



Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023

Summary TEF 2023 panel statement

The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama

Summary of outcomes

Overall: Silver

Typically, the experience students have at The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama and the outcomes it leads to are very high quality.

Student experience: Bronze

The student academic experience is typically high quality, with some very high quality features that apply to some groups of students.

Very high quality features include:

- using research in relevant disciplines, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement to contribute to a very high quality academic experience for students
- very high quality support for staff professional development and excellent academic practice is promoted
- fostering a supportive learning environment, where students have access to a readily available range of very high quality academic support
- physical and virtual learning resources are used effectively to support very high quality teaching and learning.

Student outcomes: Gold

Student outcomes are typically outstanding.

Outstanding quality features include:

- deploying and tailoring approaches that are highly effective in ensuring students succeed in and progress beyond their studies
- outstanding rates of continuation and completion for students and courses
- clearly articulating the educational gains intended for students to achieve, and why these gains are highly relevant to students and their future ambitions
- approaches to supporting its students to achieve these gains are evidence-based, highly effective and tailored to its students and their different starting points.

There is also a very high quality feature:

- very high 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

The Royal Central School of Speech and Drama sets out its mission as a small and specialist provider to inspire, educate and train the performers, practitioners and change makers of tomorrow, to shape the future of theatre and the performing arts. It is committed to a distinctive and transformative educational and training experience for its students, placing diversity, difference and collaboration at the centre of learning and teaching activity.

The provider has a single campus in Swiss Cottage, London. In 2020-21 it had 690 full-time undergraduate and 330 full-time postgraduate students, along with 70 part-time postgraduate students.

Nearly a quarter of students studying at the provider are mature. Students from the most disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds make up around 20 per cent of the population, with a minority having been eligible for free school meals (14 per cent). Nearly a third of students have a disability. Most students (almost half) enter with A-level qualifications.

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: Bronze

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 considered that student experience is typically high quality, with some very high quality features. Across the aspect the panel found:

- four features are very high quality for some groups of students
- there was not enough evidence to judge three features as very high quality.

The panel judged there is insufficient evidence that the very high quality features apply to all the provider's groups of students, including students from all underrepresented groups.

In considering 'Bronze' rather than 'Silver' to be the best fit, the panel noted most rather than all of the features are very high quality, and that these features are very high quality for some rather than all groups of students.

The panel applied the criteria and found the 'best fit' rating to be 'Bronze'. This is because most features are very high quality for some groups of students, consistent with a rating of 'Bronze'.

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

Teaching, assessment, and feedback; and Course content and delivery; student engagement in learning and stretch

The panel found that there is not enough evidence to judge these features as very high quality.

There are no overall indicators available for 'teaching on my course' or for 'assessment and feedback'. However, there is some indicator evidence available for years three and four of study, most of which show initial evidence of performance that is below the level of very high quality.

The provider and student submissions add further evidence, including:

- high contact hours of intensive physical and technical training, and teaching in small groups
- integrating principles of professional conservatoire training with teaching methods developed through research, scholarship and enquiry
- broad support from external examiners for learning, teaching and assessment, illustrated by a wide range of comments
- using in situ oral evaluations of student work by staff, individually or in a discussion group, and constant verbal feedback on performance
- positive feedback in the student submission that the extensive verbal and written assessment feedback is appreciated by students

- innovative use of an advisory board to inform equality, diversity and inclusion activity, supported by student feedback
- the distinctive range of courses in actor training, theatre practice and production, along with contemporary performance practices. These are highly responsive to industry needs and developments
- an advisory board that brings together global majority industry professionals and educators to inform education at the provider.

The panel considered that the provider does not sufficiently address the scale of the gap in the 'teaching on my course' and 'assessment and feedback' indicators, which are largely below very high quality.

The panel found that the provider submission describes its approaches to teaching, assessment and feedback, as well as course content and delivery and student engagement in learning and stretch, while providing limited evidence of the effectiveness of the approaches. However, it noted assessment and feedback processes that support students' experience are being developed.

Considering the evidence in the round, the panel concluded that there is insufficient evidence that the provider has embedded very high quality teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are effective in supporting its students' learning, progression, and attainment. It also found there is not enough evidence that course content and delivery effectively encourage the provider's students to engage in their learning, or stretch students to develop their knowledge and skills.

Research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement

The panel judged this feature to be very high quality.

The provider and student submissions include evidence, such as:

- informing course design and the student experience through research
- most staff have current links with industry across a range of professions within theatre, performance and production
- intensive engagement with industry partners to ensure courses are relevant and prepare students well for the demands of the profession
- production courses are framed as 'on ramp' to the industry, and endorsed by industry stakeholders
- offering Applied Theatre students opportunities to work with underrepresented groups through a range of industry partners
- commissioning world leading artists to work directly with the students.

The panel noted that the provider is a research intensive conservatoire that performed well in the Research Education Framework 2022 and has a knowledge exchange strategy that is extensive in

scale and impact. It considered there are effective approaches in place to ensure its mix of students directly benefit from research, professional practice and employer engagement activities.

Considering the evidence in the round, the panel concluded that that the provider uses research in relevant disciplines, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement to contribute to a very high quality academic experience for its students.

Staff professional development and academic practice

The panel judged this feature to be very high quality.

The provider and student submissions include evidence of very high quality, such as:

- practitioner academics are deliberately recruited from industry roles, and most academic staff have current industry links across theatre, performance and production. There is also substantial input from visiting lecturers and professionals
- 60 per cent of permanent faculty hold a teaching qualification
- AdvanceHE recognition for a high number of staff members
- during the staff recruitment process, interviewees are observed in teaching practice, with student input
- staff participate in a peer observation of teaching system, which is linked to personal development through annual appraisals
- termly seminars on learning, teaching and assessment are held as well as regular continuous professional development sessions, with a clear positive impact for employment or further study, and for students with a disability
- a substantial portion of the teaching staff also act as external examiners
- global impact of the provider's teaching methods is demonstrated through keynotes, masterclasses, lectures, invited talks and seminars.

Looking at the evidence overall, the panel concluded that there is very high quality support for staff professional development and excellent academic practice is promoted.

Learning environment and academic support

The panel judged this feature to be very high quality.

There are no overall indicators available for 'academic support'. Some indicator evidence is available for years three and four of study, which the panel found show initial evidence that 'academic support' is below the level of very high quality.

The provider and student submissions outlined further evidence, including:

- support for students with a disability, who make up around 39 per cent of the population, with one-to-one specific learning difficulty support or mental health mentoring
- making improvements to the student centre, and introducing a support advisor role, free dyslexia screening and subsidised diagnostic assessments. Positive impact of these initiatives are seen in the excellent retention rates
- a commitment to and funding support for needs of students with dyslexia, winning an Association of Dyslexia award in 2021
- being part of the care leaver covenant, which led to expert research in this field involving student carers. Effective support is offered for care leavers who have a nominated contact and access to bursaries
- workshops co-designed with students that help foster understanding of frameworks and support services, the student code of conduct, and institutional culture
- the student submission highlights the support in place for neurodiverse students.

While the panel considered the available 'academic support' indicators provide initial evidence of being below very high quality, it found the submissions demonstrate the effectiveness of the learning environment and academic support. These approaches apply to the mix of courses and students, including those from underrepresented groups.

Considering the evidence holistically, the panel concluded that the provider fosters a supportive learning environment, and its students have access to a readily available range of very high quality academic support.

Learning resources

The panel judged this feature to be very high quality.

There are no overall indicators available for 'learning resources'. However, indicator evidence is available for years three and four of study, which the panel found to show initial evidence that 'learning resources' are below the level of very high quality.

The provider submission outlined further evidence, including:

- offering students regular access to professional standard theatre facilities and spaces that are equipped to support production based learning in digital audio visual media
- significant investment in facilities and resources through the estate master plan strategy, with additional investment planned to support digital and immersive theatre capabilities
- library and learning resources are well supported by training and individual support sessions.

The panel considered the provider adequately explains the not very high quality indicator results, which was due to the impact of coronavirus preventing students from accessing the specialist performing arts teaching spaces they needed in years 3 and 4. The panel also found significant

evidence of very high quality learning resources and significant investment in the provider submission.

Considering the evidence in the round, the panel concluded that physical and virtual learning resources are used effectively to support very high quality teaching and learning.

Student engagement in improvement

The panel considered there is not enough evidence to rate this feature as very high quality.

There are no overall indicators available for 'student voice'. Indicator evidence for years three and four of study show initial evidence that 'student voice' is below the level of very high quality.

The provider and student submissions added further evidence, including:

- structures and processes broadly in line with common practice in the sector
- positive impact of student voice is measured through tracking issues in course committees. This demonstrated that of the 1,079 individual issues raised by students, only 3 per cent were identified as not being possible to address
- the provider identifies a need for ongoing work on the visibility of how actions in response to student feedback are being carried forward
- new programme level student action plans have been introduced, but are not yet published
- introducing a new starters survey, although results were not provided
- feedback in the student submission that the students' union is effectively involved in decision-making.

The panel considered that the provider submission describes its approaches to student engagement in improvement, but there is limited evidence of how these approaches are widely embedded, or of their effectiveness. The panel noted that the provider's initiatives to address the low indicator results are recent, so evidence of positive impact is not yet available.

The panel concluded that emergent practices for student engagement processes that support students' experience are being developed by the provider.

Considering the evidence in the round, the panel found therefore that there is insufficient evidence that the provider effectively engages with its students, leading to improvements to their experiences and outcomes. Therefore it could not judge this as a very high quality feature.

Student outcomes: Gold

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

The panel found student outcomes are typically outstanding. Across the aspect the panel found:

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

The panel found evidence that the very high quality features apply to all groups of students. This includes those from underrepresented groups, which make up a high proportion of the provider's students.

The panel applied the criteria using its expert judgement and considered that the rating with the best fit is 'Gold'. This is because most features are outstanding quality for 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.

Approaches to supporting student success

The panel judged this feature to be outstanding.

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

- outstanding support for students with a range of learning needs and disabilities, which is linked to high student retention rates
- its wellbeing and support for study procedures, leading to the vast majority of students continuing with their studies
- a strong industry-relevant curriculum including live projects
- enterprise education supported by external funding, alongside entrepreneurship toolkits for students
- being recognised as a world leading specialist provider due to graduates gaining jobs across the industry, along with their economic and cultural impact as change makers, influencers and mobilisers both nationally and internationally
- the student submission reinforces the outstanding levels of support, and a survey shows half of students saying the provider supported them for work in the industry.

The panel considered that the provider operates an effective, coherent and academic strategy to support student success and found evidence of the effectiveness of its approaches.

Overall, the panel concluded that 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 to be outstanding quality.

The indicators showed that for full-time students:

- there is initial evidence that 'continuation' is either very high or outstanding quality, but the data could not provide certainty on which applied
- there is initial evidence that 'completion' is outstanding quality.

The panel noted that the indicators suggest that this evidence applies to all the provider's groups of students. This includes the high numbers of students from underrepresented groups, which the panel considered relevant when looking at this evidence.

Overall, the panel found compelling evidence that there are outstanding rates of continuation and completion for the provider's students and courses.

Progression rates

The panel found this feature to be very high quality.

The 'progression' indicator data could not provide certainty as to whether this feature is of very high quality.

The panel noted that the indicator evidence for year three dips clearly below very high quality and considered evidence from the provider to mitigate this. Among the other evidence was the provider's own graduate outcomes data showing that 84.4 per cent of graduates are in or about to start employment or further study. The provider also offers evidence of a high proportion of acting graduates being represented by agents, and points to the fact that it has been recognised for its graduates becoming change makers, influencers and mobilisers in their professional fields.

The panel considered the 'progression' indicator to provide some initial evidence that the feature may not reach the level of very high quality. However, it found the provider submission includes evidence of very high quality related to its specific context, and which applies to the mix of students and courses. This includes the high numbers of students from underrepresented groups, which the panel considered relevant when examining this evidence.

Considering the evidence in the round, the panel concluded that there are very high rates of successful progression for the provider's students and courses.

Intended educational gains

The panel found this feature to be outstanding quality.

The panel considered the provider clearly articulates educational gains as the subject specific and transferable skills it intends students to achieve, particularly to succeed in self employed portfolio careers in the performing arts. These include personal development skills which enable students to build resilience, motivation, confidence, communication, presentations, time management, networking and interpersonal skills.

The panel found the provider explains why these educational gains are relevant to its students and their aims to secure portfolio careers in the theatre and cultural industries.

Overall, the panel concluded the provider clearly articulates the range educational gains it intends its students to achieve, and why these are highly relevant to its students and their future ambitions. This is consistent with an outstanding quality feature.

Approaches to supporting educational gains

The panel found this feature to be outstanding quality.

Evidence of outstanding quality in the provider submission includes:

- supporting students to achieve the intended educational gains by weaving transferable skills the curriculum, and tailoring support to specific student needs where appropriate
- the How to Central workshops are a key resource for students to understand what is expected from them as learners
- enabling students to develop skills and experience through professional placements, mentorships and networking opportunities with partner organisations
- extensively embedding entrepreneurial skills
- supporting graduate enterprises through the opportunity to bid for start-up awards.

Considering the evidence holistically, the panel concluded the provider's approaches to supporting its students to achieve these gains are evidence-based, highly effective and tailored to its students and their different starting points. This is consistent with an outstanding quality feature.

Evaluation and demonstration of educational gains

The panel considered there is not enough evidence to rate this feature as very high quality.

The panel noted the provider is currently developing approaches to measuring and evaluating educational gains. This includes monitoring entry profiles and reviewing degree attainment, as well as looking at attendance data to support students' engagement with learning. These measures sit alongside nuanced conversations with academic teams and other stakeholders. However, the panel did not find evidence of developed measures for evaluating educational gains.

Overall, the panel concluded that there was insufficient evidence that the provider evaluates the gains made by its students, and could not judge this as a very high quality feature.

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 the student experience aspect to be 'Bronze'; the student outcomes aspect to be 'Gold', and gave equal weight to both. It carefully examined the evidence across all features, student groups, subjects, and courses.

In reaching its decision, the panel considered there is evidence that the very high quality features in the student experience aspect typically apply to some of the provider's groups of students, and that the very high quality and outstanding features in the student outcomes aspect typically apply to all of the provider's groups of students.

The panel looked across all the available evidence and judged 'Silver' to be the best fit, as student experience and student outcomes are typically a combination of very high and outstanding quality.