



Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023

Summary TEF 2023 panel statement

South Essex College of Further and Higher Education

Summary of outcomes

Overall: Silver

Typically, the experience students have at South Essex College of Further and Higher Education and the outcomes it leads to are very high quality.

Student experience: Gold

The student academic experience is typically outstanding.

Outstanding quality features include:

- understanding the challenges facing different students and employing highly effective teaching, assessment and feedback strategies tailored to support them to reach their goals
- course content and delivery inspire students to actively engage in and commit to their learning, and stretch them to develop knowledge and skills to their fullest potential
- highly effective employer engagement including employers contributing to courses, guest speakers and collaborations with external companies
- highly effective personalised academic support tailored to students' needs, including weekly tutorials, support advisors, and peer mentors
- outstanding student engagement, including collaboration with students and making change based on their feedback.

There are also some very high quality features including:

- very high quality support for staff professional development and excellent academic practice is promoted.

Student outcomes: Silver

Student outcomes are typically very high quality.

Very high quality features include:

- very high rates of continuation and completion for students and courses
- articulating the educational gains intended for students to achieve and why these are relevant to them
- effectively supporting students to achieve these gains.

There are also some outstanding quality features including:

- deploying and tailoring approaches that are highly effective in ensuring students succeed in and progress beyond their studies
- outstanding rates of successful progression for the provider's students and courses.

About the assessment

The Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) is a national scheme run by the Office for Students (OfS) that aims to encourage universities and colleges (providers) to improve and deliver excellent teaching, learning and student outcomes.

The TEF does this by assessing and rating providers for excellence above the high quality baseline that we expect from all providers. It covers undergraduate courses.

Throughout this document, we use the terms ‘outstanding’ and ‘very high quality’, which are defined in terms of the TEF 2023 assessment as follows:

- ‘outstanding’: the quality of the student experience or outcomes are among the very best in the sector, for the mix of students and courses taught by a provider
- ‘very high quality’: the quality of the student experience or outcomes are materially above the relevant high quality minimum requirements, for the mix of students and courses taught by a provider.

The assessment was carried out in 2022-23 by the TEF Panel, a panel of academics and students who are experts in learning and teaching. This document sets out a summary of the panel’s findings and judgements.

The panel reviewed the following evidence:

- numerical indicators produced by the OfS, using national datasets
- a submission made by the provider, setting out its own evidence
- a submission made by the provider’s students, setting out students’ views.

The panel applied its expert judgement to:

- identify particular features of the student experience and student outcomes that are excellent (above the high quality baseline requirements)
- decide a rating for the ‘student experience’ and for ‘student outcomes’
- decide an overall rating for the provider.

Throughout the assessment the panel took account of the context of the provider and judged how well it delivers teaching, learning and student outcomes for its mix of students and courses.

In making its decisions the panel took account of the OfS general duties and the public sector equalities duty.

Summary of panel assessment

Information about this provider

South Essex College of Further and Higher Education states its vision as changing lives through learning, and its mission is to develop highly skilled, active citizens of all ages and abilities, leading to meaningful lives and productive careers.

The provider is relatively small, with 2,690 full time undergraduate students, 620 part time students, and 210 apprenticeships over the last four years. The majority of full-time students are studying for a first degree. It has a range of undergraduate subject areas, with most popular being creative arts and design, studied by 34.8 per cent of full-time students. The largest subject for part-time students is allied health, with 41 per cent studying this.

Data shows 45.9 per cent of full-time students are mature, and the vast majority (76.8 per cent) live locally before entering the college. 43.1 per cent of full-time students and 39.9 per cent of part time are from the most disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. 32.3 per cent of full-time students reported a disability. A high number of students arrive with Access or BTEC qualifications on entry.

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

Full details about the provider's student demographics used in the TEF 2023 assessment are available at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/data-and-analysis/data-used-in-tef-2023/.

More information about this provider can be found on the OfS Register at www.officeforstudents.org.uk/advice-and-guidance/the-register/the-ofs-register/.

Student experience: Gold

Throughout this section, we refer to indicators. These indicators are based on students' responses to the National Student Survey. The indicators are 'benchmarked' to show how well the provider performs for its particular mix of students and courses.

The panel judged the student experience is typically outstanding. Across the aspect of student experience the panel found:

- most features are outstanding
- one feature is very high quality
- there is not enough evidence to judge one feature very high quality.

The panel applied the criteria and found the 'best fit' rating to be 'Gold'. This is because most features are outstanding for almost all groups of students and courses, consistent with a rating of 'Gold'.

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

Teaching, assessment, and feedback

The panel considered this feature to be outstanding quality.

The indicators showed for full-time students there is strong evidence that 'teaching on my course' is outstanding quality, and very strong evidence that 'assessment and feedback' is outstanding quality.

The provider and student submissions showed additional evidence of outstanding quality, including:

- understanding the challenges facing its diverse set of students and outlining strategies to support them to reach their goals. Staff develop inclusive programmes including a wide range of activities
- positive feedback from students and external examiners, such as:
 - Internal survey results show 83 per cent of students agreed that their courses had helped with confidence in presenting themselves, communication skills, and confidence in problem solving
 - 89 per cent agreed the feedback they receive is informative and helpful
- the student submission provides survey and focus group evidence that students are very positive about their academic experience, including that the teaching is intellectually stimulating, staff are enthusiastic and make the subjects interesting and explain the subjects really well.

The panel considered the submissions include evidence on the effectiveness and tailoring of teaching, assessment and feedback practices. These apply to the mix of courses and students, including those from underrepresented groups.

Overall, the panel concluded that the provider has embedded outstanding teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are highly effective and tailored to supporting its students' learning, progression, and attainment. This is consistent with an outstanding quality feature.

Course content and delivery; student engagement in learning and stretch

The panel found this feature to be outstanding quality.

The provider submission shows evidence of outstanding quality, including:

- teachers use a range of methods and interventions to challenge students. This is supported by a recent internal survey with high student agreement on engaging teaching, effective explanations, stimulating lessons, and enthusiastic staff
- data from the 2022 national student survey shows a higher than average learning opportunities score
- course content and delivery are tailored to cater to students' diverse needs and their initial skill levels, supporting the transition into and through higher education
- strong student attendance rates of 93 per cent in 2020-21 and 90 per cent in 2021-22.

Taking the evidence in the submissions along with the relevant indicators, the panel judged this is an outstanding quality feature. It concluded course content and delivery inspire the provider's students to actively engage in and commit to their learning, and stretch students to develop knowledge and skills to their fullest potential.

Research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement

The panel found this feature to be outstanding quality.

The provider submission shows evidence of outstanding quality, including:

- employers contribute to courses to ensure relevance, with guest speakers and collaborations with external companies
- field trips are well received by students
- employers serve as mentors within programmes and a programme board agrees on excellent extracurricular opportunities
- national student survey 2022 results show 87.4 per cent agreement that the course provides opportunities to integrate information from diverse topics. This is higher than the sector average
- all programmes include placements or work related practice units

- the higher education employability strategy adopts the graduate capital model to develop graduate level knowledge and skills
- the college employability award formally acknowledges extracurricular efforts, work related activities, and career learning.

The panel noted that as a further and higher education college, the provider is not a research institution, so research is not included in the panel's consideration for this feature.

Looking at the evidence holistically, the panel concluded that the provider uses research in relevant disciplines, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and/or employer engagement to contribute to an outstanding academic experience for its students.

Staff professional development and academic practice

The panel judged this feature as very high quality.

The provider and student submissions show evidence of very high quality, including:

- staff receive constructive feedback and action plans for development, supported by an advanced practitioner
- teaching observations for all staff to support development, aligned with the UK professional development framework
- all staff receive performance reviews
- 14 staff have recently undertaken master's degrees, and some staff are working towards fellowship through Advance HE
- there is a clear link between staff development and curriculum development
- the student submission highlights positive feedback from a staff focus group, saying they were pleased with the support provided, and highlighting the benefits of additional training to help students with mental health concerns.

Overall, the panel found there is very high quality support for staff professional development and excellent academic practice is promoted, consistent with a very high quality feature.

Learning environment and academic support

The panel considered this is an outstanding feature.

The indicator showed there is compelling evidence that 'academic support' is outstanding for full-time students.

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

- offering personalised academic support to students tailored to their needs, including weekly tutorials, support advisors, and peer mentors

- feedback shows 91 per cent of students who used academic support services believe they can apply what they've learned to their work
- responses to the national student survey show 89.9 per cent of students saying they can contact staff when needed
- positive comments in the student submission on the disability support team, outlining the benefits for different student groups.

The panel considered the academic support indicator shows initial evidence of outstanding quality, while the submissions demonstrate tailored support given to the mix of students.

Looking at all the evidence, the panel judged the provider ensures a supportive learning environment, and that its students have access to a wide and readily available range of outstanding quality academic support tailored to their needs.

Learning resources

The panel found this is not a very high quality feature.

The indicator showed there is compelling initial evidence that 'learning resources' are below very high quality for full-time students.

The panel considered further evidence in the provider submission including:

- a significant investment in infrastructure detailed across different subject areas
- upgrading online library resources based on student feedback, aiming for easy navigation and a high number of e books. A survey shows 62 per cent of students had a positive experience with the resources, although no participant numbers for the survey were given
- the provider's national student survey score for learning resources has improved year on year due to interventions and improvements based on feedback
- the student submission supports improvements made and highlights positive comments on specialised resources.

The panel noted that, although the provider showed evidence that it is improving learning resources, this did not suggest there are very high quality or outstanding quality learning resources for students.

Considering the feature in the round, the panel concluded that there was not enough evidence that physical and virtual learning resources are used effectively to support very high quality teaching and learning.

Student engagement in improvement

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The indicator shows for full-time students there is probable evidence that 'student voice' is outstanding quality.

The provider and student submissions include evidence of outstanding quality, including:

- involving course representatives in programme board meetings to hear students' opinions, with students also invited to other committees and boards
- conducting learner voice surveys, including internal surveys
- evidence of actions taken to make improvements based on student feedback and voice
- a learner voice conference in 2022 facilitated student engagement, opinion sharing, and collaboration with staff and peers.

The panel noted a consistent emphasis on student engagement throughout the provider submission, including examples and evidence of student voice and collaboration with students, as well as making change based on their feedback.

Looking at all the evidence overall, the panel found the provider embeds engagement with its students, leading to continuous improvements to the experiences and outcomes of its students. This is consistent with an outstanding 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 are typically very high quality student outcomes as a whole. Across the aspect the panel found:

- most features are very high quality
- two features are outstanding quality
- there is not enough evidence to judge one feature very high quality.

Considering the evidence and the provider context, the panel considered there is evidence of very high quality across almost all groups of students and for all courses and subjects.

The panel applied the criteria and considered that the rating with the best fit is 'Silver'. This is because most features are very high quality for all groups of students and courses, consistent with a rating of 'Silver'.

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

Approaches to supporting student success

The panel found this feature to be outstanding quality.

The provider and student submissions showed evidence of outstanding quality, including:

- offering tailored support for a diverse set of students, including the high numbers from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds and ethnic minorities
- offering specific support to narrow awarding gaps for underrepresented student groups, and setting targets which are already achieved
- support to help students transition into and succeed in higher education
- an employability award that recognises extra curricular work and engagement
- students praise the focus on developing self confidence, supported by teaching and academic assistance
- student feedback highlights efforts to enhance employability, including an industry standard kit, guest speaker programs, and work placements. They also highly value one to one support from the employability service, with 100 per cent satisfaction rates from student representatives.

Considering the evidence in the round, the panel concluded the provider deploys and tailors approaches that are highly effective in ensuring its students succeed in and progress beyond their studies. This is consistent with an outstanding quality feature.

Continuation and completion rates

The panel considered this feature is very high quality.

The indicators showed:

- for full-time students there is very strong evidence that 'continuation' is very high quality, and 'completion' is below very high quality
- for part-time students there is initial evidence that 'continuation' is very high quality but the data does not provide certainty. There is probable evidence that 'completion' is very high quality.

The panel considered the 'continuation' indicators provide very strong evidence of very high quality for most of the provider's groups of students, including those from underrepresented groups.

The panel considered the provider's context and noted the high proportion of students with disabilities and from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds. The panel noted evidence of the provider's tailored support for these students through to completion, along with recent improvements. It was persuaded that this mitigated the evidence of the 'completion' indicators.

Looking at the feature holistically, the panel concluded there are very high rates of continuation and completion for the provider's students and courses, consistent with a very high quality feature.

Progression rates

The panel considered this to be an outstanding quality feature.

The indicator showed:

- for full-time students there is strong evidence that 'progression' is outstanding quality
- for part-time students there is probable evidence that 'progression' is below very high quality.

The panel noted the number of students studying part-time is comparatively low and therefore less weight was placed on this evidence.

The provider submission showed evidence of outstanding quality, including:

- offering career and employability support to students, including partnerships with employers and tailored workshops to both undergraduates and graduates
- a report shows positive student views about the evaluation service
- using exit surveys to enhance support based on student feedback, and collecting data on student progress after leaving studies
- an internal survey reflects high student satisfaction with resources and advice on student experience and employability.

The panel considered the indicators offered initial evidence of outstanding quality for full-time students, with evidence in the provider submission to supplement this.

Considering the evidence in the round, the panel judged this feature is outstanding for most of the provider's students. Overall it concluded there are outstanding rates of successful progression for the provider's students and courses.

Intended educational gains

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

Evidence from the provider and student submissions included:

- a higher education employability strategy focuses on the graduate capital model, aiming to develop graduate level knowledge. This includes technical, subject specific and career building skills
- the provider's narrative for educational gains focuses on raising the level of 'graduate capital'. This is defined by a comprehensive list of attributes, with brief descriptions of the benefits and what success looks like.
- targeted funding is matched to qualification levels.

The panel noted a brief generalised reference to personalisation based on students' needs for a range of unspecified projects and student groups, but found this to be very high rather than outstanding quality because of the limited detail.

Overall, the panel considered the evidence in the submissions to demonstrate that the provider articulates the educational gains it intends for its students to achieve and why these are relevant to its students. This is consistent with a very high quality feature.

Approaches to supporting educational gains

The panel found this feature to be very high quality.

The provider and student submissions showed evidence of very high quality, including:

- the student submission offers positive views on the support including by the careers and employability service and the external speakers from industry
- student feedback also provides detail on the number of students that graduated with a first or good degrees, crediting specific and tailored support
- building intended educational gains into programme design, aligned to different types of student entering the university
- implementing strategies to improve specific areas for its students based on research and feedback
- providing tailored support to meet the needs of students, including overcoming additional barriers disadvantaged students can face in accessing higher education and employability. This includes sessions before students begin their programmes to help prepare and support them with the transition into university life.

The panel noted that the evidence falls short of describing how support is tailored for all students. While projects for underrepresented students within the access and participation plan are highlighted, but the panel considered there was not enough clarity on how students' starting points are assessed to tailor educational gains. Additionally, analysis of impact is limited.

Looking at the evidence in the round, the panel concluded that the provider effectively supports its students to achieve these gains, consistent with a very high quality feature.

Evaluation and demonstration of educational gains

The panel considered that the provider measures success in its approach to graduate capital through evaluating strong learner satisfaction, improved outcomes and student attainment. However, the panel noted that these do not measure students' direct perceptions of improved capital and that it is unclear how the provider would be able to evidence the broad set of intended gains in its graduate capital model.

The panel noted TEF assessment guidance that a provider will not be prevented from being awarded higher ratings solely based on an absence of its own developed measures of educational gains.

Overall: Silver

Based on the guidance and the expert judgement of panel members, the panel found the 'best fit' rating to be 'Silver'.

The panel considered student experience features to be 'Gold'; and student outcomes features to be 'Silver', and gave equal weight to both. It carefully examined the evidence across all features, student groups, subjects, and courses and considered context.

The panel found most student experience features to be of outstanding quality for almost all groups of students and courses, and most student outcomes features to be of very high quality for almost all the provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups, and courses. The panel also found there to be some outstanding quality student outcomes features, but did not find sufficient evidence, overall, of a typically outstanding quality across both student experience and student outcomes.

In judging 'Silver' rather than 'Gold' to be the best fit, the panel considered all the evidence and found it shows there is typically very high quality provision for all groups of students and courses, rather than typically outstanding quality provision. This is consistent with a rating of 'Silver'.