and 89.2% scored their appointment 5 (Very Good) in semester 2. An example of student feedback:

“Every time I have used the academic centre, I have always come away feeling that I have been helped and not judged.” (Student feedback on CAD)

To summarise these elements we have found that across all three, students want reassurance that they are being supported to succeed. The support needs to be there, but it also needs to be clearly accessible and routinely offered to students. There are many examples of lecturers teaching and assessing by these principles, but there are also examples of this being embedded at an institutional level.

Course content and delivery

We have chosen to discuss an exciting initiative that pushes forward the content and delivery that students experience at Oxford Brookes:

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COIL (collaborative online international learning) projects are virtual exchanges between Oxford Brookes and partner international universities providing students with the opportunity to study internationally but remotely. The initiative is still in its infancy but made significant gains during the pandemic, with staff taking forward projects in their own departments. Working on research projects with a partner university supports the pillars of enterprise and innovation in Brookes' strategy.

International study and placements have been proven to improve level 6 outcomes and career progression. The COIL projects expand access to the chance to develop the skills that generate these benefits for more students. NSS results show that students who study abroad or take work placements have higher satisfaction levels, and the Graduate Outcomes survey shows that they have higher levels of success six months after graduating. There are widely recognised learning outcomes around international learning, these include employability, and awareness of global issues and perspectives. Bringing in perspectives from institutions, academics, and students from the Global South improves the quality of the curriculum that our students' study and helps our efforts to decolonise the curriculum.

However, international study is prohibitive to many students for financial reasons. COVID-19 also demonstrated how easily international opportunities can be disrupted. The COIL projects reduce barriers to access and so allow more students to gain access to international learning opportunities and the benefits that come with them. The COIL projects also allow the university to offer international opportunities whilst trying to reduce the environmental impact of travelling abroad to study.

An example of a COIL project is the Virtual Exchange Britain and Algeria (VEBA) in Human and Social Sciences that ran in 2020-21 and 2021-22. Applied Foreign Language students work with Algerian agro-sciences students to develop promotion for Algerian products in the UK. This is set to expand next year with the aim to link with Oxford employers to match the Algerian students' existing engagement with local farmers. Last year 33 students participated, and all secured the virtual exchange badge from [UNICollaboration](#).

Research, Innovation and employer engagement

We have chosen to highlight three initiatives that exemplify excellence in innovation. However, we also have drawn on the statistics presented in the TEF data dashboard which give an insight into how the general student population feels. NSS optional questions give us an indication of how the general student population feels about their confidence and prospects. In 2022, we have improved student satisfaction in their personal development. Satisfaction in personal development has risen from 67.6% in 2021 to 71.7% in 2022, including an increase in every question that comprises this average. From our research this ties into two trends we have seen: firstly, COVID-19 has made students more uncertain and anxious about their studies and graduate prospects, secondly, student and staff feedback show areas of excellent adaptation made during the pandemic to offer more support, and these have continued to develop even as we return to in person learning. Student confidence took a hit because of the pandemic. However, staff initiatives and support has begun to make up for this and exceed provision before the pandemic, with more inclusive and innovative practices becoming the norm. We remain below sector average in student satisfaction around personal development and graduate outcomes. Our research shows that while there are pockets of excellent innovation across the university, the university is still in the process of improving communication, parity, and embedding these excellent practices as standard across all departments.

Violence Against Women and Girls Conference:

The conference began seven years ago as a small in person conference for Health Care students to learn about FGM and domestic violence before they enter their vocations. The pandemic accelerated the growth of the conference due to the necessary

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move online. The event is now attended by students from many subjects and draws on expertise from Thames Valley Police, local charities and four partner universities

Whilst many of those who attend are from a Health, Nursing, or Social Work background, the conference is open to any student. This encourages interprofessional learning and highlights the importance of professionals in a number of disciplines being informed on violence against women and girls. In the last two years 1000 students have been invited each year. In 2021 750 attended and in 2022 700 attended with plans to expand next year.

It is important that students are able to engage in academic and professional conversations around gender-based violence, so they enter the workplace with the motivation and knowledge required to make positive changes. The university should continue to embed, support, and promote this initiative so that more students are aware of it and can participate.

Employment engagement in the Oxford Brookes Business School (OBBS):

OBBS have successfully embedded employment experience and learning within their courses. One example of this is the Christmas Market organised by Events Management students. Events Management students deliver a Christmas market as part of their course, for Brookes Union who act as the client. They undertake all parts of organising the event, working in teams to deliver: Booking vendors, Health and safety, Advertising and PR, On-the day support. In previous years they have adapted to the challenges of covid to run a series of online *Escape the New Normal* events focusing on wellbeing.

This gives the students real-world experience of working on an event, encompassing different skills such as teamwork, communication, and planning. As well as the practical skills that come with organising an event. The Union acts as the client - setting a brief, offering feedback on the activity, and providing platforms for promotion.

In our Reps forum, students informed us that employment skills are effectively embedded in their courses in OBBS. This includes CV and LinkedIn development and a module dedicated to preparing them for exit from university.

When consulting the TEF data dashboard for student outcomes Allied Health and Business and Management consistently performed well with either outstanding or very high-quality splits across continuation, completion, and progression. Student feedback indicates that they feel confident about their graduate progress because of their academic experience and the data dashboard shows that this transfers to outcomes as well.

Resources, support and student engagement

Library support:

In the Teaching Awards and Reps Forum, the library received many positive comments from students about the support that they offer. The Library is consistently mentioned by students as an example of both a useful resource and a department of the University which actively and effectively engages students using a variety of initiatives.

The first initiative is More Books. This usually runs in semester two each year and is a student driven campaign to encourage students to request any books or articles that they want the library to buy, be it for their dissertation or to learn more about a topic they are interested in. Students can request articles and books throughout the year but there are usually more constraints to do with budget and purpose. More Books ring-fences funding and will purchase book requests from students with minimal questions until the funding runs out. The campaign also serves to remind students that they can request books all year round if the library does not have them. This year an

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additional More Books campaign ran at the end of semester one to help students with the cost-of-living crisis by allowing them to get the books they need stocked in the library.

The Library aims to be in continual dialogue with students. To achieve this each course has a Library Academic Liaison. Students can contact these liaisons by chat, email, zoom, or face to face with any issues to do with their course. The liaisons also attend staff-student council meetings so that they are always aware of issues from student reps and from staff. Student feedback shows that they really appreciate having a named contact at the library. Academic liaisons receive thousands of emails and appointments from students each year. This has increased since COVID with the move to online appointments. Distance learners have appreciated having more access to library liaisons and students are wanting more support post-pandemic. The Library staff are concerned with making help available to students at the point of need. For this reason, they also have extensive guides online and in video form about anything from how to use the library to finding news sources to referencing. The Library also works with faculty staff to include these guides on student Moodle pages as well. The Library has also contributed to additional Moodle courses for students, including academic integrity course and digital capabilities for students.

Feedback regularly collected by the Union indicates that students highly value the support offered by the Library. The Library also collects feedback on its initiatives, receiving a majority of positive responses. However, we can see that the overall student body expresses satisfaction with academic and learning resources slightly below the benchmark. Despite our result being of very high quality, this indicates room for improvement. From conversations with student reps and officers we have identified a theme of lack of complete parity of experience. The large number of students who access the support and initiatives discussed in the report value them. However, there is a lack of coordinated communication meaning not all students know about these initiatives. Additionally, some examples of excellent practice are department specific. The university is already working to improve parity of experience with the IDEAS Framework and Assessment and Feedback Policy. Work like this across all facets of academic experience could help improve satisfaction among the whole student body.

Physical and Virtual learning resources

Response to COVID:

As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Oxford Brookes University rolled out Lecture Capture. As a result of positive student feedback, Oxford Brookes decided to continue using lecture capture after the pandemic. The use of lecture capture benefits all students but helps bridge the gap between students with “traditional backgrounds” and those who are disadvantaged. For those students who struggle with the pace or manner of traditional learning, the breadth of opportunity that the lecture capture roll-out gives them to learn at their own pace and in their own time is invaluable. Lecture capture supports the University’s goals of accessibility and inclusivity.

The SU 2021 Arrivals survey asked students about the university’s COVID response. Students did express some concerns about the quality of their experience because of the pandemic. However, the majority of responses praised staff efforts and support and said that increased online resources and recordings of lecturers were a positive change that should continue.

Physical space on campuses:

Physical space presents a unique challenge at Oxford Brookes because of our four campuses. As Headington is our central campus it receives the most attention. Staff in Campus Planning do attempt to respond to demands from other campuses, but the response is limited by time and budgets. For example, we know that an ongoing concern for students at our Marston Road campus is physical space. Feedback repeatedly shows that students want more space on campus where they can eat, socialise, and study between classes.

Physical space has been successfully adapted to student needs on our Headington Campus. The largest space on this campus is The Forum. An audit was conducted of students passing through the area to find out what they wanted from the space. This has led to several improvements. The University has increased the amount of soft furniture and comfortable chairs to create a more social environment and a place where students feel comfortable spending time in between lectures. More furniture has been added to The Platform, another large space on campus, this has doubled the capacity of the area, and is used by students to study. Campus Planning regularly put in more IT stations, power sockets, and secure charging lockers around campus as the need occurs and logistics allow. Campus Planning looks to prioritise student access to spaces on campus by making staff offices agile working spaces wherever possible.

Campus Planning aims to keep space multi-purpose where possible so that it can fit changing student needs. However, we have several specific learning spaces across Brookes' campuses that contribute to the quality of academic experience for students. These include engine test cells, VR cave, nursing simulation rooms, Bloomberg trading simulation room, and Engineering students at the Wheatley campus who have access to ex-F1 cars to work on.

Engagement with students

Student Voice performed to a very high level on the TEF data dashboard. The students reported an indicator value of 70.5% which was 100% in line with our benchmark. We believe this strong result is because of the structures the University and Union have in place to amplify student voice. Students can voice their concerns and work with staff to create campaigns and receive responses from the relevant stakeholder.

Student Voice:

Course Reps volunteer their time to represent the views of the student body and raise concerns to course leaders. They work alongside the Union and University to collect feedback from students and make positive changes on their courses. The Union and University work in partnership to ensure that the reps are heard at all levels of the University. Union Officers and Reps sit on most of the decision-making groups across Brookes.

The Faculty Rep role gives students the opportunity to step up into a position of greater responsibility and leadership within their academic representation system. Faculty Reps attend AESC meetings with the SU Vice President for Student Voice, taking the big issues which can't be resolved at Subject Committee meetings to their Faculty and ensuring that student voices are heard.

Student Reps are invited to Subject Committee Meetings; the formal channel by which feedback is presented to staff and changes are made. Whilst these meetings are the formal channel of communication available to Student Reps, staff and Reps are encouraged to talk to each other regularly throughout the year and resolve issues when they arise rather than having to wait for the next meeting.

We were able to look through the student-staff council minutes for each faculty for the last four years. Looking back at the minutes we were able to identify that each faculty were able to resolve a number of the issues students raised following the meeting or introduced longer term actions to work towards a solution.

Following student calls for more work to be done on campus culture and student behaviour, the University responded to student suggestions for improvements, implementing a series of reforms including an ISVA, sexual consent education, reforming the EDI structure at Brookes and reviewing the culture of sports. This work has also informed policy decisions at Brookes, such as work around bullying and harassment procedures.

3. Student Outcomes

The University is overall outcomes focussed and has created a number of initiatives to support students in achieving good outcomes. According to the TEF data dashboard Brookes has a continuation rate of 92.6%, a completion rate of 91.7% and a progression rate of 73.9%, which show that the methods used at the University are effective in supporting students to achieve good outcomes. We have highlighted some specific examples above of initiatives aimed at improving outcomes for students, however there are two further initiatives we would like to highlight.

The first of these is the Academic Framework, introduced in 2020, which created a credit framework with new regulations to support more structured continuation and progression. The implementation of the AFR created an initial increase of students failing to progress and this unfortunately coincided with covid restrictions. However, the University responded well to this and effectively balanced maintaining academic rigour with the introduction of supportive mitigations for the impact of covid as well as emergency regulatory measures to monitor and reduce the impact of both things happening at the same time. As a result, continuation and completion rates remain at excellent levels. It goes without saying that this was invaluable to students during what was a very difficult and stressful time, and whilst the majority of students would be unaware of the detail of the response from the University, the SU was effectively and positively engaged in the decisions surrounding this response.

The second is to highlight the University's response to the black attainment gap at Brookes. Due to the relatively low numbers of black students at Brookes, the attainment gap has varied from 29% in 16-17; 15% in 18-19; 27% in 19-20 and is currently at 18%. In response to this however, the University has developed a range of inclusivity initiatives including developments to curriculum delivery highlighted above and access to mentoring schemes which are detailed in the University's submission. There are a wide range of working groups looking specifically at improving the experiences of black students and the University responded swiftly and proactively to Brookes Union's '[Mind the Gap](#)' and '[Brookes Together](#)' research and campaign. Whilst the SU accepts that there is more to be done in this area, the University's response and commitment to supporting minority students in response to these surveys and data needs to be highlighted.