



Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) 2023

Summary TEF 2023 panel statement

RTC Education Ltd

Summary of outcomes

Overall: Bronze

Typically, the experience students have at RTC Education Ltd and the outcomes it leads to are high quality, and there are some very high quality features.

Student experience: Bronze

The student academic experience is typically high quality, and there are some very high quality features.

Very high quality features include:

- very high quality teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are effective in supporting students' learning, progression, and attainment
- 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
- an effective, multi layered student voice model, where students are involved from course to committee level.

Student outcomes: Bronze

Student outcomes are typically high quality, and there are some very high quality features.

Very high quality features include:

- effective activities and strategies that prepare students for employment and raise ambitions to develop sustained learning skills
- very high rates of continuation and completion for students and courses
- effectively articulating the educational gains intended for students to achieve, and why these are relevant to them
- effectively supporting students to achieve these 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

RTC Education Ltd states that its ethos is encapsulated in its vision statement: the end result of education is character. It seeks to create a highly personalised continuity of service and care to its students as part of an approach to widen participation in students who have previously struggled to access higher education.

The provider offers full-time higher education programmes and has seen growth in students significantly over a four-year period. Data shows that there were 5,110 full-time students of which 3,690 were on first degree programmes in 2020-21. The most popular subject is business and management, followed by health and social care and then computing.

Over half of students are aged 31 and over. Almost half are from the most disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, and the majority are local to the provider.

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 judged the student experience is typically high quality, with some very high quality elements. Across the student experience aspect the panel found:

- four features are very high quality, although this is not consistent across student groups
- there is not enough evidence to judge three features as very high quality.

The panel found compelling evidence that the very high quality features apply to some but not all, groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups. The panel considered the context of the numbers of students from underrepresented groups studying at the provider as relevant throughout its assessment.

The panel applied the criteria and found the 'best fit' rating to be 'Bronze'. This is because some features are very high quality for most groups of students and courses, consistent with a rating of 'Bronze'. The panel did not think that 'Silver' would be the best fit because the evidence does not show most features are of very high quality for all groups of students, or that all features were very high quality.

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

Teaching, assessment, and feedback

The panel considered this feature to be very high quality.

The indicators showed for full-time students there is strong evidence that 'teaching on my course' is very high quality, and compelling evidence that 'assessment and feedback' is below very high quality. For both indicators, there was variation across the quality for student groups and subjects.

The provider and student submissions showed additional evidence, including:

- establishing a content creation process that regularly reviews materials for online and blended learning, informed by subject specialists and teaching teams
- a range of comments from external examiners highlighting that marking is robust and feedback is in line with assessment guidance
- improvements in the most recent national student survey scores, for teaching and learning and assessment and feedback. However, there was little insight on the strategies used to achieve this, or how students will be stretched through teaching and learning practice
- the student submission shows results from internal surveys praising teaching materials for their relevance and improving engagement with learning.

The panel considered the student body and the high numbers of students from underrepresented groups to be relevant to the evidence. The panel noted some student groups were below very high quality in both indicators. It considered evidence in the submissions on the developmental and supportive nature of teaching, assessment and feedback, but a lack of detail on how approaches are tailored for distinct groups and courses.

When considering the evidence in the round, the panel concluded the provider has embedded very high quality teaching, feedback and assessment practices that are effective in supporting its students' learning, progression, and attainment. This is consistent with a very high quality feature.

Course content and delivery; student engagement in learning and stretch

The panel found there is not enough evidence to judge this feature as very high quality.

The provider and student submissions demonstrate:

- adapting online learning materials and delivery methods following coronavirus, to boost engagement and support students with caregiving responsibilities and other issues that make attending class more difficult
- other support options available include online resources, in person sessions, and study skills webinars. This is particularly beneficial for mature students
- high levels of satisfaction in module evaluations across partner institutions, though only a third of students in each school provided feedback
- training programmes like the new Stanford innovation and entrepreneurship initiative, as well as guest speakers and career support
- appreciative student comments on help to manage caregiving and employment obligations through schemes like laptop provision and digital improvement.

The panel noted the range of these activities but that there is limited evidence of how course content and delivery models are designed to effectively encourage students to engage in their learning, nor to stretch them to develop knowledge and skills.

Considering the evidence in the round, the panel concluded there is insufficient evidence to demonstrate a very high quality feature.

Research, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and employer engagement

The panel found there is insufficient evidence to judge this feature as very high quality.

The provider and student submissions show evidence, including:

- a scholarship fund used to encourage staff to undertake small scale research to inform their teaching and learning practice
- a co sponsored restructuring the global economy conference, although there is a lack of detail of how teaching, research skills or knowledge from the event is used to enhance the student experience.

The panel noted that the provider states that as a relatively new, teaching focused, institution, it has an emerging research agenda. However, it found limited evidence of or commentary on a strategy to expand the research activity, or focus on developing course content or academic team knowledge. Additionally, there was a lack of widespread commentary on employer engagement and its impact on academic experience.

Looking at the evidence overall, the panel found there is not enough evidence to show the provider uses research in relevant disciplines, innovation, scholarship, professional practice and/or employer engagement to contribute to a very high quality academic experience for its students.

Staff professional development and academic practice

The panel found there is not enough evidence to judge this feature as very high quality.

The provider and student submissions show evidence, including:

- academic teaching staff are regularly observed, and feedback loops contribute to a teaching focused, scholarly and research informed environment
- professional development efforts include a target for 75 per cent of academics to hold a teaching qualification by 2024-25
- many academics have relevant qualifications such as a PhD, master's, or teaching qualification, with a good spread of fellowship status across the team
- students highlight that lecturers engage in regular development activities and conferences to improve teaching techniques and subject knowledge.

The panel considered that the submission focuses more on scholarly activity over the continuing professional development of staff to improve academic practice. It found that, while there is some good practice demonstrated, evaluation and a focus on improvement for particular student groups is limited.

The panel found that good progress is being made in supporting staff professional development. However, considering the evidence in the round, it concluded there is insufficient evidence of very high quality support for staff professional development and that excellent academic practice is promoted.

Learning environment and academic support

The panel considered this is a very high quality feature.

The indicator showed that for full-time students there is initial evidence that 'academic support' is below very high quality. However, business, the largest subject area, is very high quality.

The provider and student submissions include evidence of a very high quality feature, including:

- student feedback highlights a supportive learning environment, with 86 per cent of students saying they felt well supported throughout their year of study
- students also make positive reflections about additional support workshops

- the HubX support service is well regarded and efficiently staffed
- a new academic skills policy aims to enhance access to support and response times
- support approaches, such as SCOPE, are integrated into annual plans, targeting students with low attendance for intervention
- live study skills webinars have received a 97 per cent satisfaction rating from students
- guidance and support for assignments are provided through classes and one to one tutorials.

Looking at 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 found this is a very high quality feature.

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

The panel considered further evidence in the provider submission including:

- the digital environment and e resources are key to the provider's delivery model
- positive feedback from students is highlighted, with an internal survey showing 91 per cent of students found resources accessible and appropriate, while national student surveys consistently show high satisfaction with resources
- canvas, e book collections, databases, and software are widely used, with support from library services in expanding students' knowledge and applying this to assessments
- the student submission indicates good attendance at support workshops.

The panel noted actions have been taken to address student groups below very high quality in the indicators, although not specific to certain underrepresented groups. It also noted a lack of in depth analysis of the impact of the physical learning environment on student engagement and stretch.

Nonetheless, when 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 this to be a very high quality feature.

The indicator shows for full-time students there is strong evidence that 'student voice' is very high quality. However, there is some variation across student groups.

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

- a multi layered student voice model, where students are involved from course to committee level
- positive student feedback on open student forums with the director, leading to speedy resolution of issues
- a number of surveys, including digital pulse and induction surveys, collect feedback at different stages of the student journey
- a student voice committee meets regularly, though there is a lack of consistent detail on improvements and their impact
- making changes based on student voice. One example among others, is increasing laptop access after focus groups found many students were having to access online learning on their phones
- significant improvements in the national student survey student voice score, rising from 84 per cent to 91 per cent in a year.

The panel noted less evidence of how continuous improvement has impacted directly on teaching and learning practice. Additionally, the provider does not evidence interventions for student groups where indicators are below very high quality.

When considering the evidence in the round, the panel concluded the provider effectively engages with its students, leading to improvements to the experiences and outcomes of its students. This is consistent with a very high quality feature.

Student outcomes: Bronze

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.

Across the aspect of student outcomes the panel found:

- four features are very high quality
- there was not enough evidence to judge two features very high quality.

The panel judged that the very high quality features only apply to some of the provider's groups of students, including those from underrepresented groups.

The panel applied the criteria and considered that the rating with the best fit is 'Bronze'. This is because some features of the aspect are very high quality for most groups of students, consistent with a rating of 'Bronze'. The panel did not think that 'Silver' would be the best fit because it did not find that most features are very high quality for all group of students, nor that all features are very high quality.

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 very high quality.

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

- activities and strategies that prepare students for progression to employment and raise ambitions to develop sustained learning skills
- the thinking into character programme, and the Stanford innovation and entrepreneurship programme
- an increase in engagement with the student development programme and the ASK@Regent service which enhances academic skills
- a professional and academic skills development module helps students develop learning and employability skills at the start of their journey
- a digital literacy strategy with self assessment in induction, and offering a European computer driving licence qualification to all students. However, evaluation of how this impacts different student groups is limited
- tailored services such as English language support and a bespoke English language development programme. Although there is little detail on impact
- student feedback quotes results from the internal survey showing 88 per cent of students said they had much more of a career plan by attending RCL
- a number of services designed to support students with attendance issues or completion of assessments, but it is unclear how these have been targeted to improve completion rates
- supporting the large number of students who balance study commitments with work and family responsibilities.

The panel considered there is evidence that approaches effectively support students to succeed, with some tailored to students. However, there is less compelling evidence of the effectiveness of these approaches and their direct link to improvements in outcomes.

Considering the evidence in the round, the panel concluded the provider effectively supports its students to succeed in and progress beyond their studies. This is consistent with a very high quality feature.

Continuation and completion rates

The panel considered this feature is very high quality, though noted that this was finely balanced.

The indicators showed for full-time students:

- there is initial evidence that 'continuation' is very high quality, when taking into account varying results for individual subjects and student groups
- there is initial evidence that 'completion' is below very high quality.

The panel noted that completion rates were improving, though were still below very high quality in the most recent year of available data. It considered the array of new measures and improving performance highlighted in the provider submission, and these were accepted as evidence that there is not a serious or widespread concern. However it noted that the provider does not appear to be delivering positive completion outcomes for large numbers of its students.

The panel carefully considered the contrasting performance for continuation and completion. Looking at the evidence in the round, it concluded that 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 there is not enough evidence that this is a very high quality feature.

The indicator showed for full-time students there is compelling evidence that 'progression' is either very high quality or below very high quality, but the data could not provide certainty. The panel noted significant variations in the results for different student groups and subjects.

The panel considered evidence in the provider submission stating that there are some groups of students not included in the progression outcomes, citing their own analysis. The provider also acknowledged a gender-based progression gap, but offered little insight or analysis of the reasons or taking actions to improve progression rates for female students.

The panel looked at the results for underrepresented groups, particularly those from more disadvantaged backgrounds, which largely show very high quality or outstanding rates of progression. In considering the evidence, the panel gave weight to the positive impact being made in these groups but noted this is not across all student groups and courses.

When considering the evidence in the round, the panel found there is insufficient evidence to show there are very high 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.

The panel noted the provider sets out educational gains as being embodied in its mission to provide an outstanding, personalised education to learners to achieve the results they want, in their studies, their careers and their personal lives, regardless of their educational background or experience at a time and place convenient to them.

The panel considered this is expanded upon through the provider's thinking into character programme and student development programme. The approach and overarching framework is used to target and plan activities across the year that meet the needs of different student groups.

The panel noted there is less compelling evidence of the role employer engagement plays, although it is demonstrated when reviewing in the range of activities in the submission.

Overall, the panel concluded that the provider articulates the educational gains it intends 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:

- holding an intention to study meeting, with over 90 per cent of applicants taking part at the start of each programme
- the thinking into character programme has 3,000 active installations and over 80,000 learning materials have been downloaded. The student submission confirms it has been positively received by students
- specialist sessions like networking for introverts, academic writing bootcamps, social media for business, entrepreneurship, public speaking, and presentation skills
- wellbeing workshops and a student mentoring scheme.

The panel noted evidence of further investments that will extend this work including work readiness activities. It considered there was less explanation of how students' links with research could be expanded to increase the gains from these activities.

Looking at the evidence overall, the panel found 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 there was insufficient evidence of very high quality for this feature.

The panel considered that there was limited evidence to show how much students were benefiting from the provider's approaches in relation to each intended gain for each course or student group. While the student submission does outline the satisfaction rates from the internal survey in terms of improved confidence in communication and time management skills, these are not analysed by student groups or course.

The panel noted the provider acknowledges evaluation of the success of activities is ongoing and will be exploring methods for further evaluation in future.

Overall, the panel found that there is insufficient evidence to judge the provider evaluates the gains made by its students. However, it 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: Bronze

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

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

In judging 'Bronze' to be the best fit, the panel considered there is insufficient evidence that very high quality features typically apply to all the provider's groups of students, including students from underrepresented groups or courses which comprise a high proportion of the provider's students.

The panel considered all the evidence and judged it to show some student experience and student outcome features are very high quality for most groups of students, consistent with a rating of 'Bronze'.